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LINDENWOOD CREATIVE WRITING CLUB TAKES ON NATIONAL NOVEL WRITING MONTH CHALLENGE

By Hazel Denother

Each November, writers all over the world participate in National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo), challenging themselves to write an entire novel in just thirty days or fewer. Members of Lindenwood University's Creative Writing Club are tackling this lofty challenge with enthusiasm and dedication. Dr. Daniel Plate, associate professor of English and official faculty sponsor of the club, explains, "The official goal of NaNoWriMo is to write a 50,000-word novel in the month of November. The real goal is to encourage community among writers by connecting them around a very ambitious individual goal."

Dr. Plate is a major advocate for the challenge and is heavily involved with Creative Writing Club events on campus. He says, "This is the third year the Creative Writing Club has participated in NaNoWriMo. Dr. Jeremy Carnes [associate professor of English] deserves the credit for originally suggesting to me that the club jump in and take the challenge. Then I teamed up with Susan Edele [director of the Writing Center] and the Creative Writing Club to encourage NaNoWriMo activities and push it in whatever classes I can." Dozens of Lindenwood students, faculty and staff members, and alumni have taken part in NaNoWriMo through the Creative Writing Club since the group's first year participating in the challenge. Every year, a few hardworking Lindenwood community members reach the elusive 50,000-word mark by the end of the month.

During NaNoWriMo season, the Creative Writing Club hosts several events at which aspiring Lindenwood novelists can write, interact with other writers, come up with creative story prompts, and encourage each other to reach their goals. Students, faculty, alumni, and St. Charles community members are invited to attend these events, and the functions help to foster connections between writers on-campus and off. Because of the pandemic, all university NaNoWriMo events are being conducted via Discord, an online communication platform, so participants can continue their creative collaboration in a safe manner.

Writing a novel can be a daunting endeavor, especially for students who are also juggling classes, work, and other daily responsibilities. Dr. Plate comments, "The habit

of creating art while studying for tests and doing homework, sharing the difficulties and triumphs of doing this work, is exactly the same as trying to create poems, stories, or personal essays while managing a career and family. Knowing other people trying to do the same thing makes it meaningful.” Attempting to reach the word count goal is a big part of NaNoWriMo, but the most important point of the challenge is the act of simply *trying*. While participating in the month-long event, Lindenwood writers dedicate time, energy, and effort towards a major goal about which they’re deeply passionate, and the experience can be rewarding for them whether they “win” the challenge or not.

NaNoWriMo gives Lindenwood participants the opportunity to pursue an aspiration that they otherwise may have never believed themselves capable of achieving. Dr. Plate states, “The main reason it’s a great experience is that most students have never tried to write a full novel. It seems like something that only professional writers do, so it encourages the students to see themselves as ambitious, powerful, imaginative people who can do the real work of artists.” Participation in the event builds students’ confidence and shows them that they are capable of achieving great feats.

In addition to its annual participation in NaNoWriMo, the Creative Writing Club takes part in several other events on campus. For the last five years, the group has published an annual chapbook of spooky stories in tandem with the university’s Dark Carnival festivities. Members of the organization also enter creative writing contests, hold club writing workshops, collaborate on academic projects, and hold discussions about literature, movies, and other art forms. Writing communities can be incredibly important for student writers, and Lindenwood’s Creative Writing Club is a model example of a strong, supportive group of young creatives that promotes camaraderie and accomplishment among its ranks.

Dr. Plate is a firm believer in what the club does: “Writing and art gives extra purpose to a person’s life. When each of us observes our own stories and our own imaginative worlds and pays attention with enough seriousness to create something that can be shared with others, this helps students see that college life is not some bubble unconnected from the future, but is the process of starting to create the habits they will need for the rest of their lives.” He explains that creative writing can help improve students’ relationship with themselves, with others, and with the world around them, saying, “I believe that the most important questions about our lives are answered by thinking about art....Sharing our creations makes us think about healthy political engagement and the importance of being both strong individuals and engaging in the community.”

To Dr. Plate’s delight, Creative Writing Club members are continuing to cultivate a positive artistic community this NaNoWriMo season despite pandemic challenges. He is optimistic about the future of the club, and he remarks, “My hope is that the club will become whatever students want it to be. I would like to participate and show up but not direct its future. My deepest hope is that students will continue shaping the club and NaNoWriMo into events that create the friendships that mirror the nature of art itself.”

By the end of the month, a few Creative Writing Club members will have reached the impressive 50,000-word count NaNoWriMo goal, and the Lindenwood community will have a group of newly minted novelists in its midst. Lindenwood community members' participation in National Novel Writing Month is yet another representation of the university's real academic success. Lindenwood students are creative, motivated, and talented individuals who tackle major undertakings and formidable ventures that they believe in. Furthermore, they have big ideas, dreams, and goals that they aren't afraid to go after. The students' spectacular hard work and accomplishment can be seen in the classroom and beyond, and their creativity and ambition will make them inspiring community members and unstoppable future leaders wherever they may go.