

ASU Now: Access, Excellence, Impact (/)



✉ (mailto:?subject=Canyon Voices: Assembling an opus&body=Here is a link to Canyon Voices: Assembling an opus: <https://asunow.asu.edu/20160418-creativity-canyon-voices-assembling-opus>)

[Creativity \(/topics/now/creativity\)](/topics/now/creativity)

Canyon Voices: Assembling an opus

[West campus \(/topics/news/locations/west-campus\)](/topics/news/locations/west-campus)

[New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences \(/topics/news/college-unit/new-college-interdisciplinary-arts-and-sciences\)](/topics/news/college-unit/new-college-interdisciplinary-arts-and-sciences)



ASU West lit mag Canyon Voices to release 13th issue on April 20.



Canyon Voices gives emerging artists a place to be heard.

April 18, 2016

Students creating literary magazine bring their own backstories even as they edit others' on ASU's West campus

In a small classroom at the end of a long hallway, groups of three to four students are huddled together behind the soft glow of at least a dozen Apple icons, working against looming deadlines to put together a magazine.

Thirty years ago this scene would have looked much different: unwieldy stacks of paper, pens tapping against ink-smearred pages.

One thing that hasn't changed, however, is the underlying thrum of chaos: long lists of unanswered emails, lengthy Word docs full of edits and hundreds of jpeg files of art submissions yet to be sorted.

This section of English 494 is dedicated to the editing and publishing of Arizona State University's West campus literary magazine, **Canyon Voices** (<https://newcollege.asu.edu/canyonvoices>). And though the students aren't covered in ink or shouting over a printing press, they are still getting real-world experience in doing quality work as the deadline clock ticks down to an April 20 release party+.

Monday, March 21

"I'm pinching myself because we're actually on track," lecturer+ and Canyon Voices founder Julie Amparano announces to her students at the beginning of class.

The release party for the 13th issue is only a month away now. Canyon Voices gets hundreds of submissions, and with only 16 students and one semester to sort, accept or reject them; edit and workshop them with the authors; finalize the layout and publish it online — keeping up with deadlines can feel like a near miracle.

English major Patricia Colomy hears Amparano's statement and smiles to herself as she carefully lays out print copies of poems at her work space. They cover the entire table and then some. The idea, she explains, is to better visualize how they will look in the completed issue. And also to make sure no two similar poems are too close to each other.

"We're trying not to put all the depressing ones next to each other," she deadpans.

As the lead editor for the poetry section, Colomy estimated she and her fellow section members had fielded roughly 130 submissions by class time on March 21 — the most of any of the sections, which also include fiction, creative non-fiction, scripts and art. Of those 130 poetry submissions, they were able to narrow it down to 20.

Published twice a year, Canyon Voices accepts writing and artwork from undergraduates, graduates, faculty and the community at large — it has even published the work of contributors as far away as Europe and the Gaza Strip.

The class meets twice a week for about an hour, but most of the work is done on students' own time. For those like Colomy — who balances school, work and her role as a wife and stepmother — it's a real commitment.



Members of the Canyon Voices fiction section — including fiction lead editor Kaitlin Thern (far right) — choose from a selection of art submission to accompany their section.

Deanna Dent/ASU Now



At first hesitant to take on the role of lead poetry editor, Colomy said she is glad she did.

"We've gotten some fantastic stuff, and I like the editing process," Colomy said.

A writer herself, as many of the Canyon Voices students are, Colomy has dabbled in fiction, non-fiction and even screenplays, though poetry remains her favorite genre. She has even won awards for her work, including the Paulette Schlosser Memorial Scholarship when she was a student at Mesa Community College (MCC).

She recently returned to college after a 10-year break and is loving life at the West campus.

"I like a small feel," she said. "When I came out to ASU West after spending time at MCC, I was like, 'Oh, this is nice.' You get to know the same professors, the same people, and it feels a lot like a small community."

Though she feels like she's headed in the right direction now, with the goal of working in the publishing industry, it took Colomy awhile to figure things out.

"It usually takes something magnificent or something terrible for people to make these kind of choices," she said of her decision to return to school. "And for me, sadly, it was something terrible."

About eight years ago, Colomy's brother was killed.

"When I came out on the other side of it, I really felt like I almost owed it ... well, not owed it to him to be a better person or to live my dreams, but I thought if he was here, that's what he would be doing. ... I kind of look at life like you never know what's going to happen. He was 32 when he was murdered, so he didn't have a very long life. And I just figured if the same thing were to happen to me, I'd like to go out knowing that I at least lived a few of my dreams."



00:47 |

Monday, March 28

A palpable energy buzzes in the room. It's "art day," and each section is clamoring to narrow down choices for art pieces.

Kaitlin Thern is particularly under the gun. As the lead editor for both the fiction and the art sections, she has to finalize fiction's choices and oversee the rest of the sections' choices, ensuring there's no overlap and enough diversity.

As Thern sits copying down the lists of art pieces from the whiteboard, Amparano remarks on her composure and how the last student she asked to head up art day "broke out in hives."

Thern is unfazed. "It's actually pretty amazing," she says. "Everybody's first pick is a different artist, so it's going really well."

A psychology major, Thern might seem like a square peg in a course dedicated to the production of a literary magazine. But, like Colomy, writing is something she has always loved.

"I had all these ideas for stories way back, even in elementary school," Thern said. "... And ever since coming to college I realized that this is something that I want to be a part of my life no matter where I end up."

And no matter how much she already has on her plate, it would seem. Besides heading up two sections for Canyon Voices, Thern serves as vice president for Spectrum, the West campus' LGBT support group, and along with her fiancée and fellow classmate Rome Johnson, co-wrote an hourlong play that will debut after the Canyon Voices release party.

"I don't know why I did this to myself," Thern said of the heavy workload, "but I don't regret it. It feels really good to just become a leader in so many aspects of my life, and to just see this potential in myself that I didn't know was there."

With what she describes as a "critical eye," Thern says Canyon Voices fills a void for her.

"I can easily see through a story to what areas it lacks, what it needs," she said. "And I found that in workshop classes people generally want you to be very kind and tiptoe around their work, and walk on eggshells, and that was always very frustrating for me. But in this class, people really appreciate the way I critically look at stories, and to be appreciated for that is really nice."



00:42

Wednesday, April 6

Sitting off to one side of the classroom are co-editors-in-chief Sayed Karimi and Megan Huffman. They have an easygoing rapport, slinging sarcasm back and forth and chatting about the responsibility of owning a cat (not that big of one, they determine).

Despite their apparently carefree attitudes, they admit they're feeling the pressure. After all, it's already April 6, and they've still got plenty of acceptance and rejection letters to send out, sections' progress to check on and the release party to plan, something Karimi is happy to let Huffman take the lead on.

"She loves to boss people around," he jokes.

"Oh yeah, I love it," Huffman replies gamely.

Having fled Afghanistan at the age of 8, Karimi only learned at the age of 10 to speak the language he is now majoring in. After spending a couple years in Pakistan, where he worked in a garment shop, his mother was finally able to secure passage out of the war-torn Middle East for herself and her three children in August 2001 — about three weeks before Sept. 11.

Needless to say, it was a difficult time to be a Muslim refugee in America.

"It was a scary moment for us in particular because we thought we were out of all this trouble," said Karimi. "We left our home because of this political war and everything that was going on, and we thought we were finally free but then, out of nowhere, it followed us."

Undeterred, Karimi focused even harder on his studies, despite the fact that he struggled with English.

"It really hit me when I was a junior in high school when I started to write stories. They were terrible, terrible stories. But I still enjoyed doing it," he said.

Much of his inspiration comes from politics and his personal experience growing up in an unstable country.

"I vividly remember the night that the Taliban took over Afghanistan. It was a very, very scary night," said Karimi. "But then a year later, it was like a normal thing. The sound of gunshots and explosions, they just became a background noise."

After high school in the U.S., Karimi followed a more traditional path and secured a certificate to be a pharmacy tech, something that came natural to him.

"It was my Middle Eastern genetics kicking in," he said with a laugh, pointing out that in his experience Middle Eastern students often pursue medical or engineering careers. "It was just super easy for me. My teachers told me I was so good at it that I should become a pharmacist."

And he almost did. "But I kept finding myself trying to scribble out poems here and there. One day, it just hit me. I was like, 'You know what? This is not me. No matter how much I suck at writing, I'm going to go and follow through with that,'" he said.

This is Karimi's third semester with Canyon Voices. Students can take the course as many times as they like, but after the first two semesters, it becomes independent study. Each time, they have the opportunity to move up a rank. His first semester, Karimi was a general editor for creative non-fiction; his second semester, he was a lead editor for fiction; in this, his third semester, he is finally a co-editor-in-chief.

Karimi doesn't have a wife or children of his own yet but is a self-proclaimed "family man." At the age of 19 he purchased his own home and invited his mother and sister to move in with him. Karimi calls his mother his "hero" and says, "My sister is probably one of my most favorite people in the world."

After all, she fully supported his decision to become an English major. And though he admits he's "not the greatest poet," he's happy to be on the path he's on — one that allows him to pursue his true passion.

"Here I am now at ASU, I'm an editor for Canyon Voices ... it's one of the greatest things that's happened to me. I love it."