

## **Criterion I: Demonstrated Ability to Teach Effectively and / or Perform Effectively in Other Current Assignments**

### **Brief Narrative**

I will address within criterion I my strategies for effective teaching, to include my experience serving as chair of the fine arts department before merging with Writing, Literature, and Language, and serving as the coordinator from the creative writing program. I will also touch on my years of experience advising the student-run literary journal, *Haute Dish*. I have spent over two decades of my life at Metro State in one role or another. Since my tenure and promotion in 2021, I continue to have the honor of working with students in a teaching and advising capacity. The history of how I ended up teaching at Metro I shared in my previous dossier when applying for tenure and promotion. To briefly recall, my teaching as community faculty at Metro started in 1999, with WRIT 231. And here I am, more than two decades later, writing yet another intro to Criterion I for my end-of-career promotion.

My last five years working full time in the creative writing program is my life's joy. The ability to watch students wander and wonder their way through the elements of robust writing from one semester to the next fills my heart. I tell students what I know, implementing the magic of the elements from telling to showing. Teaching is magical for those who feel the passion.

Student-centered curricula guide both my students and me to stay focused. There's always a lot to cover in a course that meets weekly for over three hours, and it is important to be organized and time sensitive. This becomes most important when students are workshopping material that leaves the reader, and more often the writer, feeling vulnerable. As I've stated in my overall narrative, securing an environment that respectfully welcomes a workshop setting is a priority of mine. The best learning happens within a cohort model. To stay on track, I create and send all students a "Weekly Writing Agenda" listing everything that will be covered in that week's class. (please find samples of weekly agenda sheets within this section).

Ever since COVID, adaptations of course delivery remain a constant discussion within our program. Building a sense of community takes the work of every participant, and setting the room as a safe environment is essential. Initially I was leery of teaching writing over a zoom environment because I thought it would make the cohort model more difficult. I've learned over the years since COVID hit that students appreciate the diversity offered through classroom delivery. I also learned that it is still possible to build a community on zoom. Students leave their cameras on and look one another in the eye. We use the option of the hand raising icon to promote a stimulating dialogue, and a community forms from the beginning. This is not to say that face-to-face isn't my more desirable method of teaching, but I've learned through experience that community is created through engagement, and students do in fact engage on zoom just as productively as they do face-to-face.

I still insist on offering WRIT 251 (Intro to creative writing), and WRIT 481 (Capstone) these two required courses face-to-face. I believe creative writing majors appreciate having their first and last course in a classroom setting.

Until fall, 2023, creative writing was housed under the department of fine arts. In fall, of 2022 I chaired the fine arts department for a semester until I went on sabbatical that spring. My role as chair challenged me to think administratively by introducing me to a different avenue for managing people. Students are easier to manage; you give them voice and they connect with others. Managing faculty, creating bi-weekly agendas for meetings, working with scheduling of courses, and other responsibilities was time consuming, yet important for my awareness of how to interact within a department versus a classroom. The skills I learned in doing so prepared me for my next venture after sabbatical: coordinating the creative writing program. Serving as the coordinator keeps me busy and goal orientated. You will see through some of the documents included within this criterion that in our program annual reflection that these goals are documented and I am proud to say that our program has a healthy number of majors/minors, and that I've learned I can also find joy in admin work. Serving as coordinator subjects me to explore options for developing new classes. One of my goals down the road is developing 1-2 credit courses for our major. I intend to do this due to the high number of SDIS/FDIS I take on during the academic year. I think offering 1-2 credit courses for our majors is a necessity. I don't mind overseeing/teaching in an SDIS/FDIS delivery; however, I do think it takes away from my desire for community. Since my tenure, I average at least two SDIS/FDIS every semester to include summer.

I'd like to switch up the tone a bit and talk about *Haute Dish*, Metro State University's literary magazine published in print twice a year. What a journey; what a phenomenal journey it's been and continues to be. In summary, I am no stranger to *Haute Dish's* genesis and rebirth. Back in 2004 I met with then student, Clint Weathers, and resident faculty, Alison McGhee, and we worked out a plan with a detailed schedule to reboot *Haute Dish* after its hiatus. We issued a beautiful magazine in Spring of 2004 with these stats: Winter/Spring 2005 (premiere issue): 32 submissions (25 published) 13 poems, 10 prose, Poems: 16, Prose: 13, Art: 3. We were publishing this three times a year, matching the semester schedule. By the summer of 2007 these were our stats: Summer, '07: (44 published) 19 art, 11 poems, 14 prose Total: 188 Submissions, Poems: 85, Prose: 44, Art: 58, Arts Community: 1, Students: 141, Alumni: 37, Faculty: 6.

I proceeded to advise *Haute Dish* for over ten years, and in 2014, I passed the advising over to Mary Ringstad, community faculty in CLA. In 2018 I returned as advisor to *Haute Dish*. And do I love it? It's wonderful. Because of the students. Because of their passion and commitment to making this an exceptional literary magazine that continues to be published two times a year. I send a huge acknowledgement out to Clint Weathers and Diane DeRosier for performing magic during its genesis and beyond.

Over time I've read submissions of renditions of vampire stories, alien and dystopian worlds, many rich in setting and character development; many leaving the residue of characters

deemed for epiphany. All stories, regardless of their stage in development, are filled with passion. A passion that burns in the student writer's soul and just waits for the right opportunity to make its grand entrance.

*Haute Dish* is just another extension of the creative magic at Metro. One plan I have is for students to revisit ezines, and what's happening in the ezine world, both outside and inside of academia. It's been several years since former student, Josh Fischer, researched ezine competition, which in turn lead to us submitting to competitions and winning awards.

*Haute Dish* also has an online audience with regular visitation. I want to thank my colleagues that support *Haute Dish* through readership, live readings and zoom readings, and introducing its creative outlet in many of their classes at the beginning of each semester. CLA is an incredible community of learners, educators, arbitrators, peaceful activists, all with deep emotions and a love for teaching. I'm reminded often how fortunate I am to be among this community, this cohort, this phenomenal academic home.

This spring, 2026, *Haute Dish* is going to have a makeover, and this is exciting for various reasons. We will once again compete with other university literary journals around the country for our published works, and we will be designing our magazine into a book with an ISBN, and all that legitimacy. Please find the attached flyer titled *Haute Dish* is in the News with an Organic Facelift for '25-'26.

## **CURRICULUM DESIGN**

**Since my tenure at Metro State University, I have taught the following courses:**

WRIT 251: Introduction to Creative Writing

WRIT 300: Race and Identity in the Twin Cities

WRIT 324: The Graphic Novel

WRIT 324: Topics in Writing: Travel Writing

WRIT 353: Writing Short Fiction

WRIT 356: Writing Humor

WRIT 357: Writers as Readers

WRIT 358: 1000 Words or Less

WRIT 359: Boot Camp: Creative Writing for Non-Majors

WRIT 481: Advanced Creative Writing Capstone

MLS 620-50: Liberal Studies Explorations: The Graphic Novel ([co-taught with Bev Hill])

**While my time at Metro I have also designed the following courses for the Creative Writing Major:**

WRIT 324: Topics in Writing: The Graphic Novel; Travel Writing

WRIT 356: Writing Humor

WRIT 357: Writers as Readers

## **Pedagogical Approaches**

Building a cohort is most essential to my teaching style. This takes a while, but it's important to remember that this sets the tone for continued writing. Because of this I must earn the respect of the students in the class, and I do this through various tools. First and foremost, the selection of required reading is what I will build my syllabus around. Critical thinking skills are what we delve into every class meeting. I require that students not only discuss assigned readings critically in our face-to-face/zoom classes but also turn in weekly one-page responses to those readings required as part of their end-of-semester portfolio.

One measure I use in evaluating writing is an adaptation of Education Northwest's 6 + 1 Trait Writing. On a possible 10-point scale I offer up to two points per category: Ideas and Content; Organization; Voice, Sentence Fluency; Word Choice. Each category has several components breaking down in detail identifiers of that specific category.

Students turn in several assignments each class meeting to me, and my turn around for years has been the following week. Students look forward to weekly feedback, and it solidifies their level of trust in me. Students majoring in creative writing engage in wanting to learn the core elements of character development, point of view, dialogue, landscape and setting, and finding epiphany through plot.

This segues back to the idea of cohort. Trust, respect, addressing concerns as they present themselves, are all contributors to a successful cohort. Many alumni still are involved in our monthly meeting. Get Lit is now eight years old.

### **Instructional Advisement and Innovation**

I look forward to continuing a strong partnership with literature and language. My colleagues are teaching fascinating courses, and I strongly feel we are all looking out for one another's best interests. I also have a strong connection with colleagues in fine arts and communication. Because of this I frequent colleague's courses guest lecturing on the elements of writing.

In addition, I stay current in what's being published locally, national and internationally, but most importantly I thrive on reading my students' work.

Over eight years ago a group of creative writing graduates decided to start a Metro State writers group that met monthly for three hours each meeting. Over the course of eight years the group remains dedicated to regular monthly meetings, currently on Zoom, the first Sunday of every month. Many alumni attend routinely. Every month there is anywhere from 5-15 writers, some of those writers are now out of state, but due to Zoom, they can attend virtually. I attend the group monthly to show my support, and I occasionally will share work with writers. Starting January 1, 2025, 21 students/alumni, including myself set off to write 70 poems in 70 days. 14 writers completed this challenge, and we held a reading on April 11, 2025. We had close to 100 people in attendance. For the spring submissions, we received over 120.

One thing I like to offer my students is the opportunity to hear and engage with guest speakers. This is especially important for courses like Writing Humor. We've had some profound visits

with professionals such as Sarah Cooper, Matt Goldman, Al Franken, Tig Notaro among many others. Students love the interaction, and you know what? So do the guests because it's not about them, it's about what they have up their sleeve to share. That's what all of this about, right? Another element of magic.

I want to mention how important my student feedback is to my pedagogy. Every time a student takes the time to express what works in a 15-week class and what doesn't work with specific examples, I then apply this feedback to my future teachings of the course evaluated. For example, when WRIT 359 ended after six weeks This is some of the feedback I received:

"I found this class to have a lovely balance of writing, technical lessons, revision, and overall practice. I especially appreciated the workshopping we did as a class, and the free writes. What I am taking away: the lesson on brevity and continuing to understand the discipline I need to foster within myself when it comes to writing. I am sure I will continue to return to The Poet's Companion, as I found it to be a really useful tool. All in all, this was a really lovely way to have class and be taught. I am a little sad that it is such a short course!"

"First, I would like to say thank you for your patience, feedback and love of reading and the ability to teach what you enjoy."

#### **What Worked and Why?**

"Workshopping the feedback from other writers was invaluable"

"Free writes one of my favorites. Doing these allowed me to be creative with words without worrying if they fit or made sense. Generally, my free writing turned out to be something I could expand and revise later."

"Reading although A Poet's Companion wasn't my favorite read, I gained valuable knowledge from reading it."

#### **What Didn't Work and Why?**

"The amount of reading for such a short amount of time. It felt like, for A Poet's Companion I would have liked to have gone in deeper depths especially in the chapters that dealt with witnessing, images, voice and style and poetry of place."

"This was also true for me with In Brief it wasn't that I don't enjoy reading. However, I do like to take my time to savor go back over and grasp what I'm reading. So I felt there was a lot to read in such a small amount of time."

#### **My Takeaway's**

"I got to see up close and personal what agitates me and why and then learn to let it go."

"One of the most insightful free writes we did (in my opinion) is going back and looking at what we were doing this time last season and playing around with writing it as a list, a poem etc."

“The ability to get feedback has been one of my greatest gifts and I can see I do have a voice as a writer.”

**Most Recent Student and Staff Comments in Reflection of Learning:**

“I really appreciate this course and you as an instructor. You’re just cool, and you know your shit, and you are not full of shit. Good on you and thank you so much.”

“Whenever I need inspiration for my writing, I think back to what I have learned from these courses, even think about the prompts we did in class. As you are you off on sabbatical next semester, this was the last class I was able to have with you. Thank you for the tools you have given me these passed semesters!”

“I would say I’ve enjoyed this class by far the most out of my entire Metro experience. Although in the future when I think back on my time at this school, there mainly will be memories that are extremely depressing and I’ll think of all the hardships that I wish didn’t have to be there to break me down or make me an even more beaten dog, but the classes with you have been fine. At least you didn’t single me out to be made an example of...I know we don’t really know each other, and you might not even like me, but I really truly am thankful you were there for me.”

“Thank you so much for the feedback and all the work you put into helping me and everyone else. I feel teachers often do not get enough feedback, as well as writers and poets (so I guess that makes you a triple threat), and just wanted to share my appreciation for that as well as for all you give to the students and the community. And I’ll definitely see you next Get Lit! Thanks again!”

“I am so grateful for the method in which Suzanne conducted class and structured workshops. Suzanne provided general questions to target our thinking about a piece, and then allowed us to express our thoughts, one at a time. Everyone was so respectful and kind when delivering critiques, even when it was a hard message to deliver. Everyone’s kindness allowed me to get past the sting of a hard critique and focus on how to make my writing better, so a big “Thank You!” to everyone, and to Suzanne for fostering such a safe environment.”

“Let me start by saying I really enjoyed this class or any class that Suzanne teaches. Her teaching style and the books she assigns have assisted me greatly in taking my writing further. For instance, Brevity by Galef, David is a great reading; the assignments throughout each chapter really get the juices in the brain flowing.”

“In this class, I got the pleasure of learning and discovering more pieces of unique fiction that were presented in class and meeting wonderful classmates and an instructor. I didn’t now know what to anticipate when I registered for this class, but I don’t regret joining it. While there were multiple assignments that I had fun writing and brainstorming, there were also some challenges that were encountered as well. Writing short stories within 1,000 words gave me another way to look at certain narratives and topics since there is little information. I was always left speculating about what transpired before or where this take me next. With that being said, I

feel like this class gave me plenty of inspiration and contributed to most of my success this semester.”

“Thank you for another wonderful semester. Thank you for being you and for being such a caring, kind, and amazing professor. I hope you enjoy your sabbatical and may the writing muse be with you every day to inspire you!”

• Nielsen, Suzanne R  
Fri 12/2/2022 2:53 PM

Dear Professor Nielsen,

On behalf of the Institute for Community Engagement and Scholarship, I wanted to thank you for the workshop you hosted at today’s campus visit with Farnsworth Magnet School. I remember you saying that you had never condensed your classes down to 35 minutes before, but no one would have known! It was so great to see how engaging and encouraging you are with students, and it was awesome to see how they opened themselves up to the idea of writing a story AND sharing it out. I told Katie that the workshop made me want to take a writing class.

We hope that you’ll be willing to work with us again for more workshops in the future. Thank you again for all you do!

Warm regards,  
Ashley Lopez

“Suzanne, Thank you so much for everything this semester. I have enjoyed spending every Thursday evening with you and everyone in our class. I have learned so much from you. Thank you so much for your support and encouragement. You haven’t seen the last of me. I just might pop into your 1,000 Words or Less course again in the future.”

“Somehow you (Suzanne) have chosen the best topics for the free writes that really encourage us to think but they’re really fun or interesting topics. I really like having some of the assignments as revisions because then it gives us all time to go over our work again and think about what we could change to convey the humor we are trying to share. Thank you for another wonderful semester, Suzanne! You truly are a gift to us students, with your love of your work, it rubs off on us. Thank you again.”

“I realize I am not graduating until Fall but I wanted to say thanks for all that I have learned. Last night I presented one of my students with a graduate award. We were supposed to introduce them and give a prepared, short, one-minute speech about why they deserved it. Mine was the only one to meet the timeline and one of the few to have an audible audience reaction. I do not think I could have spoken so succinctly and captured the emotion as well without all I have learned from both of you. Whether I ever publish anything of great significance or not, I am trying, I want you to know what I have learned is helping me do a job I already love, not just on that day but every day. I am constantly writing and communicating with students from a wide variety of backgrounds and the skills I have learned both in writing and appreciating other perspectives and experiences makes me a better teacher and a better student of the craft of communication. Thanks. Also, I just wanted to thank you for such a good

class. There are so many elements of this class that I truly enjoyed, and that helped me grow as a writer.”

“I LOVED the 10-20 minute free-writes and then having to share those writings with the class. It forced me to pay attention to my own thoughts, and because I only had 10 minutes to produce something, I had to put my immediate thought to paper. I was surprised by what I was able to produce. And now I have so many ideas for future short stories! The other thing that impacted me was to think about "showing" versus "telling", and to use the five senses. I hadn't thought about my writing in that way before.”

“Being around other writers, even if they write in different genres, has made me want to better my own writing. Seeing successful story tellers motivates me to learn from them. As I am getting older, and further in my college career, I have started to look at my writing more. Whenever I need inspiration for my writing, I think back to what I have learned from these courses, even think about the prompts we did in class. As you are you off on sabbatical next semester, this was the last class I was able to have with you. Thank you for the tools you have given me these passed semesters!”

“Hi Suzanne, Thank you for the portfolio and for your kind words. Your writing courses helped me reignite my lifelong passion for writing, and they have helped me through some very dark times. Thank you so much for creating a space which allows openness and acceptance and cultivates creativity. I will miss being your student immensely. I hope that our paths cross again. If the Sunday writers' group is still a thing, I would love to join if you have a location or Zoom link I can attend. Thank you and I will see you tonight!”

“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 let you know, 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!”

“Aw, Suzanne, 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.”

**ATTACHED DOCUMENTS:**

- a. Letter from Jeremy Badow
- b. Letters from students/staff
- c. Chair/Coordinator responsibilities
- d. Program Annual Reflection
- e. Workloads
- f. IIQs

- g. SDIS/FDIS
- h. Haute Dish Facelift (misc)
- i. OSA nominations
- j. Promoting CW
- k. PDP/PDRs
- l. Misc.