

Event Title: On Grading Creative Writing: Process, Product, and Talent

Event Description: Creative writing is a serious art that demands the study of craft, close reading, thoughtful discussion of literature, and much practice, all of which are dependent upon the time to learn one's own creative process. Grading this work is an especially difficult task. The practicing writers and teachers on this panel will discuss their approaches to grading creative writing in ways that rewards students' processes and talent, while maintaining high standards for the art of creative writing.

Event Category: Creative Writing Pedagogy

Event Organizer and Moderator: Rachel M. Hanson is a former Olive B. O'Connor fellow in nonfiction at Colgate University, and teaches creative writing and literature at UNC-Asheville. Her work has appeared in *Ninth Letter*, *The Iowa Review*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *Best New Poets*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA from the University of Utah and a PhD in literature and creative writing from the University of Missouri.

Event Participants

Bryn Chancellor is the author of the novel *Sycamore* and the story collection *When Are You Coming Home?*, which won the Prairie Schooner Book Prize; she also received the Poets & Writers Maureen Egen Writers Exchange Award, and her fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *Brevity*, *Gulf Coast*, *Colorado Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *The Common*, *Publishers Weekly*, and elsewhere. She is associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

CJ Hauser teaches creative writing and literature at Colgate University. Her most recent novel, *Family of Origin*, was published by Doubleday in July 2019. She is also the author of the novel *The From-Aways* and her fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Tin House*, *Narrative Magazine*, *The Paris Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Esquire*, *Third Coast*, and *The Kenyon Review*. She holds an MFA from Brooklyn College and a PhD from Florida State University. She lives in Hamilton, NY.

Susan McCarty is the author of the story collection *Anatomies* and her fiction and essays have been published in *Conjunctions*, *West Branch*, *Indiana Review*, *Barrelhouse*, *Utne Reader*, *Iowa Review*, and numerous other literary journals. Susan has an MFA in fiction from Vermont College and a PhD in literature and creative writing from the University of Utah. She is an assistant professor of English at Oakland University.

Ye Chun/叶春 is the author of two books of poetry, *Lantern Puzzle* and *Travel over Water*, a novel in Chinese, and three books of translations, including *Ripened Wheat: Selected Poems of Hai Zi*. Her short stories have appeared in *The Georgia Review*, *Threepenny Review*, *TriQuarterly*, and other places. A recipient of an NEA Fellowship, three Pushcart Prizes, and a Sustainable Arts Foundation Award, she is an assistant professor at Providence College.

Event Outline:

- As organizer, I will give some opening remarks on the thought process behind the creation of this panel and how it came together, followed by introducing each panelist. (5 - 7 minutes)
- Panelists will present alphabetically. (10 - 12 minutes each)
- As moderator, I will have prepared a list of questions, but will turn it over to the audience for questions first. (20 minutes)

Opening Remarks (abbreviated) – As most of us creative writing teachers know already, we must be ready to guide students toward a writing process that works for them, and also get students to understand that their creative writing process will, at times, differ from other types of writing they take on in their careers as students and beyond. But the creative writing process can take a long time to figure out, and students must, by the very nature of being students, *produce* work—they must give their teachers a product to grade. Obviously, we want to reward process and growth, but we also must reward talent. So, how do we do it? That’s what this panel is all about answering, and I’m so pleased that some of my most favorite writers and people from all over the country took the time out of their very busy schedules to help all of us tackle questions about grading creative writing.

Brief Overview of Panelists Presentation/Approaches to Grading CW**Bryn Chancellor:**

Like many instructors, I have a fraught relationship with grading undergraduate creative writing, veering from ambivalent to antagonistic as I fret whether institutional requirements and checkboxes quash the energy and urgency at the heart of creative work. What changes when students view a story or poem or essay as an assignment instead of something that obsesses them, impels them? (Or can both be true?) How do we minimize or decenter grades if we also must assert the necessity and value of engaged discussion, close reading, deep attention, purposeful drafting, revising, and reflection, and a workshop that hinges on reciprocity? Are grades a carrot or a stick (or the donkey)? How do we balance rigor and kindness? Can we create a space at once open to play and dreaminess and wrong turns, to structure and dedication, to empathetic feedback and camaraderie? I don’t have certain answers; what I do have are a bazillion examples of my attempts (fail again; fail better). I’ll come bearing handouts.

CJ Hauser:

I want my students to feel free and open to risk-taking in drafts but then really separate intention from results in final drafts. I tell my students the following: “Here’s how grading works: each wonderful thing you do builds your grade up from a zero toward a shining & glorious A. Too often I think students conceive of papers as starting as an A and that A being chipped away at by provable errors. Negative Ghostwriters. You must earn and build your good grade fortunes brick by brick.” I’ll bring handouts on how I go about grading.

Susan McCarty:

Teaching CW is teaching form. Just like we teach forms in lit and comp classes and then ask students to execute them, we can also do that in CW. Three types of approaches I use:

- 1-Grade Around Creativity (a lot of assignments, not graded for writing quality)
- 2-Skills & Reflection (grading for particular skills we cover in class)
- 3-Ungrading (not grading, assumed grade is A)

In my presentation, I'll discuss the reasons for each approach, the pros and cons of those approaches, and assignment examples from each approach.

Ye Chun:

I will share my experience in devising different rubrics and grading policies for different levels of poetry workshops. I will also discuss the trials and errors in the different grading approaches I have experimented with over the years and what currently seems to be working for me.