

WORD!

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Revised PRWR curriculum offers updated courses, new track options

by Michael Downs
program director

When more than two years ago PRWR faculty first began talking about how to revise the program's curriculum, two thoughts gave them focus. Update it; make it flexible.

Now, beginning in Fall 2023, incoming PRWR students will have more choices for how to complete their degrees, including a new nonprofit writing track and an option to pursue the degree without any track at all.

Additionally, over the last two years PRWR has added courses and updated course descriptions and titles, reshaping the program's classroom offerings to better fit today's professional writing world.

Since the program's founding in 1984, PRWR's curriculum has adhered to its original form. There have been tweaks along the way, including new courses and some changes to what courses might fulfill a track. But the core courses and the tracks themselves have remained much as first conceived. Feedback from students and alumni suggested changes, particularly in the core courses, which students said too often seemed to overlap in content.

So, in Fall 2020, a small group of PRWR faculty gathered to consider changes. Eventually those suggestions were shared with the entire program faculty, and then went through a lengthy university approval

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Congrats to our PRWR graduates!

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Bobbi Jo Bergum



Alexander Eikenberg



Coty Poynter



Chloë Williams

Revised PRWR curriculum offers updated courses, new track options (cont.)

process. The curriculum will become official with the annual publication of the university's graduate student catalog in July.

Some aspects of the old curriculum remain. Students will still need 36 credits to earn the degree. Students who want to fulfill a track will do so by taking three courses, choosing from among a longer list. There remains a group of core courses all students must take. The creative writing track is unchanged.

For current PRWR students, the changes don't mean much. Their governing curriculum is the same as when they enrolled in the program. But current students may have already benefited from changes PRWR has made regarding courses: the creation of Content Strategy and Writing for Social Change (PRWR 629), for example, or updates to the names and descriptions of several courses. Rhetoric: The Pursuit of Eloquence has become simply Rhetoric, with a refocused course description. History of Prose Style has become simply Style, with less emphasis on history and more on writing style.

The curriculum's structural changes will apply to all incoming PRWR students, beginning in Fall 2023.

Among the highlights:

- **The core curriculum drops to five courses rather than six.**

Incoming students will now take Rhetoric (PRWR 611), Rhetorical Grammar (613), Editing (617), and the internship (797).



Jeannie Vanasco, a PRWR creative nonfiction professor, taught the updated Style course in Spring 2023

A fifth course completes the core, though students get to choose that course from this list: Style (615), Technical Writing and Information Design (623), Theory of Creativity (641), Methods and Research for Professional Writing (691).

Practically, this also means that incoming students gain an extra elective choice, from three to four courses.

- **Students no longer need to choose a track.**

Students are welcome to choose a track or to develop a trackless course of study that best suits their interests.

- **Writing for the Nonprofit Sector, a new track, replaces Writing for the Public and Private Sector.**

To complete the nonprofit writing track, students may choose three courses from this group:

Grant and Community Writing (619); Business Writing (621); Designing Content for the Web (628); Content Strategy and Writing for Social Change (629); and Public Relations for Nonprofit Organizations (MCOMM 551).

The replacement of Writing for the Public and Private Sector means that current students in that track will graduate with the new track title, Writing for the Nonprofit Sector, on their academic transcript. If current students want some other track on their transcript, those students may contact PRWR's academic advisor, Michael Downs, to choose a different track.

- **The Scientific Writing track has been folded into the Technical Writing track, which has been renamed Technical Writing and Scientific Communication.**

In addition, this combined track is bolstered by a new course, Foundations in Technical Communication (PRWR 624).

- **The Journalistic Writing track's multitude of offerings have been cut back and will rely less on Mass Communication courses.**

Students may fulfill the Journalistic Writing track by choosing three courses from among Design Layout and Production (PRWR 625); Writing Creative Non-Fiction (705); Freelance Writing (713); Writing Reviews (730); and Science and

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Revised PRWR curriculum offers updated courses, new track options (cont.)

its Public Audience (731). Students may also choose the Mass Communications course, Literary Journalism, though the Mass Communications department has seldom offered that course in recent years.

- **The Teaching Writing track includes an added course option and a revamp of the old Modern Rhetoric course.**

The Modern Rhetoric course is now called Cultural Rhetorics and will shift its focus to more contemporary thinking about rhetoric. In addition, students may now choose Design Layout and Production (PRWR 625) as a way to fulfill this track.

Along with those structural changes, several courses have been added to the curriculum or changed in the last few years.

Those courses that have changed include the aforementioned Rhetoric (PRWR 611); Style (615); and Cultural Rhetorics (627, the former Modern Rhetoric). Faculty updated the course description for Methods and Research in Professional Writing (691) to include more contemporary research strategies and techniques. New courses include the aforementioned PRWR 629, Content Strategy and Writing for Social Change, and Foundations in Technical Communication (624).

PRWR's curriculum was due for a change. Not only does a program's

curriculum need to adapt to what's going on beyond the classroom, it needs to anticipate what's coming.

A new curriculum must also take into account the expertise of current faculty. Most importantly, a curriculum needs to provide students with the best experience that those faculty can offer. We PRWR faculty are excited to share this new curriculum with incoming students and to see where it takes all of us.

For more information about the curriculum changes, contact Michael Downs at mdowns@towson.edu

WRITERS WHO WORK
Professional Writing
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**WRITE TO
LEARN,
WRITE TO
EARN.**

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TU TOWSON UNIVERSITY | English

PRWR professor wins grant to lead group research study

by Ariel Crank

Over the next several months, **Dr. Halcyon Lawrence** will lead a grant-funded research group that will explore how faculty and students can respect and support the various forms of English and its dialects found in the technical communication classroom.

The group will challenge the idea that there is only one standard or correct way to write or speak English – whether in the classroom or in the tech comm profession.

“We know that everyone benefits from diversity,” said Lawrence, an associate professor in PRWR. “Linguistic diversity is no less beneficial to everyone, and like other forms of diversity, embracing linguistic diversity can open us to new ideas and can lead to creative problem-solving for a range of people.”

It’s this understanding that led Lawrence to apply for a grant from the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC).

Lawrence’s grant was one of two awarded for research to promote anti-racist programs and pedagogies. She received \$2,000 to pursue the work.

The funds will pay for books and stipends for people in the research group. The participants will include teachers, students, and professional writers and communicators – all working in professional, technical, and scientific communication. Ultimately, the group will write a statement of linguistic justice.

The phrase linguistic justice



PICTURED: ↑ PRWR professor Dr. Halcyon Lawrence

describes the assertion that people have the right to speak or write in their own language or dialect without being pressured to conform to a different form of English.

The group will eventually present its findings at the annual conference of the CPTSC and receive feedback, then offer a final report by January 2024 to the organization’s research grants director. Eventually, the research will appear as an article in the organization’s journal

“The goal is to advocate for changes in curriculum design and to re-examine how language composition and rhetoric are introduced in the classroom.”

Programmatic Perspectives.

The article will propose strategies to include different dialects and languages in the technical writing classroom and profession, though Lawrence’s primary concern is English. The goal is to advocate for changes in curriculum design and to re-examine how language composition and rhetoric are introduced in the classroom.

For example,” Lawrence said, “participants question what it means when we say, ‘writing should be clear in technical communication and what language biases we are reinforcing towards the goal of clarity in technical and scientific writing.”

To be considered for the CPTSC’s anti-racist programs and pedagogies grant, applicants responded to a request for proposals available on the organization’s website

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PRWR professor wins grant award to lead group research study (cont.)

and wrote a two-page proposal, which was then evaluated anonymously.

Lawrence made her grant proposal, "Readdressing Language Bias in the Field of Professional, Technical, and Scientific Communication," in November 2022.

Stacey Pigg, an associate professor at North Carolina State University and co-chair of the research grants committee for CPTSC, said Lawrence's project stood out for its emphasis on addressing racial biases and pedagogies in the field.

Lawrence, who grew up outside of the United States, can point to a specific moment as a student when she encountered a language bias. When she began graduate school in the U.S., a colleague on a group project corrected her United Kingdom spelling of words. She told him that the spellings were not incorrect but that she used a different standard.

"At that time," she said, "it didn't register that I was being policed on my use of language, but when I look back now, that's exactly what happened." As a professor, she thinks about language use in the classroom and the effects of language bias. Believing that

students have a right to their own language practices in technical writing, Lawrence uses her assignments to welcome those students who are multilingual (fluent in more than two languages) and multi-dialectical (those able to use more than one dialect of the same language) to present their work in ways that reflect their cultural and language experiences. Lawrence wants linguistic and dialectical diversity to be taken just as seriously as diversity of age, race and ethnicity.

Lawrence's work can lead to more people who value diverse voices, Pigg said, including those who design technology.

"Lawrence is focused directly on how we do a better job in our programs and value diverse language," said Pigg. "This project will show that people can be professional no matter what you speak."



PICTURED: ➡

The CPTSC's journal Programmatic Perspectives plans to publish the research group's findings.

PRWR student's play premieres at the Maryland Ensemble Theatre



PICTURED: ↑ *CraftTown* playwright Lydia Hadfield

by Daniella Bacigalupa

Lydia Hadfield has labored in retail, restaurants, teaching, agriculture, and more, and Hadfield – a first-year PRWR student in the technical writing and information design track – knows that humor helps workers to survive the absurdities of the job.

“Having a sense of humor is the way to cope with all kinds of demands that having to make a living, having to work, having jobs, puts on you,” said Hadfield. “And work is such fertile ground for comedy.”

So Hadfield, who is also a playwright, wrote *CraftTown*, a comedic homage to the 1974 classic noir film *Chinatown*, starring Jack Nicholson. The play premiered at the Maryland Ensemble Theatre (MET) in Frederick, Maryland, this spring,

running 15 performances from March 31- April 23 with 11 cast members.

The play is a noir satire about a store called *CraftTown* and its employees who are captivated by mystery and theft. Think Chinatown only in an arts and crafts big box store. To put it briefly, in life there is petit larceny and grand larceny – and now, in *CraftTown*, there is “Mod Podge larceny.”

In the play, *CraftTown*’s assistant manager, Scotty DelRio, discovers that scrapbooking stickers are missing from the store. While solving the mystery of the missing art supplies, he unravels a dark truth about his co-workers.

To write *CraftTown*, Hadfield drew specifically on her experience working in retail. She also tapped into her curiosity about people’s relationship to their work, and how

people build identities out of their working selves.

The play was directed by Jeremy Myers, an MET ensemble member. Myers and Hadfield met through friends in the theater community pre-pandemic but became closer when Hadfield came to the MET artistic director with her play. Myers listened to a stage reading of *CraftTown* and had eyes for the MET to produce it.

“It’s just so smart the way she has this noir satire,” said Myers. “Dancing around that genre, and yet it’s so many other things.”

The play’s protagonist also seized Myers’ attention. “I was so enthralled that there was a trans character,” Myers said. In *CraftTown*, the protagonist is trans, said Myers, and while the plot isn’t centered on the protagonist’s identity, that identity is so embedded in the character’s DNA that *CraftTown* is a queer story. Hadfield wanted to write fun, comedic roles, particularly for women and queer people of all ages.

“I wrote the lead role of *CraftTown* for a very specific friend,” Hadfield said. “I wanted to write a role for this friend who is transmasculine, and a story that wasn’t a coming-out story or a tragedy – just a really fun, comedic role. The character’s identity is a part of a bigger story, a different kind of story, and a fun story.”

CraftTown is a memory play, meaning that the audience

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PRWR student's play premieres at the Maryland Ensemble Theatre (cont.)

hears the story retold from Scotty DelRio's memory. And in true noir fashion, the audience never gets told the right answer to the play's mystery. Rather, it's up to the audience to navigate the moral landscape on their own. "Noir asks timeless, moral questions that are interesting," Hadfield said, "about unity and division, about society and the individual, about corruption and personal values."

Hadfield entered the world of theater by doing solo performance work. She described her transition from writing solo plays to writing for others as an exciting, collaborative experience.

Hadfield, a Frederick County native, has been involved with MET since her teenage years.

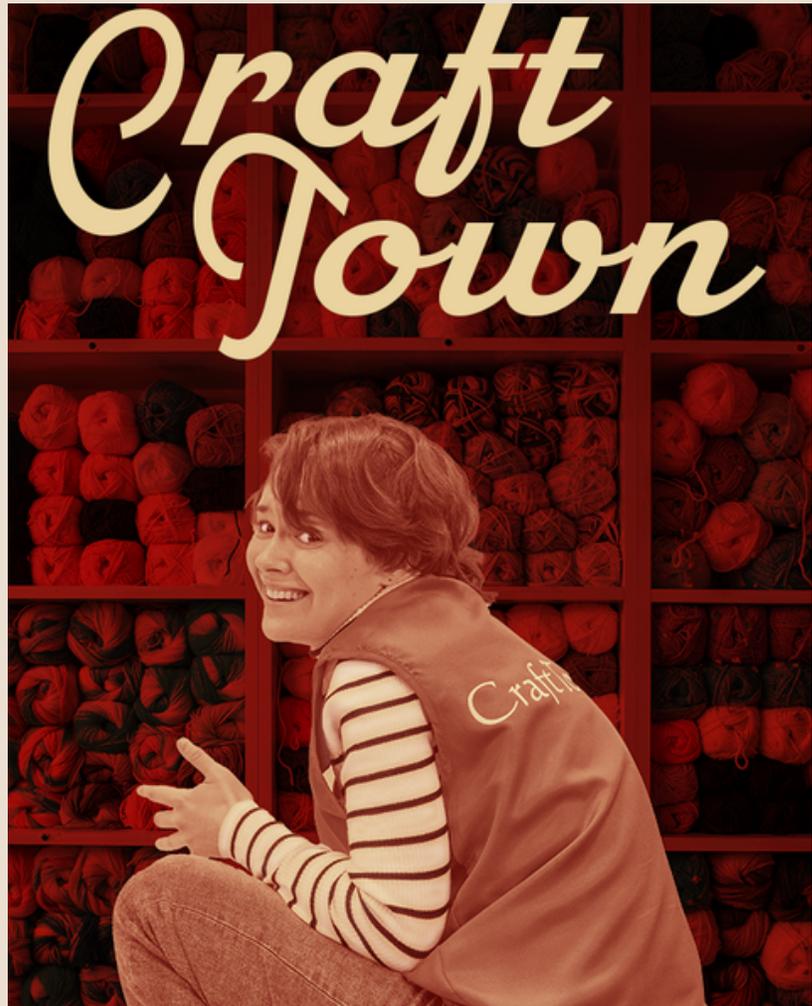
From age 15 to 17 she was a part of MET's teen improv, which was a performing troupe.

"Improv comedy is a huge part of my comedic sensibility and also my creative sensibility," Hadfield said. "And the way I approach writing and creative work. I love to bring improvisational spirit to the creative process."

Hadfield had an unconventional upbringing, raised in a family that was in show business. She left public high school during the first year to begin homeschooling and theater. Hadfield has always enjoyed performing, calling it an integral part of her life.

Hadfield originally wrote *CraftTown* during the pandemic as an audio play. Because she wrote it before vaccines were available, she wrote it as a flexible audio series.

Hadfield wanted it to be available



PICTURED: ↑ *CraftTown's theater poster*

while everyone was at home, and the theater world as she knew it had moved online.

Scripts tend to be written prescriptively, with characters who have assigned gender pronouns. Because Hadfield wanted to be as inclusive as possible, she also experimented by assigning characters names but no pronouns. She conceived a play with built-in flexibility, an invitation to greater participation.

Despite having spent most of her life in theater, Hadfield feels it's never her place to give general advice on writing plays.

"I don't know if I'm in a position to give any advice," Hadfield said. "If folks want to do something they should explore it as best they can. There are lots of different routes into writing for theater."

There is no joy quite like the joy of live performance storytelling, said Hadfield – stories that pull the audience into the world of well-thought-out characters, and fun characters.

"My first intention is always to entertain," said Hadfield. "To make people laugh. Come out and laugh!"

WORD! congratulates PRWR's spring 2023 graduates

Bobbi Jo Bergum Creative Writing

Why did you choose PRWR?

Creative writing was my first passion. I vividly remember my elementary school hosting the Scholastic Book Fair every year, and I would faithfully visit it. Every. Single. Day. With a heap of novels, I'd always purchase a notebook. Usually, it had a cute puppy or kitten on the cover. Before the next Book Fair came around, I'd have filled the old one cover to cover with stories (usually about puppies and kittens). The subject matter of my writing has diversified greatly, but after leaving college, I wanted to keep that same passion. My grandpa died when I was 19, my dad died when I was 21, and they were always my biggest supporters and first readers. Pursuing this Master's degree was my way of honoring them—and keeping them alive in a sense.

Who were you when you walked into PRWR and who are you as you are walking out?

I came in during the COVID lockdown, really with no idea who I was then, much less who I'd be when I graduated. I felt isolated with no sense of who I was becoming other than someone trying to survive the pandemic. I wrote my way to the answer. I'm not just saying that. Writing has long been my way of talking to *myself*. Of peeking into my own mind and figuring out what's in there. In every class I've taken with PRWR (even the non-creative ones), I've found the same topics coming up again and again: theology, the military, human relationships. Those are the things I value, and graduating, I now know those things always need to be the cornerstones of how I live my life, professionally, academically, and personally.

Describe your writing process with three emojis.



What's next for you?

The day following commencement, I'll also be commissioning into the Maryland National Guard as an intelligence officer. This is typically a part-time commitment, but there are limited opportunities to work for the Guard full-time. In addition to doing intelligence for the Guard, I will also perform administrative and HR tasks. I also hope to continue learning Portuguese!

What was your PRWR writing epiphany moment?

Creative ideas didn't seem to come as easily for me as I got older. Taking creative writing classes was also a way of holding myself accountable—and some of my favorite stories were the ones that started out forced. Professor Becker's classes saw a lot of that, and I appreciate his patience. I'm now in my final semester, but I had an "epiphany moment" in Professor Harrison's poetry class. I was struggling to come up with a semester project—and then was hit with it all at once during a class discussion. A chapbook—containing poems from different individuals in a woman's life—is probably a project that will span beyond this semester, but maybe this is just the beginning of how I will take PRWR with me even after I graduate.

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Ryan Gunther

Technical Writing and Information Design

Why did you choose PRWR?

I chose PRWR because I attended Towson for my undergraduate. I was familiar with the quality of the staff and education. Additionally, the PRWR program offered a unique program that was exactly what I was looking for to provide me the skills and training to feel competent as a technical writer.

Who were you when you walked into PRWR and who are you as you are walking out?

Prior to entering PRWR I was very unsure about my future and about my abilities to competently fill the role of a technical writer. Prior to entering this program I was asked many times what exactly a technical writer does. My answer was typically a shrug. "Lots of stuff," I'd say. Now, I can speak at great length about what technical writers do. I feel all the more enriched for my experiences with PRWR. I have learned a lot, both about myself and professional writing. Enrolling in this program is one of the best decisions I've ever made.

What was your PRWR writing epiphany moment?

Every semester, every class has offered its own moment of epiphany. However, I'd have to say my first epiphany in PRWR occurred towards the beginning, when I began to input my own interests into the parameters for my course assignments and produced work of which I was proud.

What's next for you?

I plan to continue working as a technical writer for the manufacturing company where I'm currently employed. Having recently moved to a rural area, I hope to also finally find the time, peace, and solitude to work on my creative endeavors, seriously and earnestly.

Describe your writing process with emojis.



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Coty Poynter

Creative Writing

Why did you choose PRWR?

Well, there's a long answer and a short answer. For the sake of brevity, I'll stick with the short answer. I chose PRWR because I was familiar with Towson University – I graduated in 2017 with my Bachelor of Science – and the attentiveness of the professors. I'm glad I did, too. I can't think of a single class I took during my time in the program that I didn't walk away with some kind of practical advice or knowledge.

What was your PRWR writing epiphany moment?

There were so many I've experienced over the two years I've been in the PRWR program, but one does stand out among all others. During my first semester (Fall 2021), I took Theory of Creativity with Jeannie Vanasco.

Throughout the course, we studied several authors in different genres: fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. As we were developing ideas for the final project, I met with Professor Vanasco to discuss my ideas for it – I wanted to try my hand at creative nonfiction, a genre I wasn't very familiar with. At some point during our conversation, Professor Vanasco said something – something that for the life of me I can't remember – that clicked in the way the proverbial lightbulb turns on, and I made the decision to listen more to the soft-spoken voice in my head that's often overwhelmed by the far-louder voice of self-doubt, and to pursue an idea that I was both curious about and somewhat uncomfortable in exploring.

The result was a creative nonfiction essay that I'm proud to have written, and the confidence (no matter how flimsy at times) to follow curiosity no matter where it may lead. Much of my (writing) life has been dominated by intense self-doubt and harsh self-criticism. So, experiencing that epiphany, though it was only a moment, offered the chance for me to counter both of those terrible tendencies, and it offered a glimpse of what life can be when I'm a bit more kind to myself, a bit more patient, and a bit more myself.

Describe your writing process with emojis.



Who were you when you walked into PRWR and who are you as you are walking out?

When I walked into the PRWR program, I wasn't very confident or sure of who I was as a writer. As I walk out, I am more certain of who I am as both a writer and an individual, and I have the confidence (some days more than others) to take the necessary risks with my career and my writing, whatever form it may take.

What's next for you?

At the start of the year, I was hired on as the managing editor for Nonprofit Quarterly. So, I intend to focus on applying the knowledge gained from the PRWR program toward that role to further develop the editorial processes, as well as continue to challenge myself.

Aside from work, there are quite a few ideas for different projects – two novels, a series of erasure poems, and numerous nonfiction essays, both creative and serious, as well as a book proposal – that I plan to work on over the years in my spare time. A few other PRWR students started a writing group after taking one of Jeannie Vanasco's classes, so I'm looking forward to keeping that group going and working together to develop resources for local writers via a website we'd like to curate. And at some point down the line, I think I'd like to return to get my Master of Fine Arts – though I'm not sure where that will be and don't plan on rushing to that anytime soon.

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Chloë Williams

Writing for the Private and Public Sectors

Why did you choose PRWR?

Towson University is my alma mater and has always felt like home. Especially having studied abroad and then gone through the COVID pandemic in my undergraduate studies, I felt like my time at Towson wasn't quite done when I graduated. The faculty and fellow students in the PRWR program are amazing, and have all taught me so much. The time I have spent learning, workshopping, engaging in the community with them has been invaluable. The time I have spent in this program with such brilliant people has made me a much stronger writer and person.

Who were you when you walked into PRWR and who are you as you are walking out?

When I walked into the PRWR program, I was ready to learn how to be a writing professional and to refine my creative writing. I knew what I wanted to do with my writing, but didn't quite have the skills to develop my projects exactly how I wanted. This program has given me a breadth of skills to take forward into my career and creative paths. I've learned how to write technical documents, grants, reviews, poems, research papers, and more. I am a more confident and excited writer now than I ever have been.

What was your PRWR writing epiphany moment?

It is so hard to choose one epiphany moment, but I am very fond of the time I spent in Professor Harrison's Theory of Creativity class. Though it was a small class, we all developed really wonderful projects that took us all a little out of our comfort zones, and we became good friends along the way. It was a very supportive environment, and I am really proud of our work in that class. Shout-out to Professor Harrison!

What's next for you?

After graduation, I am looking forward to focusing on my novel draft, and expanding on two poetry projects that I started in the PRWR program. I work for the Baltimore Museum of Art, and I'm also hoping to write articles for their publication *BMA Stories*.

Describe your writing process with emojis.



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Alexander Eikenberg

Creative Writing

Why did you choose PRWR?

I chose PRWR because it put me back with the faculty I admired during undergrad. I missed Towson!

Who were you when you walked into PRWR and who are you as you are walking out?

Walking in I wanted to be an English professor who came to work and talked about wonderful things every day. This is, for better or worse, still where I am!

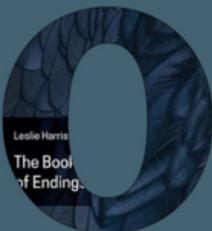
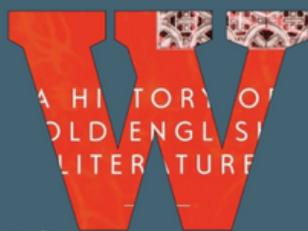
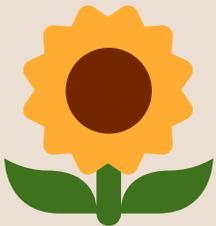
What was your PRWR writing epiphany moment?

I had a professor advocate on my behalf, and not tell me until an opportunity had materialized for me. I felt not just like I belonged in the community of writers, but that I could be successful if I tried.

What's next for you?

I'm hoping to find an adjunct position at a college or university, and start teaching English 101!

Describe your writing process with emojis.



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