



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, DC

DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE

Dear Horace W. Goldsmith Distinguished Teaching Professorship Committee,

During my young career as a professor, I have been advised, quite often, that I need to learn how to choose—the options being having an active creative and publishing life or becoming a devoted and sacrificing teacher and mentor. Lisa Spaar is definitely someone who has dedicated herself to the latter, and yet she defies that conventional wisdom by managing to be a masterful writer whose books capture the attention of the literary world and whose reviews and essays provide much needed context for the poetry being written today. In that way, she has always been not only an invaluable supporter in my academic and creative life but also an aspirational model for who I might one day be as a professor.

Speaking as a former student of hers, what Spaar does so well—and this is difficult at the undergraduate level—is take student writers seriously and effectively gauge how much they should be pushed. I honestly would not be where I am—fortunate enough to be an award-winning poet with four books—if Professor Spaar had not taken a chance on allowing me into her poetry workshop (for which I did not have the proper prerequisites when I transferred to the University of Virginia). I was a raw talent, and she built up my foundation in regards to understanding and appreciating the craft elements of writing poems. I was also lucky enough to be recruited for the Area Program in Poetry Writing (APPW), which Spaar developed and implemented in 2001. She had the foresight to see that there were enough strong undergraduate poets at U.Va. to develop a concentration within the English major that provided even deeper study of craft (in classes that Spaar taught) as well as opportunities to be mentored by MFA students. Many of us APPW students have gone on to publish books and work as editors, and some of my closest writing comrades come from that first cohort. I was able to publish my first book, The Listening, while I was in graduate school because the manuscript's core was my undergraduate thesis from the APPW—for which Spaar served as my advisor. In many ways, I feel as though she provided us an MFA-quality experience at the undergraduate level, and it has propelled me forward throughout my creative and professional life.

If you were to draw an influence map of contemporary American poetry, her region would be significant and the threads numerous. I hope to reproduce at American University some of what she has done as a teacher and mentor at the University of Virginia.

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