

RIGGIO HONORS PROGRAM: WRITING & DEMOCRACY

In his prescient essay of sixty years ago, “Politics and the English Language,” George Orwell famously tracked the special connection between a decadent politics and the debasement of **language**. The slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts, Orwell argued. In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible. Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging, and sheer cloudy vagueness. The fight against bad English is not frivolous, Orwell concluded, and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers.

The Len and Louise Riggio Honors Program: Writing & Democracy at The New School is an innovative undergraduate program of writing workshops and close reading seminars that operates along the seams of Orwell’s special connection between writing and democracy. A close attention to language - a vigilance and sophistication in the use and appreciation of words - is both vital preparation for a career as a writer, whether poet, novelist, or nonfiction writer, and an essential prerequisite for alert, informed citizenship, particularly in a world heaped by 24-hour cable news networks, government information and disinformation, the internet, and our other turn-of-the-twenty-first-century analogues to Orwell’s culture of euphemism, question-begging, and vagueness.

This New School undergraduate writing initiative seeks to merge **study and practice**, the aesthetic and the social. The Riggio program builds upon the mission and achievements of the New School Graduate Program in Creative Writing and continues the vital historical New School legacy of the artist as public intellectual. The Writing and Democracy Program anchors itself in the idea that reading and writing are the engines of democratic literacy, and that the skills of reading and writing include those associated with creative writing but also extend to the writing and reading of law, politics, biography, science, and technology. The program seeks to uncover the distinctive forms of argumentation, style, and persuasion associated with all these forms of expression.

Writing workshops in the **Riggio program** feature more reading than is customary in conventional workshops, in the belief that writers grow and deepen their craft by responding to great works. Although students will not be expected to generate explicitly political poetry or fiction, there is an emphasis on “the writer in the world.”

Students graduate with a BA or BS in Liberal Arts, and may select additional classes across the comprehensive New School curriculum, but the core of the Riggio program is a 32-credit sequence of writing workshops (fiction, nonfiction, poetry) and literature seminars that culminates in a thesis project. Students also receive credit for attending an ongoing series of public readings, literary forums, lectures, symposia, and panel discussions as part of the Writer’s Life Colloquium. Fellows receive a partial scholarship for each semester in residence. The Riggio Writing Fellows Program focuses an

intensive community of undergraduate writers through student readings, a new literary magazine, group excursions to NYC literary events, and credit-bearing internships.

Faculty for 2008-09 include: Jeffery Renard Allen, Catherine Barnett, Mark Bibbins, Elizabeth Gaffney, David Gates, Shelley Jackson, Zia Jaffrey, Suzannah Lessard, Honor Sachs, Rene Steinke, Lynne Tillman, and Paul Violi.

Riggio Honors Program: Writing and Democracy

WHAT IS THE RIGGIO PROGRAM?

The **Riggio Program** is an intensive 32-credit course of study in **literature and writing** that brings together a **community of serious undergraduate writers** at the New School. Courses are taught by nationally and internationally acclaimed writers. In **small writing workshops**, students develop close working relationships with teachers, fellow students, and teaching assistants currently in the New School M.F.A. program who provide one-on-one support for student work. **Literature courses** focus both on **the writer in the world** and on a **close and careful reading of texts**. Students also attend an ongoing series of public readings, literary forums, lectures, symposia, and panel discussions as part of the **Writers' Life Colloquium**. The program culminates in a **thesis project** supervised by an individual faculty member; during the thesis semester, Riggio Honors Program students who have completed all other requirements receive a **\$4,000 scholarship**. In addition, Riggio Honors Program students have the opportunity to showcase their work in a reading series, culminating in an **end-of-the-year reading at Barnes & Noble**, as well as to edit, produce, and publish **12th Street**, a literary journal showcasing the work of Riggio Honors Program students and faculty, distributed in all New York City Barnes & Noble stores.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS?

This is a selective, intensive, 32-credit course of study that culminates in a thesis. Students take a combination of workshops and literature classes. Students also receive credit for attending an ongoing series of public readings, literary forums, lectures, symposia, and panel discussions as part of the Writer's Life Colloquium.

		Credits
Workshops	4 Workshops (at least 2 must be Riggio workshops)	12
Literature Courses	4 Literature Courses (at least 2 must be Riggio literature courses)	12
The Writer's Life Colloquium	2 semesters	2
Thesis	Students work with a thesis advisor and attend a semester-long thesis seminar.	6
Total Credits		32

HOW CAN I APPLY?

Continuing students with at least a **3.0 gpa** may apply at any time in their New School career (applicable courses previously taken may be counted toward the Riggio Honors Program requirements once accepted). To apply, submit:

1. A **Statement of Purpose** of approximately 500 words describing the writing you've done, the writing you plan to do, and how the Riggio Writing Honors Program would further your personal goals.
2. A **Writing Portfolio** of 10-15 pages, double-spaced, fiction or nonfiction prose or 10 pages of poetry. The portfolio should demonstrate your ability to excel in the Riggio Honors Program.

The applicant's name must appear on each page. Applications may either be dropped off or mailed to:

Riggio Honors Program: Writing & Democracy
attn: Laura Cronk
Writing Program, Rm. 515
66 W. 12th St.
New York, NY 10011

WHAT IF I JUST WANT TO TAKE ONE COURSE?

No problem. Riggio program courses are open to all degree students and complement a variety of areas of studies such as writing, literature, cinema and media studies, democracy and cultural pluralism, visual studies, *et cetera*.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

- **Website:** www.newschool.edu/riggio
- **Writing Program**, 66 W. 12th, 5th floor, 212.229.5611: Luis Jaramillo (JaramillL@newschool.edu)
- **Bachelor's Program**, 66 W. 12th St, 9th floor, 212.229.5119: Writing advisors Joe Salvatore (SalvatoJ@newschool.edu) or Caroline Berger (BergerC@newschool.edu)

Spring 2009 WRITING AND DEMOCRACY CLASSES

Fiction Workshop: Point of View and the Particular World NWRW 3924

15 sessions, Mon., 8:00pm-9:50 pm

Rene Steinke

Point of view—the perspective from which a story is told and the voice created to tell that story—is the center of fiction. A story's point of view, whether or not the fiction is in any obvious way “autobiographical,” suggests the writer's assumptions and observations about the world. The fiction writer's vision is not revealed so much in abstract positions, as in the particulars of detail, tone, style, and character. Since good writing is entwined with the art of reading closely, we will study fiction (and the particulars of point of view) by great writers such as Grace Paley, Vladimir Nabokov, and Flannery O'Connor. Working in conversation with master writers, students will explore the context and form of their own fiction. This is a fiction workshop for students who want to focus on craft. Students write stories or novel chapters with multiple revisions, and by the end of the semester, students write and revise one or two short stories or novel chapters. (3 credits)

Poetry Workshop: Make it New NWRW 3928

15 sessions, Wed., 8:00pm-9:50pm

Paul Violi

While developing their own style poets are not always fully aware of what direction they are heading in or the distinctive qualities their poems may already contain. In this workshop discussion of students' writing is approached in the context of exploring and drawing from the wellsprings of their own originality as well as from the closely attentive reading of some of poetry's most exciting and inspiring innovators. We read many poets whose independent spirit and democratic sense of individuality provided the creative freedom to make poems that found world-wide appeal and renewed and enriched the traditions of their art. (3 credits)

Nonfiction Workshop: Opinion and Reporting NWRW 3919

15 sessions, Thurs., 6:00pm-7:50 pm

Suzannah Lessard

The great task of non-fiction is to engage with the world outside us and uncover its meanings. In a time of change like the present, this task becomes vital to the health of a society. In this workshop we focus on opinion and reporting. In opinion, the writer goes out into the public arena as a protagonist using his or her art as a weapon of seduction with which to pierce the mind, and sometimes the heart, of the reader. In reportage, on the other hand, the writer is more like a lens through which the reader explores the world. Here transparency rather than dazzling performance is required. Yet literary reporting also seeks to examine the world on a level of complexity comparable to that of great fiction, and for this the self must be brought into play. In this workshop participants write short opinion and reportorial pieces and one long, in-depth piece in either genre. Close mentoring in the process of gathering and organizing material is provided. We also examine masterworks in both forms as well as some pieces of fiction that are relevant to our task. Authors include John McPhee, James Agee, Joseph Mitchell, Jonathan Schell, Ian Frazier, and Joan Didion. We look at the best reporting from the Civil Rights era and Vietnam and the best pieces of current opinion writers such as Maureen Dowd and David Brooks. (3 credits)

Writers on Writing CRN 5717

15 sessions, Monday 8:00pm-9:50pm

Sigrid Nunez

More than any other artists, writers are often asked to state why they do what they do. In this class, in addition to reading creative work in different genres, we look at ways in which writers have described their work and the writer's place in society. Our reading includes manifestos, credos, journal entries, and interviews, as well as letters in which writers as mentors speak directly to other writers about their craft and beliefs. Students do exercises in which they write brief imitations of master writers, in order to get as close as possible to the bone of these writers' styles, and to learn “how it is done.” Working together, we do line-by-line editing of manuscript pages brought to class from outside, discussing how to make every sentence as intelligible and

effective as possible. Our main goal in this course is to develop greater awareness and understanding of how our use of language reflects how we think and feel about the world. Reading includes works by George Orwell, Flannery O'Connor, Virginia Woolf, Tobias Wolff, V. S. Naipaul, William Gass, Cynthia Ozick, Milan Kundera, Mario Vargas Llosa, and others. (3 credits)

The Unspoken: Pressing Against the Limits of Language NWRW 3925

15 sessions Thurs., 8:00pm-9:50pm

Catherine Barnett

In this course we will examine the unspeakable, the unsayable, and the unnamable in poetry and prose. We will study Samuel Beckett, Emily Dickinson, Paul Celan, Cormac McCarthy, W.G. Sebald, Jean Valentine, Jorie Graham, and other writers and philosophers to see how they negotiate these terrains. We will identify strategies that both convey and fight against silence. Students will engage closely with outside texts through discussion, brief response papers, and improvisational writing both in and out of class. Student work will also be discussed through the lens of what is said and what is silenced. (3 credits)

Politics in the Time of Malaria NWRW 3926

15 sessions, Tues., 8:00pm-9:50pm

Jeffery Renard Allen

This course looks at contemporary novels and short stories from around the world that deal with health issues. Key is the question of how such issues frame or shape matters of democratic process and the struggle for social equality. We read works by Salman Rushdie, Nuruddin Farah, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Robert Bolano, and Michaeline Aharonian Marcom, among others.

Citizenship and The U.S. Constitution ULEC 2670*

15 sessions. Thurs., 4:00pm-5:20pm

Honor Sachs

The United States Constitution is a living document. In this course we examine the major transformations in constitutional thought and government design with particular emphasis on the changing meanings of citizenship in U.S. history. Throughout the course, we examine the roles and rights of citizens from the perspective of three major moments of transformation in U.S. history: the founding era, the Civil War, and the New Deal. We are currently living through a fourth major moment of transformation in constitutional thought when old systems are being dismantled and rebuilt. For the final project of this course, students reflect on various aspects of constitutional design and draft a new U.S. Constitution to meet the demands of the 21st century. *This course is part of the Writing and Democracy Program; for more information see page 14.*

**Students must also register for discussion session: ULEC2671, Section A, Thursdays, 6:00-7:20 p.m.; Section B, Thursdays, 8:00-9:20 p.m.; Section C, Fridays, 12:00-1:20 p.m.; Section D, Fridays, 2:00-3:20 p.m. (3 credits)*

Writer's Life Colloquium

All students participate in an ongoing colloquium of readings, lectures, and conversations with visiting writers, scholars, journalists, and writing teachers. The Writer's Life Colloquium reflects the wide range of cultural activity at The New School and the belief that students benefit from exposure to many voices and genres. Active participation in the Colloquium consists of attendance at a minimum of eight events each semester. (1 credit)

2008-09 Faculty Biographical Notes



Jeffery Renard Allen holds a PhD in English (Creative Writing) from the University of Illinois at Chicago and has published three books, *Stellar Places* and *Harbors and Spirits*, both collections of poems, and the novel *Rails Under My Back*, which won the Chicago Tribune's Heartland Prize for Fiction, and most recently, *Holding Pattern*, a collection of stories. His essays, reviews, fiction, and poetry have appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Poets & Writers*, *TriQuarterly*, *Ploughshares*, *BOMB*, *Hambone*, *StoryQuarterly*, *African Voices*, *African American Review*, *Callaloo*, *Black Renaissance Noire*, *Literary Review*, *XCP: Cross Cultural Poetic*, and other publications. He has received numerous awards for his work including a Whiting Writers' Award, the Chicago Public Library's 21st Century Award, and a Recognition for Pioneering Achievements in Fiction from the African American Literature and Culture Association. Allen is currently working on a novel and is an associate professor of English at the City University of New York, Queens College and an instructor in the graduate writing programs at The New School and Columbia University.



Catherine Barnett is the recipient of a 2006 Guggenheim Fellowship, a 2004 Whiting Writers' Award, the 2004 Glasgow Prize for Emerging Writers, and a Pushcart Prize. Her book, *Into Perfect Spheres Such Holes Are Pierced*, won the 2003 Beatrice Hawley Award and was published in spring 2004 by Alice James Books. Her poems have been published in *Gulf Coast*, *Pleiades*, *The Washington Post*, *Barrow Street*, *Shenandoah*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and *The Iowa Review*. Barnett also teaches at NYU, where she was recently honored with an Outstanding Service Award.



Mark Bibbins received a Lambda Literary Award for his first collection of poems, *Sky Lounge* (Graywolf Press, 2003). He co-founded *LIT* and is a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow in Poetry. His work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Paris Review*, *Boston Review*, and *The Best American Poetry*.



Patricia Carlin received her Ph.D. in literature from Princeton University, where she specialized in Shakespeare studies, and poetry and poetics. She teaches literature and creative writing, and has previously taught at Princeton University and Vassar College. Her publications include *Shakespeare's Mortal Men*, a study of the plays in their cultural context, and *Original Green*, a poetry collection, and her work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. She co-edits the poetry journal *Barrow Street* and is a co-founder of Barrow Street Press.



Elizabeth Gaffney is the author of the novel [Metropolis](#), which was a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers selection. She has translated three books from German, and her stories have appeared in many literary magazines. She worked as a staff editor at George Plimpton's *Paris Review* and currently is Editor-at-Large of the literary magazine *A Public Space*. Gaffney has been a resident artist at Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony, and the Blue Mountain Center.



Shelley Jackson is the author of *Half Life*, *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, hypertexts including *Patchwork Girl*, *My Body*, and *The Doll Games*, and author/illustrator of several childrens' books, including *The Old Woman* and *The Wave*. Her short stories and essays have appeared in numerous anthologies and journals including *Conjunctions*, *The Paris Review*, *Bookforum*, *The LA Times*, *The Village Voice* and *Cabinet Magazine*. She is the author of *SKIN*, a story published in tattoos on the skin of 2095 volunteers, and co-founder (with artist Christine Hill) of The Interstitial Library. The recipient of a Howard Foundation grant and a Pushcart Prize, she has degrees from Stanford and Brown and has taught at Brown, MIT, Pratt Institute, and the European Graduate School.



Zia Jaffrey is the author of *The Invisibles: A Tale of the Eunuchs of India*, and is writing a book on AIDS in South Africa. She has covered the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, the global AIDS pandemic, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, and Pakistan under General Musharraf, and has written cover stories, features, and book reviews for numerous publications, including *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *The Village Voice*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Mother Jones*, among others. She teaches international fiction and non-fiction in The New School's M.F.A. program.



Suzannah Lessard was a staff writer for *The New Yorker* from 1975-1995; author of *The Architect of Desire: Beauty and Danger in the Stanford White Family*, winner of the Whiting Award in 1996; and has taught at Columbia School of the Arts, George Mason University, George Washington University, Wesleyan University, Goucher College, and Queens University at Charlotte, N.C.



Sigrid Nunez is the author of five novels, including *The Last of Her Kind*, *For Rouenna*, and *A Feather on the Breath of God*; a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award for First Fiction and the Barnes & Noble Discover New Writers Award; winner of a Whiting Writers' Award and awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters; and has taught at Amherst College, Smith College, Columbia, and the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference.



Rene Steinke, author of the novels *The Fires* and *Holy Skirts*, was a finalist for the 2005 National Book Award and was included on the Best Books of 2005 lists by the Chicago Tribune and the Washington Post; formerly the Editor-in-Chief of *The Literary Review*; her writing has also appeared in *Bookforum*, *Vogue*, and *The New York Times*.



Lynn Tillman is a novelist, short story writer, and essayist. Her most recent books are *American Genius*, *No Lease on Life* (a novel), which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction; and *This Is Not It*, a collection of stories and novellas inspired by 22 contemporary artists' work. She was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2007.



Paul Violi is the author of ten books of poetry and a collection of short nonfiction. His poetry has been published in numerous magazines and anthologies here and abroad, including *Harper's*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Partisan Review*. He received the 2001 Morton Dauwen Zabel Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and other awards include two poetry fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts as well as grants from the Ingram Merrill Foundation, the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, the Fund for Poetry, and the New York Foundation for the Arts. He has coordinated poetry programs at the Museum of Modern Art, worked on special projects for Universal Limited Art Editions, and was managing editor of *Architectural Forum*. He has taught writing and literature at many colleges and universities, including New York University and Columbia.

****Citizenship and the U.S. Constitution****

Honor Sachs is the Cassius Marcellus Clay postdoctoral fellow with the Howard Lamar Center for the Study of Frontiers and Borders at Yale University. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 2006. Her forthcoming book, *Chosen Land: Gender, Race and Rights in the First National West*, explores the relationships between social experience, political culture, and legal development on the early national frontier. Her publications include "The Myth of the Abandoned Wife: Married Women's Agency and the Legal Narrative of Gender in Eighteenth-Century Kentucky," *Ohio Valley History* (2003) and "Reconstructing a Life: The Archival Challenges of Women's History," *Library Trends* (2008). Her next project will look at the nineteenth-century movement to archive and preserve the history of the revolutionary era. She has taught courses in U.S. women's history, legal history, and early America and will offer a course on Gender, Race, and Law in Early America this spring.

