BRINGING THE WRITTEN WORD TO WAKE IN SPRING 2012

Ellie Thiemann | Class of 2014

The university will host the first ever Wake Forest writer’s conference and symposium on campus from March 23-25, 2012 to celebrate the achievements of our alumni.

The conference, called “Words Awake: A Celebration of Wake Forest Writers & Writing”, will bring over 50 Wake Forest alumni to campus to participate in workshops and panel discussions with students and faculty.

Wake Forest is incorporating “Words Awake” as a way to begin to integrate more writing into the curriculum campus-wide. A new Creative Writing Minor is now offered through the English Department with courses which focus on writing for and across specific disciplines such as medicine and business.

Tom Phillips, the Director of the Wake Forest Scholars Program and Interim Director of the Program in Interdisciplinary Humanities, spearheaded the planning committee for this event, saying hosting a celebration like this has been a dream of his. “This will be the first event like this on campus to recognize the many achievements of our alumni,” he said.

He hopes that students will take advantage of the many amazing opportunities the weekend will offer. Phillips stresses that this event is not just for English and journalism-focused students: “Words Awake is a celebration of the written word through the lens of Wake Forest alumni,” he said.

The planning committee, which is made up of Phillips, Ann Boyle, Phoebe Zerwick, Maria Henson, Mary Beth Wallace, Mary Martin Niepold, and a network of alumni, has been working for over a

Community Outreach as part of Words Awake

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In March, as part of the “Words Awake” conference, Wake Forest will be sending alumni authors and writers to local schools as part of a new community outreach program designed to give young, public school students contact with notable Wake Forest alumni who work in all different areas of writing and publishing.

On Friday, March 23, Wake alumni will be visiting nine different public schools in the Winston-Salem area to hold workshops and work with the students. Some authors will be working directly with students in small groups, while others will give school-wide talks. The students, who range from kindergarten to high school age, will interact directly with authors and have the opportunity to listen to their talks.

Phoebe Zerwick, a lecturer in the English Department and a professor of journalism, explained that the highlight of the program will be giving local students, who may not have much exposure to writing, direct and intimate exposure to authors.

The planning committee has worked hard to tailor each author’s visit to the needs of the school they will be visiting. Old Town Elementary

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year to ensure the success of the event, which will be promoted regionally as well as locally.

To kick off the celebration on Friday, March 23, visiting authors will visit local elementary and high schools to work with students. On Friday evening, Tom Hayes ('79) will premiere a documentary about his father, Harold Hayes ('48), often called “the main architect of the New Journalism movement,” and the groundbreaking former editor of Esquire magazine.

The weekend will continue on Saturday with panel discussions involving alumni and current Wake professors. Throughout the day, 16 different conversations will take place, each offering a unique topic and panel of writers. Words Awake boasts an impressive line-up of authors, including Laura Elliott ('79), author of the critically-acclaimed novel Under a War Torn Sky; Matt Gallagher ('05), soldier and author of Kaboom, and Jane Bianchi ('05), former senior editor at Seventeen magazine.

The panel discussion topics vary widely—the day begins as a symposium called “Writing a Dangerous World,” ends with a discussion of writing and editing careers in and around North Carolina, and covers everything from sports reporting, screenplay writing, writing for young adults, and writing for news for Washington.

Saturday, the last full day of the conference, will conclude with one of the many highlights of the weekend, a ceremony honoring 15 Wake Forest alumni authors who will be inducted into the Wake Forest Writer’s Hall of Fame. Maya Angelou is among the honored and will be performing a reading of her work.

The weekend will close with a brunch Sunday morning, cleverly called a “Pastry Slam”, where students can come speak to the authors about their work and questions raised during the weekend over a light breakfast.

For Phillips, “Words Awake” epitomizes how “Wake Forest engages the world in a humanitarian way,” and will be an amazing opportunity for current students and faculty to gain intimate exposure to some of the most influential authors of the twentieth and twenty-first century.

The planning committee is looking for student volunteers to serve as escorts for the visiting authors while they are on campus. For more information contact Hannah Kay Hunt at hunthk8@wfu.edu.

School has a rich culture of poetry already embedded into the school’s curriculum and surrounding community, so the “Words Awake” program will be sending a poet to the school to hold a workshop about reading and writing poetry as a special event for young students.

The planning committee has also been working with the career center at the vocational school in Winston-Salem to arrange for Elizabeth Norfleet, a alumnae and author of the acclaimed cooking book, The Seasonal Palette, to give cooking classes to the students and offer them advice about the art of culinary writing.

Anne Boyle, another member of the planning committee, is collaborating with Northwest Middle School to integrate Wake Forest authors into the school’s English curriculum. This event is of special importance to this school, as it will bring the authors of the books that students are studying directly into their classrooms.

Zerwick also expresses her excitement about the possibilities this event offers Wake alumni, students, and the greater Winston-Salem community in the future. “‘Words Awake’ will hopefully become an annual event…a celebration as opposed to just a conference,” Zerwick, who wrote for the Winston-Salem Journal for nearly 20 years, said.

She noted that Wake Forest has much to offer the surrounding area and that this project, “fits right into the University’s policy of public engagement.”

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