

Writers in the Library

Literary programming on a shoestring

by Steven R. Harris

A cursory examination of the library literature would lead one to believe that literary programming is the exclusive province of public libraries. However, academic libraries are uniquely situated to provide interesting and dynamic literary functions to their campuses and to a wider public audience. Most academic libraries have strong literary collections and an interested audience who is eager to participate in arts programming.

At the University of Tennessee (UT) Libraries, we have worked hard to reach out to our literary community and to develop a series of programs that serve their interests. A few years ago, the then Dean of Libraries Paula Kaufman decided that having a writer-in-residence would be a valuable experiment to try at the University Libraries.

She spoke with Marilyn Kallet, director of the Creative Writing Program in the Department of English,¹ to solicit names of possible appointees to such a position. The idea was to select an up-and-coming author, someone who was interested in making an effort to write full time.

The library planned to provide the writer with a small stipend and a study carrel, complete with computer and network connection, from which to work. The position would be renewable for an undetermined number

of years, with the intent to select a new writer for the assignment periodically.

In 1998, around the same time that I became UT English literature librarian, the library appointed Brian Griffin to the post of writer-in-residence. Although a Tennessee native, Griffin was a graduate of the Master of Fine Arts program at Virginia, where he had worked closely with Peter Taylor. He had recently won the Mary McCarthy Award for Short Fiction for his collection of short stories *Sparkman in the Sky*.² Griffin was also very active in the local Knoxville Writer's Guild.³

UT seems to be unique in having a formal and permanent writer-in-residence. To my knowledge, the only other academic library that has a similar program is at North Carolina State University, where Kaye Gibbons has served as author-in-residence for many years.

After a year or so of getting all four of our feet on the ground, Griffin and I began to think of ways we could work together to promote the literary arts in the library, at the university, and within the community.

One thing we had both noted was that, despite having a graduate creative writing program, UT did not seem to offer a regular venue for students in that program to present their works. With the blessing of the library administration and a lot of assistance from

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Pamela Schoenewaldt as the new writer-in-residence. Schoenewaldt is a recent émigré to Knoxville, having lived for many years in Naples, Italy. In 1995, she won the Chekhov Prize for Short Fiction from *The Crescent Review*.

Year three

We began our third year of the Writers in the Library series with a reading that featured both the incoming and outgoing writer-in-residence. In planning this year's series, Schoenewaldt drew heavily on Griffin's experience to round up an extensive roster of authors, many from the Writer's Guild and the Knoxville writing community in general. The series is expanding from five to nine readings during the academic year. We have also gotten additional publicity support from the Libraries to create a bookmark that lists the entire agenda of authors and dates. With a schedule of events prepared ahead of time, we were able to book the library's auditorium for many of the readings.

Although she had been so instrumental in developing the Writers in the Library series, Paula Kaufman moved on to become dean of libraries at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, in 1999, before our series even began. Interim Dean Aubrey Mitchell, and our new Dean of Libraries Barbara Dewey, however, have strongly supported the series and encouraged its continued development.

In planning Writers in the Library, we have relied exclusively on our own wits and UT resources (material and intellectual), but there are a number of organizations around that can help a librarian develop a reading series. ALA's "@yourlibrary" program provides ideas and funds to qualified applicants.⁶ Poets House also works with libraries to establish literary events.⁷

We decided to go it on our own, partly out of laziness, partly out of ignorance, but mostly because we took a lot of pleasure in developing the ideas ourselves and shepherding them through to a finished product. It has truly been one of the most enjoyable aspects of my time at UT. I encourage everyone to develop a similar literary program at their libraries. It provides a great way to become familiar with local writers and to form important bonds with library supporters throughout the community.

Notes

1. Information on UT's Creative Writing Program in the Department of English can be found at <http://web.utk.edu/%7Eenglish/creative.htm>.

2. Brian Griffin, *Sparkman in the Sky & other Stories* (Sarabande Books, 1997).

3. The Knoxville Writer's Guild is on the Web at <http://www.knoxvillewritersguild.org/>.

4. The Writers in the Library Web site is at <http://www.lib.utk.edu/announce/writersinthelibrary/>.

5. Information on the Peter Taylor Prize for the Novel is online at <http://www.knoxvillewritersguild.org/tennprize.htm>.

6. Visit <https://cs.ala.org/@yourlibrary/>.

7. Poets House can be found at <http://www.poetshouse.org/>. ■

("Atkinson and CJCLS. . ." continued from page 420)

zations that support the missions of community, junior, and technical colleges.

Paula Herring, chair of the awards committee, said, "Cynthia was chosen because she exemplifies leadership on all levels: local, state, and national. She has been a leader on her campus, in the state of Maryland, and in CJCLS. Her tireless advocacy for and commitment to community college libraries [make her] truly deserving of this award."

The Michael M. Bennett Library of St. Petersburg Junior College has been chosen to receive the 2002 CJCLS/EBSCO Community College Learning Resources Program Achievement Award for its information literacy program, which includes online tests, curriculum development, instruction of other librarians, faculty awareness, and advocacy.

"The librarians at St. Petersburg Junior College have developed an innovative information literacy program for their students," said Herring. "From online testing to instructional video to credit coursework, this program is designed to reach every student in every campus. The librarians are to be commended for their outreach to their campuses."

A citation and \$500 (donated by EBSCO Information Services) will be presented to each recipient during the ALA Annual Conference in Atlanta at the CJCLS All Committee Meeting on Saturday, June 15, 2002, at 8:30 a.m. at the Omni Hotel, Brampton A. ■