

April 17, 2025

Professional Development Report Years: 2024 -'25

re: Suzanne Nielsen

Associate Professor, Writing Literature, and Language

Dear Kristen:

This is my Professional Development Report (PDR) for academic years 2024 – 2025, which reflects on this year's effective teaching, scholarly/creative achievements, continuing program prep/study, contributions to student growth/development, and service to Metro State and the community.

In reflecting (as well as projecting) I remain passionate about our program, its growth, and its sense of community. One essential ingredient I bring to every class and extracurricular activities within the program is the importance of community. Writing is a solitary art, yet workshops fuel creative energy beyond the classroom. For writers to stay motivated, they need to stay connected to others working towards the same or similar outcome: filling the world with the world's voices. This spring we have eight students graduating with a creative writing major, and in honor of community all students will be attending graduation to either receive their diplomas, or to support their peers. Several of our upcoming graduates will stay connected to Metro's writing community by participating monthly with Get Lit, an ongoing online workshop setting that alumni attend regularly. Extracurricular activities include advising the literary magazine, *Haute Dish*, scheduling student readings, and promoting/ participating in student/alumni Sunday writing group, *Get Lit*.

In addition to my focus on program development I continue to see my role as significant serving on the MLS Advisory Committee, and the LAM committee. Below list my reflections more specifically for continued development as a strong and effective creative writing associate professor in the college of liberal arts.

### **Criterion 1: Effective Teaching**

1. In fall, '24 I taught WRIT 357, *Writers as Readers*, as well as WRIT 358, *1000 Words or Less*. Students reacted positively to the face-to-face WRIT 357, and I was happy to hear the feedback. Students appear to want to be face-to-face again, and perhaps it's because our courses are workshop intensive, and it helps to look people in the eye.
2. This spring, 2025, I had a successful 6-week Boot Camp course (WRIT 359). We had two students over the cap, and all 20 students successfully completed the 4-credit course. WRIT 481: *Advanced Creative Writing*, has been an interesting experience as I am co-teaching this course. The course is face-to-face, and the students have stated repeatedly that they get so much more out of face-to-face courses.
3. For both WRIT 359 and WRIT 481 I worked with new texts, and the students responded so positively, especially in WRIT 481. Among the texts used included Salmon Rushdie's *Knife*, and Steve Almond's *Truth is the Arrow, Mercy is the Bow*. In March, 2025, author Steve Almond zoomed into our WRIT 481 course to discuss process, and resilience in writing. Students love having guests, particularly when it relates specifically to the materials used in class. I will engage students in multicultural texts and assigned readings/discussions for all CW courses.
4. I provided prompt feedback weekly for all writing assignments due.; I met with advisees for spring, summer and fall, '25 scheduling.

5. I've reviewed student portfolios for each course I am teaching to assist me in determining individual writing processes (in place of a final). This assignment is a requirement for each of my courses and a clear example of writing being a recursive process.
6. Conferences these past two semesters have gone extremely well. Students have attended conferences on time with questions drafted in advance. The students continue to express interest in dialoguing with authors.
7. One of my roles in our program is that of creative writing coordinator. Below lists my ongoing responsibilities connected to this role:
  - a. Maintain bi-weekly communication with program faculty about HR deadlines, professional development and grant opportunities, and department events to support the Creative Writing program.
  - b. Coordinator provides one-on-one mentorship to Creative Writing faculty to support their work in the classroom, including in-class visits if agreed to by the faculty instructor.
  - c. Coordinator identifies and supports faculty within their respective program with the development of new courses; communicate with the rest of the department as these courses enter formal review and approval (Departmental review, Curriculum Committee, Academic Affairs, GELS and RIGR review if appropriate).
  - d. Coordinator develops publicity (flyers, D2L announcements) for creative writing courses and programming.
  - e. Coordinator supports the chair in professional development events for program faculty.
  - f. Enrollment Outreach (to communities, to community colleges) / Publicity flyers, emails, brochures
  - g. Event Planning (e.g. workshops, speakers, readings, etc.)
  - h. Coordinator carefully plans creative writing courses each semester, following a 2-year rotation, and considering enrollment trends and assigning quality instructors for our students.
  - i. Coordinator assigns courses within the program to resident faculty members and community faculty members with attention to faculty expertise and teaching experience in creative writing, workload needs and limitations.
  - j. Coordinator provides timely communication to chair when course enrollment and potential cancellations arise. They will provide recommendations for faculty reassignment due to cancellations.
  - k. Coordinator works with a two-year plan of courses for the program.
  - l. Coordinator interviews qualified candidates for creative writing community faculty positions to help strengthen the program and build our pool of instructors. The coordinator recommends qualified candidates to the dean for consideration, and works with the office manager to begin necessary paperwork.
  - m. After new community faculty members are hired, coordinator immediately conveys the job expectations to them, including (but not restricted to) the obligation to attend mandatory New Faculty Orientations/Workshops, an informal introduction of the university-level instructional support systems, the format and minimum content required for course syllabi, and professional norms of college teaching.
  - n. Coordinator reviews and submits relevant course exemption paperwork.
  - o. Coordinator reviews and submits course equivalency paperwork.
  - p. Coordinator submits overrides related to relevant course pre-reqs.
  - q. Coordinator mediates grade appeals between students and creative writing program faculty.
  - r. Coordinator responds to complaints about faculty instruction in a timely and constructive manner.
8. This marks a new decade of advising *Haute Dish*. I've been officially advising this journal for over 20 years. And still going. Advising responsibilities include bi-monthly meetings with volunteer editorial staff, working with editors describing in detail expectations of an editor. We hold two readings a year, one in spring, and one in fall. Our last reading, April 13<sup>th</sup>, was held at Springboard for the Arts in St. Paul, and we had close to 100 attendees including online

guests. Other duties for advising Haute Dish include working with students on a budget, layout design, submissions and publications. My role as advisor is important, yet I try to stay in the background and trust the students with follow through. There are always little fires to be put out; when you work with a room full of creatives, there are lots of suggestions, thoughts, and passion behind those suggestions and thoughts. I love advising the students with Haute Dish because of their continued passion to the product and affirming student voices.

9. Metro creative writing events are always a success either on campus or off site. As stated, we hold two *Haute Dish* readings each year, along with special event readings, and attendance is always overwhelming to include current students, alumni, friends and family.
10. 21 writing students this spring, '25 took on the challenge of writing 70 poems in 70 days. 14 of us finished this challenge and we celebrated with a reading in the Metro Library on Thursday, April 10, '25 from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. We had eight readers and a small audience

## **Criterion 2: Scholarly or Creative Achievement or Research**

I have recently published four creative works (poetry/fiction). I also just wrote a blurb for a recent collection of Poetry titled *Meltwater* published by the Minnesota Historical Society: In Craig Evenson's *Meltwater*, we sit by the side of the road watching the season's change amongst our fellow communicators: wolves, foxes, dogs, cats, an aviary of birds taking ques from a hawk. We smell the freshly-cut grass embracing a father's body; we stare into the deep eyes of our neighbor, the crow; we spend time in hospital lobbies, loading truck beds with benches marked "free"; we attend a family reunion where a mother asks, "How long must we live?"

Our shared world with the woodlanders is never quite lonely as we watch them and they watch us trampolining, applying the Gytaku method while leaving behind shadows dipped in ink. In Evanson's collection, framed pictures don't look back while we travel many miles only to face the brief cycle of life. Beautifully crafted, we welcome the wise eyes behind these words.

This spring semester, starting with January 1, I had 18 students commit to writing 70 poems in 70 days. 16 of the 18 students finished this challenge on March 11, 2025. We are gathering together an anthology of each writer's three-five favorite pieces and we will be scheduling a reading with library services (Michelle Filkins who also participated in the 7-/70 event) during the month of April for National Poetry Month.

I was a guest speak at the Jewish Community Center (JCC) in December, '24, talking about the *Invention of the Story*.

I also visited Aliessa Ringer's TCID 375: Environmental Comm course lecturing on narrative on March 12, '25.

Additionally I spoke at this event: 2024 Fall "Stay Day" Leadership Retreat: October 19, 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. (Sponsored by the Office of Student Life and Leadership Development) Title of Presentation: Creative Intelligence and Leadership (55 minutes) **Summary**: This is an interactive presentation that explores what defines creative intelligence, and what defines leadership. We will review what researchers have gathered on this topic, and we will reflect on how creative intelligence breeds successful leaders. Participants will brainstorm what it means to be creatively successful in a time of AI and social media.

Poems published: *Thumbprints* (poem) December, 2024 in *Fearless Obsession*: ISBN 9798218304669;

Published poems in *Raven's Perch*, '24: *Do you Know Your News Anchor's Blood Type*; *Guilty Rabbits*; *Moon Around*; *Before I knew the Word Hymen*.

Published poem: *The Man on the Steps* published in *Rumble*, 'fall, '24.

1. Four of our creative writing majors appeared on The Gaily Show (AM 950) in February, '25 highlighting LBGTQ poetry.

### **Criterion 3: Evidence of Continuing Preparation and Study**

1. The student writers' group, *Get Lit*, which meets the first Sunday evening of each month throughout the calendar year has expanded by leaps and bounds. The 18 students that took on the 70/70 challenge with me this spring are all participants of *Get Lit*.
2. I have collaborated with Library Services for a joint reading honoring the writers who completed the 70/70 project.
3. Some new texts I've worked with this semester include Salman Rushdie's *Knife*. This came at an interesting time as Rushdie was in court during our reading testifying against his abuser. Very timely. The other text that was just published is Steve Almond's *Truth is the Arrow, Mercy is the Bow*. Steve Almond zoomed with our class mid semester to engage in dialogue with the students including a Q & A.

### **Criterion 4: Contributions to Student Growth and Development**

1. Eight of my majors are graduating this spring and I have written several letters of recommendation for these students as they are continuing with their educational journey. Two of these graduates are enrolling in the MLS program in fall, '25.
2. I work one on one with each of my graduates from our first meeting up until graduation. I am often completing graduation reviews, exception forms, and letters of recommendation. I deliberately meet with each of my students to discuss further plans after graduation, and I keep tabs on many of our graduate through *Get Lit* monthly meetings.
3. I served as chair for the annual Carothers Award. This involves forming a committee of three faculty and staff to read all blind submissions, averaging between 18 and 42 per year. Once the committee was formed, I then collect, record identification, and make certain all entries are saved as blind submissions. I sent out all submissions the following day after deadline and offered the committee at least a week to read and work using a prepared rubric, until a winner is determined at the final meeting. I enjoy this process. It is tedious, yet an annual event that honors student writing.
4. I have actively recruited students to serve as editors for our literary magazine, *Haute Dish*, for fall, '25.
5. Our program recently received confirmation that a new course I proposed: WRIT 390: Writing for Literary Publication, will be offered for the first time Spring, '26. What is most exciting about this is our continued plan to collaborate student SDISs to receive credit for their editorial contributions to the literary magazine.
6. I provided a lecture for prospective students working with Phil Fuehrer in fall, '24: Student Life and Leadership.
7. I maintain a picture of growth by keeping track of alumni through *Get Lit* monthly meetings and recognizing students' continued publications.
8. I continued to nominate students for the president's award bi-annually. My spring '25 nomination for CLA received an honorable mention.
9. My open-door policy with students and advising is another way of instilling community within the program. Many students visit me each week with submission guidelines and information along with external resources they may be a part of to stay connected in the writers community.
10. Recent Student Comments:  
Hey Suzanne, just sending you an invite to a small graduation party with my family. If you are available for a little bit on May 11<sup>th</sup> at 2PM, I would be happy for you to join us for a small BBQ at my moms place.  
No pressure or anything but I did want to extend you the invite.

Thanks again for being the best teacher Ever!!

You really have changed my life.

Also I plan on now that things have slowed down a bit after graduation to start coming back to Get Lit. I still want to be a part of that group. Bryant Rooney

Thank you so much, Suzanne 😊 I'm just beaming over here. I'll keep the name in mind, if not for a child maybe a pet of some sort. If I haven't told you before, I'll you now, you're the whole reason I came back to Metro and decided to declare a creative writing major. I took your readers and writers course in 2016 and it sparked something in me that I needed to see through, even if it took me a few years to do it. Thank you for being my advisor. Thank you for inspiring me to go back to school and pursue something that lights my soul on fire, I owe you more than you know.

Thank you thank you thank you,

Sadie

Aw, Suzanne thank you so much!! ❤️😊 I am in awe of your organizational skills and all the work you put into teaching. I am so grateful to you! Thank you so much for assembling this. I love it. Meg Kosowski

#### **Criterion 5: Service to the University and Community**

1. I served on the MLS Advisory Committee, and I also recommended recent grads to the program.
2. I served on the LAM Committee reviewing exciting degree plans created by students and advisors.
3. Chairing the annual Carother's Writing Award in February/March is always a role I enjoy playing.
4. I attended all professional meetings monthly: CLA; WLL
5. I attended all IFO meetings to work on collaboration with other faculty.
6. I completed my role for adjudicating the MN Writing Region for the 2025 Scholastic Arts and Writing Awards.
7. I recruit students to the creative writing program through word of mouth and publicity of ongoing events.
8. I am excited for May 5<sup>th</sup> commencement. I have eight students graduating. Ironically this is our last WRIT 481 class meeting, and we have made adjustments for this so all students, those graduating and peers are attending graduation.
9. We officially have five of our required courses for our program now listed as a fulfillment of goal 6. This was a project that took considerable time and joint effort with my chair, Julie Kae. The courses now listed under goal six include: WRIT 352: Writing Memoir and Creative Nonfiction; WRIT 354: Writing Poetry; WRIT 356: Writing Humor; WRIT 357: Writers as Readers; WRIT 358: 1000 Words or Less. This will increase our numbers for enrollment.

With justice, self-control, prudence, and humility, I continue to find a new energy exploding from the creative writing students. They want to write, they want to read, they want to make a difference. This momentum will move us into the next academic year. I so appreciate your leadership. Thank you so kindly, Kristen.

Also I contacted Sarah Dimick Gray about the GELS work, and the opportunity to be a part of the committee and here is her response:

Hi Suzanne,

Next fall will be the call for the COPs, the Communities of Practice, that will inform the work of the GESC, General Education Steering Committee. It will be the COPs that determine the learning outcomes for each course category and thus the types of courses that will contribute. Would that be of interest to you? I responded "yes."