



**Southern Connecticut
State University**

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To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Brenna Harvey. I'm a Hartford resident, a non-profit administrator, an associate artistic director at the Sea Tea Comedy Theater, and a current MFA student in fiction writing at Southern Connecticut State University.

I wish to share the incredible contributions my Southern professors have made to my creative and professional life, and how an accessible, affordable, high-quality graduate education has helped me achieve my formerly distant dream of professional authorship.

I have previous experience with graduate studies, having obtained a masters degree in sociology in 2013 and then working as a doctoral candidate researcher for the next five years. I applied to Southern's MFA program in 2019 based on its reputation for strong mentorship and classroom instruction, and I have found the faculty support in my department to be unparalleled.

Since enrolling at Southern, I have received five professional publications. Since the start of 2021 alone, I have published two pieces in outlets that pay professional market rates for original fiction. Not only does this put me in the enviable position of being able to actually pay for my own life expenses through my literary output, but it also qualifies me for membership in professional organizations that provide connections to literary agents, editors, and publishing houses, which dramatically increases my chances of publishing novel-length works that can find an enthusiastic audience and be a part of larger cultural conversations.

I attribute this success in large part to my Southern professors, who read their students' material with a level of depth and attention that is unlike anything else I've experienced in my entire post-secondary education. This statement applies equally to my creative writing classes, where professors' attention helps student work become immersive, thought-provoking explorations of individual psychology and human struggle, and to academic classes, where students are held to incredibly high standards and treated with the seriousness and respect of true university colleagues.

My professors are also enviably equipped to facilitate contentious debates in the classroom, helping students dissect, understand, and honestly portray prejudice and inequality, without unthinkingly reinforcing it in their writing. In an era where political and partisan divides threaten the very fabric of our democracy, the value of instructors who can facilitate these kinds of conversations cannot be underestimated.

The end result of these efforts is a community of writers better equipped to tell their own stories, and to listen to others with reason and compassion. And my community at Southern has differed markedly from my networks at other institutions. Our community is comprised of first-generation college students, first-generation Americans, retirees, students employed full-time in the healthcare, education, and the service industry, students of color, queer students, students whose perspectives and experiences are too often marginalized and disregarded.

But while Southern's courses are more financially accessible than those of many colleges and universities, that accessibility is precarious, and, though our faculty expends every possible effort to obtain funding and financial support for our graduate students, many of our graduate programs, including the creative writing MFA, don't offer funding packages that are competitive with other major universities. It is my greatest fear that that Connecticut officials don't understand the incredible value of our State University graduate programs, and that ruthless budgetary decisions will lead to tuition increase, fee hikes, and crushing, inhumane teaching loads for our faculty members, which will devastate their ability to provide high quality instruction and mentorship.

What the state of Connecticut, and indeed, the United States of America, needs at this moment is a renewed commitment to funding higher education. Accessible higher education in all fields, including the arts, is a boon to the professional skills and quality of life of all of our residents, myself included, and also helps build an engaged, compassionate, and indeed, a functional civic society.

Sincerely,
Brenna Harvey