

# THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA



JUNE 9, 1999

TO: COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS FACULTY AND STAFF

FROM: LINDA MAXSON, DEAN

RE: THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL WRITING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

The College of Liberal Arts and the University of Iowa value the potential as well as the past accomplishments of the International Writing Program. The IWP was founded over 30 years ago with federal funding to provide literary artists from around the world a place to write, interact, and make themselves better known to U.S. audiences. Changing circumstances now make it necessary to enhance the program's involvement with University of Iowa students and faculty, as was recommended in the last review of the program. Inasmuch as the University and College Strategic Plans mandate *more* integration of international content into the curriculum, the functions and structure of the IWP should reflect student-oriented changes.

The greatest threat to the future of international writing and literary exchange at the University would be to delay giving thoughtful consideration to the future of this program. As Jon Whitmore, University Provost, points out, most programs that remain vital for long periods of time at a university have changed and evolved in response to an ever-changing environment.

In view of the confusion about the future of international writing at Iowa that has arisen over the past week, let me describe what the College is doing:

- 1) The IWP is not closing. It will be operating, in this transitional year, on a different scale and with a redefined function. A smaller number of writers will be on campus, some for longer and some for shorter than the 90 days that was typical in the recent past. The writers will, however, be interacting more fully with our academic programs, offering courses or serving as guest lecturers in courses taught by our faculty, as well as spending time writing and working with translation specialists.
- 2) The need to meet explicit and long-standing goals for the program justifies rethinking the structure of the International Writing Program. The priorities the College has for the IWP were stated at the conclusion of the 1994-95 review of the IWP:
  - a) To strengthen the IWP's connectedness to academic departments and to more fully involve the visiting international writers as a resource in the teaching and scholarly programs in those departments. The College is currently seeking to identify ways in which the support it gives to international writing will contribute to its mission of offering programs to undergraduate and graduate students.
  - b) To identify new sources of external funding. In the last decade, with diminishing federal support for international cultural and academic exchange, the funds on



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which the IWP had formerly relied were no longer available. For the past decade the College has been dedicating more and more of its instructional funds to support this program, and we must ensure that the program contributes more broadly to the education of undergraduate and graduate students. It would be unjust to both our students and to our international writers, who have long represented an inestimable resource for our campus and community, to have it otherwise.

- 3) In its search this past year for a new director of the IWP, the College had identified one candidate who could have undertaken the administrative restructuring needed to achieve the goals stated above. When this candidate unexpectedly declined the directorship at a critically late date, it became clear that restructuring the IWP was a task to which the current faculty would have to devote considerable time and energy over the next year. It also became clear that the College could not at the same time devote its energies and resources to hosting a fall 1999 session of the IWP under the old format.

A Committee of College faculty and staff will spend the next semester making more concrete the academic and public missions for international writing, considering various ways of structuring the program to meet a wider mission, and exploring alternative sources of funding. This Committee will be chaired by Steven Ungar, professor and chair of Comparative Literature, and its members include Frederick Antczak (professor of Rhetoric and Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts), Daniel Balderston (professor and chair of Spanish and Portuguese), Sandra Barkan (Assistant Dean of the Graduate College, who holds an adjunct faculty appointment in Comparative Literature), Connie Brothers (administrator of the Writers' Workshop), David Hamilton (professor of English and editor of the *Iowa Review*), and Michael McNulty (professor of Geography in the College and the University's Associate Provost for International Programs).

The College is accountable to the public for maintaining healthy academic programs and for financially responsible administration of those programs. The Committee I have appointed will report by December 1, 1999, so that we can secure the future for international writing in our College.

I urge those of you who have written about the future of the International Writing Program to step forward and engage in a constructive dialogue with Committee members to make suggestions. I also urge you to participate in the activities that will be planned for those writers who will be on campus in 1999-2000. With the interaction and collaboration of more faculty and students with each year's cohort of international writers, we can be assured that the next 30 years of international writing at Iowa are stimulating and academically rewarding.