



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously-funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the current guidelines, which reflect the most recent information and instructions, at <https://www.neh.gov/program/spotlight-humanities-higher-education>.

Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Education Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: *Conversations in Literature and Culture*

Institution: Savannah State University/Hampton University

Project Director: Margaret Cox

Grant Program: Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education Development Grants

Humanities content and activities

Savannah State University (SSU) submits a two-year **Development Level** proposal to the NEH Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education program, entitled “Conversations in Literature and Culture,” an original podcast, with the goal to significantly enrich humanities teaching at SSU. One of the challenges that the university faces is declining enrollment, noticeably in the field of humanities. A co-curricular project such as this, in the form of an internship, would generate student interest in the humanities—especially English, Languages, and Cultures.

The major goal of this proposed project is for students to investigate humanities issues that are relevant to the region of the American South, and those that are global, and to increase their historical and cultural awareness and critical thinking. The development of a single, well-defined project to achieve this goal will be by means of the creation of an original podcast “Conversations in Literature and Culture” which will serve as a site for literary discussions between Savannah State University students and faculty, as well as writers. The proposed grant period will be for two years, centering on specific literary genres and themes. It will be an opportunity for SSU students to hone their research and interviewing skills; for faculty to mentor students and share their scholarship; it is also expected that the invited authors, in reading and discussing their work, will inspire the audience and participants alike. The eight-episode podcast will be accessible via a webpage as an open educational resource (OER) to students, faculty, and writers. Because the podcast will be available as a free resource on the internet, it will reach a wide audience beyond the Savannah State University community.

This development project and its artifacts, “Conversations in Literature and Culture” will be preserved and sustained beyond the two-year grant period. To ensure its sustainability, funding from more sources will be pursued. For instance, the Fulbright Outreach Lecturing Fund enables universities to host Fulbright Visiting Scholars who are already in the country, allowing for continuous global humanities conversations. Affordable Learning Georgia, as well as Georgia Humanities, are additional funding sources that would help in the continuous creation of the podcast episodes. This project will make a significant impact on teaching and learning within the department of English, Languages, and Cultures at Savannah State University; also serving as a space for interdisciplinary dialogue.

Southern Gothic literature will be the focus during the project’s inaugural year. Southern Gothic is a mode or genre prevalent in literature from the early 19th century to this day. Characteristics include the presence of irrational, horrific, and transgressive thoughts, desires, and impulses; grotesque characters; dark humor, and an overall angst-ridden sense of alienation (Bjerre, 2017). The drama of Tennessee Williams, especially *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), set in New Orleans, represents the notion of Southern Gothic through its depiction of loss and decay of the old South and its sentiments. Also included in the literary mode of Southern Gothic is Toni

Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). The novel, inspired by real-life experiences of Margaret Garner, who was born into slavery in Boone County, Kentucky, features haunting, horrific, and grotesque elements connected to slavery and racism. More recently, Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017) and *Salvage the Bones* (2011), both set in Mississippi, have each exemplified Southern Gothic literature. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* deals with poverty, alienation, and death in a family, whereas the theme of death is illustrated through the gothic element of ghosts. *Salvage the Bones* demonstrates the threat and destruction imposed by Hurricane Katrina on residents in the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. This novel's depiction of the impact of natural disasters in regions such as the American South adds a much-needed contemporary climate change conversation.

The second year of the project will center on diaspora literature. The term diaspora refers to the dispersion of a people from their native land; and often, there is a subjective emotional attachment whereas such feelings are determined by cultural identity. We see this illustrated in works by writers of various nationalities and cultures as they examine themes such as nostalgia, alienation, displacement, and resilience in the face of adversity. Students will conduct research and pose questions about writers who use their pieces to illustrate the various experiences connected to living in diaspora. Works such as *Anna in Between* (2009) by Trinidadian-American writer Elizabeth Nunez examines the notion of being neither here nor there when it comes to identity as a Caribbean immigrant in America. Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2007), which details the experiences of a Nigerian who has lived abroad in diaspora and how he views himself and others after returning to his native land, provides an Africanist perspective about diasporic experiences. Among the works of fiction that will help students gain more knowledge about the Asian diaspora are Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation*, which depicts a sense of dual identity experienced by a girl who emigrates with her mother from Hong Kong to Brooklyn, NY; and Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*, a historical novel, which portrays multi-generation experiences of Korean immigrants living in exile in Japan.

Project personnel

"Conversations in Literature and Culture" will be directed by Margaret Cox, Associate Professor in the Department of English, Languages, and Cultures. As Principal Investigator (PI), she will be responsible and accountable for all aspects of the project including budget maintenance and submitting required reports; interviewing, hiring, and orienting student interns; recruiting faculty mentors, inviting writers to be virtual speakers; and editing podcast episodes.

Throughout her academic career and as an active participant at professional conferences, Margaret Cox has interacted with various writers. For instance, she moderated the National Black Writer's Conference panel "Literary Encounters: East Meets West—A Dialogue" which featured novelist M. G. Vassanji and poet Meena Alexander. While she was an instructor at Brooklyn College, CUNY, she invited fiction writer Oonya Kempadoo to

give a campus-wide literary chat about her latest novel *All Decent Animals* (2013). Recently, Margaret Cox attended a masterclass on fiction writing given by Elizabeth Nunez. She is also a member of the planning committee for the annual Haitian Studies Institute conference, which last spring, featured many scholars, including historian Gerald Horne.

Utilizing her expertise in Adobe Premiere Pro, she will edit the podcast episodes. She recently created a three-episode podcast entitled “Key Topics in African American Literature” in which student interns served as researchers, moderators, and panelists. This was companion piece to a book that she co-edited, *Great Works of African American Literature* (2022), funded by Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grant (Round 19).

A number of faculty from the Department of English, Languages, and Cultures; and also, the Department of Africana Studies, are interested in serving as faculty mentors. They would be responsible for advising students in the research and planning aspects of the podcast and participate as guests on episodes that align with their areas of specialty. There has been overwhelming interest in this project. A total of four faculty members (two per academic year) will be selected for participation.

Six student interns (three per academic year) will be hired to work on the research and planning of podcast episodes and will interview guests. They will develop episode outlines and craft interview questions. Before the actual work begins, they will attend an orientation which will provide an overview of policies and procedures relevant to the project. Interns will be mentored by participating faculty.

Four writers: Jesmyn Ward, Elizabeth Nunez, Jean Kwok, and Teju Cole will be invited to participate as guests on the podcast. In the event that they are not available, the PI will reach out to other professionals within the network of writers that she is acquainted with. Appropriate adjustments will be made to the reading selections.

Institutional context and benefit

SSU is a small sized institution of higher education with Fall 2022 enrollment of 2967. The student body is largely (93%) undergraduate, and predominantly underserved (83.2% African American; 6.5% Hispanic). The mission of Savannah State University, the first public historically black university in the State of Georgia, is to develop productive members of a global society through high quality instruction, scholarship, research, service and community involvement. The university fosters engaged learning and personal growth in a student-centered environment that celebrates the African American legacy while nurturing a diverse student body. Savannah State University offers graduate and undergraduate studies including nationally accredited programs in the liberal arts, the sciences and the professions.

To carry out discipline-specific aspects of the university’s broader mission, the Department of English, Languages, and Cultures offers a multidisciplinary, student-centered approach to learning that enriches the whole person and the larger

community. By exploring literature, creative and professional writing, and international languages and cultures, the department strives to provide a strong foundation of a liberal arts education rooted in the Africana traditions.

The continued endeavor to fulfill this mission has not been without challenges. The university-wide decline in enrollment has resulted in major budget cuts, negatively impacting humanities programs. It is anticipated that co-curricular programming such as the “Conversations in Literature and Culture” podcast would increase student interest in the humanities. The NEH Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education grant would help the Department of English, Languages, and Cultures create an in-house internship program that engages learners in a higher level of scholarly and creative work.

Work Plan

The creation of an original podcast “Conversations in Literature and Culture” will open up literary discussions between Savannah State University students and faculty, as well as invited writers. The anticipated grant period will be for two years, centering on specific literary genres and themes. The podcast episodes will be accessible via a webpage as open educational resources (OER) to students, faculty, scholars, and the general public. It will be an opportunity for students to hone their research and interviewing skills; for Savannah State University faculty to mentor students and share their scholarship; invited authors, in reading and discussing their work, will inspire the audience and participants alike. The period of performance for this project is 8/1/2023-7/31/2025. Southern Gothic literature will be the focus during the project’s first year. The second year of the project will center on diaspora literature.

A number of faculty from the Department of English, Languages, and Cultures; and also, the Department of Africana Studies, are interested in serving as faculty mentors. They would be responsible for advising students in the research and planning aspects of the podcast and participate as guests on episodes that align with their areas of specialty. A total of four faculty members (two per academic year) will be selected for participation.

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Four writers: Jesmyn Ward, Elizabeth Nunez, Jean Kwok, and Teju Cole will be invited to participate as guests on the podcast. In the event that some writers are not available, the PI will reach out to other professionals within the network of writers that she is acquainted with. Appropriate adjustments will be made to the reading selections.

The timeline on the pages that follow provides more details about the work plan.

Aug 1, 2023–July 31, 2024

Aug 1-13

- Send out internship flier.
- Order books, laptops, webcams, and microphones.
- Reconfirm invited writer's participation.

Aug 14-30

- Interview internship applicants.
- Reconfirm participation of faculty mentors (2).

Sep 1-8

- Hire student interns.
- Hold project orientation for newly hired interns; faculty mentors will be present.

Sep 11- 29

Students interns will explore the genre of Southern Gothic, read *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams receive guidance from designated faculty mentor, conduct research, formulate questions to be raised in podcast Episode One.

Oct 2-14

- Students and faculty mentor will meet on Zoom to record podcast episode.
- Project director will edit Episode One.

Oct 16–Nov 3

Student interns will read *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, receive guidance from designated faculty mentor, conduct research, formulate questions to be raised in podcast Episode Two.

Nov 6-11

- Students and faculty mentor will meet on Zoom to record podcast episode.
- Project director will edit Episode Two.

Nov 13-17

- Screen podcast episodes at on-campus Symposium.
- Make episodes available on the school library website, as well as on the departmental website.

Jan 8-12

- General meeting between interns, faculty mentor, and Project Director.
- Project Director will check in with invited writer.

Jan 15-Feb 2

Interns will research the occurrences of and impact of natural disasters in the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Feb 5-23

Student interns will: read *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward, receive guidance from designated faculty mentor, conduct additional research, formulate questions to be raised in podcast Episode Three.

Feb 26- Mar 2

- Students and faculty mentor will meet on Zoom to record podcast episode.
- Project director will edit Episode Three.

Mar 4-8

- Student interns will read *Sing, Unburied, Sing* by Jesmyn Ward.
- Project Director will go over logistics with invited writer.

Mar 18-29

After they have returned from Spring Break, students will receive guidance from designated faculty mentor, conduct research, and formulate questions to be raised in podcast Episode Four.

APR 1-6

- Students, invited writer, and faculty mentor will meet on Zoom to record podcast episode.
- Project director will edit Episode Four.

Apr 8-12

- Screen podcast episodes at on-campus Symposium.
- Make episodes available on the school library website, as well as on the departmental website.

Jun 1-Jul 31:

- Federal Financial Report
- Performance Progress Report

Aug 1, 2024–July 31, 2025

Aug 1-16

- Send out internship flier.
- Order books.
- Reconfirm invited writers' participation.

Aug 19-30

- Interview internship applicants.
- Reconfirm participation of faculty mentors (2).

Sep 2-13

- Hire student interns.
- Hold project orientation for newly hired interns; faculty mentors will be present.

Sep 16-Oct 4

Students interns will explore the concept of diaspora, read *Anna in Between* by Elizabeth Nunez; receive guidance from designated faculty mentor, conduct research, formulate questions to be raised in podcast Episode Five.

Oct 7-12

- Students, invited writer, and faculty mentor will meet on Zoom to record podcast episode.
- Project director will edit Episode Five.

Oct 14-Nov 1

Student interns will read *Every Day Is for the Thief* by Teju Cole, receive guidance from designated faculty mentor, conduct research, formulate questions to be raised in podcast Episode Six.

Nov 4-9

- Students, invited writer, and faculty mentor will meet on Zoom to record podcast episode.
- Project director will edit Episode Six.

Nov 11-15

- Screen podcast episodes at on-campus Symposium.
- Make episodes available on the school library website, as well as on the departmental website.

Jan 6-10

- General meeting between interns, faculty mentor, and Project Director
- Project Director will check in with invited writer.

Jan 13-31

Interns will research Korean and Japanese history and culture.

Feb 3-21

Student interns will: read *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee, receive guidance from designated faculty mentor, conduct additional research, formulate questions to be raised in podcast Episode Seven.

Feb 24- Mar 1

- Students and faculty mentor will meet on Zoom to record podcast episode.
- Project director will edit Episode Seven.

Mar 3-14

- Student interns will read *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok.
- Project Director will go over logistics with invited writer.

Mar 24-Apr 4

After they have returned from Spring Break, students will receive guidance from designated faculty mentor, conduct research, and formulate questions to be raised in podcast Episode Eight.

APR 1-6

- Students, faculty mentor, and invited writer will meet on Zoom to record podcast episode.
- Project director will edit Episode Eight.

Apr 7-11

- Screen podcast episodes at on-campus Symposium.
- Make episodes available on the school library website, as well as on the departmental website.

Jun 1-Jul 31:

- Final Federal Financial Report
- Final Performance Progress Report