From the Chair

With its award-winning faculty and transformative curriculum, the MFA Writing Program at Columbia University ranks as one of the most vibrant and respected writing communities in the world. At Columbia we believe that each of our students has the potential to make a distinct and significant contribution to literary culture. Accordingly, our workshops focus on the development of the individual voice and vision by strengthening students’ commitment to craft, revision, and rigorous critique. But even as they celebrate uniqueness and difference, workshops at Columbia also help build a strong sense of camaraderie and mutual respect among our students, who pursue their own artistic goals with the understanding that one writer’s achievement doesn’t come at another’s expense. There are many paths to artistic success, and at Columbia, students are encouraged to experiment with—and to appreciate—all of them. Our seminars and lectures seek to expose students to new perspectives and literary techniques as well as to fortify their knowledge of literary histories, critical thinking, and the current state of the art. The Writing Program is housed in Columbia’s School of the Arts, and the interdisciplinary spirit is strong here. Student communities, formal and informal, thrive at Columbia. Ours is a diverse, inspiring, and exceptional program, as perhaps best represented by the astonishing range of work produced by our faculty and alumni. If you’d like become part of a community of passionate, artistically ambitious writers and readers in a city that teems with literary energy, I urge you to explore the Writing Program, and apply.

Timothy Donnelly, Chair
The Curriculum

The MFA Writing Program admits students in three concentrations: Fiction, Nonfiction and Poetry. Through our Literary Translation at Columbia Program (LTAC), students may pursue a joint course of study in both writing and translation.

At the core of the curriculum is the writing workshop. Workshops are small (7 to 12 students), ensuring that students present work as often as possible throughout the semester. Students receive substantial written responses from their professors and classmates; they also have regularly scheduled one-on-one conferences with faculty. The second-year thesis workshops (6 to 9 students) are dedicated to shaping each student’s work into book form.

The Writing Program at Columbia considers the study of literature from the practitioner’s point of view—reading as a writer—essential to a writer’s education. Every semester, in addition to the workshop, students take, on average, three craft-oriented seminars and/or lectures designed to illuminate, augment and inspire each student’s experience and practice as a writer.

We draw fully on the resources of Columbia University—its faculty, libraries, archives, scholarly centers, diverse student body, wealth of facilities, and of course, its location in New York City. Students are encouraged to take electives in the other Programs of the School of the Arts—Film, Theatre and Visual Arts—and in any of the 28 departments of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

Information about courses and thesis requirements can be found at arts.columbia.edu/writing.

“The Fiction concentration is exciting (to put it mildly) for myriad reasons: the illustrious writers and editors on faculty, the scope of artistic diversity, the variety of courses offered, the intensity of rigor and the relaxed collegiality. But what is truly incomparable is the depth of attention given to each student’s work, and the depth of commitment expected from the student in return. The program is transformative.”

Binnie Kirshenbaum, Fiction Concentration Director
Events

The Creative Writing Lecture Series brings distinguished writers to Columbia for original talks on craft. Recent guests include Jesse Ball, Lydia Davis, Ben Lerner, Jenny Offil, Karen Russell, George Saunders and Zadie Smith.

The Nonfiction Dialogues engage distinguished nonfiction writers in conversation about their work and careers. Guests have included Jo Ann Beard, Ted Conover, Jane Mayer, Geoffrey O’Brien, Maggie Nelson and Mary Roach.

Our Poetry Reading Series features leading poets presenting and engaging in conversation about their craft and careers. Recent guests include Rae Armantrout, John Ashbery, Peter Gizzi, Jorie Graham, Bernadette Mayer, Shane McCrae and Monica Youn.

Stalking the Essay is a day-long symposium that aims to encircle the practices, theories and possibilities of the essay form. Past guests include Ian Buruma, Vivian Gornick, Wayne Koestenbaum, Marilynne Robinson and Daniel Mendelsohn.

Literary Translation at Columbia (LTAC) hosts events with leading literary translators from around the world. Recent guests include Edith Grossman, Natasha Wimmer, Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky.

One-day seminars have been led by Mary Jo Bang, Robert Coover and Joyce Carol Oates, among others.

In addition, students curate and host the Gallery Reading Series, and alumni curate and host the Columbia Selects MFA Reading Series.

“We think individual achievement and a strong sense of community can, and should, go hand in hand. Our workshops encourage students to explore and develop their own unique sensibilities as they seek to promote the progress of their peers. Our seminars offer rigorous critical study of poetic traditions and recent innovations alike, grounding our students’ practice in a shared engagement with the works of the past and present as they realize, together, poetry’s future.”

Lucie Brock-Broido, Poetry Concentration Director
Extracurricular Opportunities

Students intern at literary publishers, magazines—including *The New Yorker*, *Tin House* and *The Paris Review*—and at literary organizations including PEN, the 92nd Street Y and the Academy of American Poets. They also work as research assistants to eminent writers. Editors, publishers, agents and other literary professionals are regularly engaged with the Program in panels and informal discussions.

*Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art* is a national literary magazine edited, managed and published by students. Our Word is a student organization for writers of color. Columbia Artist/Teachers (CA/T) provides students with training and teaching opportunities on- and off-campus, with local schools, community organizations and Columbia students.

“We offer a full range of courses, from memoir and personal essay to science writing, criticism, humor, research methods, profiles, food writing and lyric essay. It’s the biggest graduate nonfiction program in the country, with a stellar faculty, and arguably the best.”

Phillip Lopate, Nonfiction Concentration Director
Full-Time Faculty

Timothy Donnelly, Chair
Hilton Als
Paul Beatty
Susan Bernofsky (LTAC Director)
Lucie Brock-Broido (Poetry Director)
Nicholas Christopher
Deborah Eisenberg

Richard Ford
Lis Harris
Richard Howard
Leslie Jamison
Margo Jefferson
Heidi Julavits
Binnie Kirshenbaum (Fiction Director)
Dorothea Lasky
Victor LaValle
Sam Lipsyte

Richard Locke
Phillip Lopate (Nonfiction Director)
Ben Marcus
Ben Metcalf
Orhan Pamuk
Deborah Paredez
Simon Schama
Elissa Schappell
Gary Shteyngart
Alan Ziegler

Recent and current adjunct faculty include Mia Alvar, Tash Aw, Mark Bibbins, James Canon, David Ebershoff, Angela Flournoy, Rivka Galchen, Alan Gilbert, Rebecca Godfrey, Michael Greenberg, Eliza Griswold, Edith Grossman, David Hinton, Cathy Park Hong, Maureen Howard, Hari Kunzru, Paul LaFarge, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, Erroll McDonald, Eileen Myles, Rowan Ricardo Philips, Lia Purpura, Sigrid Nunez, Camille Rankine, Roger Reeves, Rob Spillman, Sadie Stein, John Jeremiah Sullivan, Benjamin Taylor, Hannah Tinti, Lara Vapnyar, Adam Wilson, Natasha Wimmer, James Wood and Wendy Xu.

“LTAC offers all Writing students the chance to expand their horizons by experimenting with literary translation, and allows those with serious aspirations as translators to deepen their engagement with this art form. A part of the LTAC curriculum, the Word for Word translation exchange program offers students the opportunity to work with emerging writers at partner institutions in Europe and Latin America in collaborative workshops and foreign travel exchanges.”

Susan Bernofsky, Director, Literary Translation at Columbia (LTAC)

Application

The School welcomes applications for the fall semester of each year. Visit arts.columbia.edu/apply for application information, and please note specific guidelines for international students, including visa information.

Financial Aid

The School of the Arts and Columbia’s Office of University Financial Aid work carefully with students to arrange the financing of their degrees. Scholarships, fellowships, federal work-study, loan packages, student employment, teaching opportunities and other options are available for eligible students.

In addition to federal aid (for U.S. citizens or permanent residents) and international loans (for international students), students can be eligible for School of the Arts institutional aid and outside scholarships, fellowships and grants. The Artists’ Resource Center (ARC) helps current students find these outside opportunities. The ARC website includes an extensive and searchable guide to sources of funding, and the staff is available for one-on-one consultation.
Recent Alumni Publications

Fiction

Yelena Akhtiorskaya '09
Panic in a Suitcase

Mia Alvar '07
In the Country

Emma Cline '13
The Girls

T Cooper '01
Lipsitz: Six, or Two
Angry Blondes

Annie DeWitt '09
White Nights in Split
Town City

Mark Doten '10
The Infernal

Rivka Galchen '06
Atmospheric Disturbances

Matt Gallagher '13
Youngblood

Lauren Grodstein '01
A Friend of the Family

Mike Harvkey '04
In the Course of Human Events

Rebecca Schiff '09
The Best Moved

Tania James '06
Atlas of Unknowns

Alexandra Kleeman '12
You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine

Rachel Kushner '01
The Flamethrowers

Catherine Lacey '10
Nobody Is Ever Missing

Johanna Lane '06
Black Lake

Reif Larsen '08
The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet

Dinaw Mengestu '05
The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears

Karen Russell '06
Vampires in the Lemon Grove

Elyssa East '05
Dogtown

Olivia Gentile '03
Life List

Elizabeth Greenwood '13
Playing Dead

Miguel Syjuco '04
Ilustrado

Wells Tower '02
Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned

Karen Thompson
Walker '06
The Age of Miracles

Adam Wilson '09
Flatscreen

Nonfiction

Cris Beam '05
Transparent

Julia Cooke '13
The Other Side of Paradise

Dustin Beall Smith '05
Key Grip

Tara Bray Smith '03
West of Then

Dan White '07
The Cactus Eaters

Brook Wilensky-Lanford '09
Paradise Lost

Poetry

Samuel Amadon '07
The Hartford Book

Justin Boening '11
Not on the Last Day, But on the Very Last

Jay Deshpande '12
Love the Stranger

Adam Fitzgerald '11
George Washington

Harmony Holiday '13
Hollywood Forever

Thomas Hummel '08
Letters & Buildings

Kristina Jipson '08
Halve

David Kutz-Marks '09
Violin Playing Herself in a Mirror

Filip Marinovich '07
Wolfman Librarian

Elizabeth Metzger '15
The Spirit Papers

Frances Justine Post '08
Beast

Camille Rankine '09
Incorrect Merciful Impulses

Max Ritvo '15
Four Reincarnations

Sarah V. Schweig '09
Take Nothing with You

Lytton Smith '07
While You Were Approaching the Spectacle But Before You Were Transformed by It

Craig Morgan Teicher '05
To Keep Love Blurry

Mai Der Vang '14
Afterland

Erica Wright '07
Instructions for Killing the Jackal
About the Program

The Columbia University School of the Arts MFA Writing Program offers a rigorous approach to literary instruction and a faculty of acclaimed writers and editors who are devoted and dedicated teachers. The faculty, students and curriculum represent and foster a high degree of aesthetic diversity. Students are encouraged to make the most of their own artistic instincts and to realize as fully as possible their potential as writers.

Visit arts.columbia.edu/writing-brochure for application requirements and financial aid information.

About the School

Columbia University School of the Arts awards the Master of Fine Arts degree in Film, Theatre, Visual Arts and Writing and the Master of Arts degree in Film Studies. It also offers an interdisciplinary program in Sound Arts. The School is a thriving, diverse community of talented, visionary and committed artists from around the world with a faculty comprised of acclaimed and internationally renowned artists, film, theatre and television directors, writers of poetry, fiction and nonfiction, playwrights, producers, critics and scholars. In 2015, the School marked the 50th anniversary of its founding. In 2017, the School opens the Lenfest Center for the Arts, a multi-arts venue designed as a hub for the presentation and creation of art across disciplines on the University’s new Manhattanville campus. The Lenfest will host exhibitions, performances, screenings, symposia, readings and lectures that present new, global voices and perspectives, as well as an exciting, publicly accessible home for Columbia’s Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery.

For more information visit arts.columbia.edu.