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ATTN: Editorial Department

CONTACT:

Roy Burkhead, Coordinator of Marketing and Communications
E-Mail: rburkhea@mtsu.edu
Phone: (615) 898-5033

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HEADLINE: MTSU Offers Unique Creative Writing Experience in *The Writer's Loft*

MURFREESBORO, Tenn.—Aspiring authors from Memphis to Mountain City now have a chance to study the craft of writing with the help of *The Writer's Loft*, MTSU's new low-residency certificate in creative writing. Part of the University's Continuing Studies initiatives, the 18-month certificate allows a huge range of students spanning many different generations, lifestyles, and schedules the opportunity to pursue their craft on a customized, individual basis.

"Our mentors are essential to *The Writer's Loft's* success," said Roy Burkhead, a marketing and development coordinator with MTSU and a driving force behind the certificate. "Mentors and students meet for a day of orientation on August 23 where the students decide whether to write fiction, memoir, non-fiction, or poetry, and then everyone returns home. . . wherever home may be."

"Studying creative writing in a low-residency format is the ideal situation because writers should be home writing, not sitting in class," said Charlotte Rains Dixon, an award winning writer from Portland, Oregon and one of the certificate's mentors. "A mentor in a low-residency program respects the student's writing on its own terms and exists to guide that writing to excellence." And Burkhead agreed, adding: "*The Writer's Loft* is a supportive, open creative environment."

"Almost every good writer has a mentor at some point in his or her career," said Jason Hunt, a full-time teacher of English and Latin at Brentwood's Montessori Academy and a mentor with *The Writer's Loft*. "Take Hemingway, for example; where would he have been without Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, and F. Scott Fitzgerald?"

Each professor, or "mentor," is given no more than five students to work with throughout the semester, and the students mail packets of writing to their mentors approximately every five weeks. In turn, the mentors evaluate the work and send the writing back to the students with detailed comments.

Some mentors come from MTSU's English Department while others work from their homes in Oregon, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, and Kentucky. Some mentors possess M.A. degrees in English, one has a Ph.D., and most have earned Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Writing degrees from schools in Vermont and Kentucky. And in addition to being part of *The Writer's Loft's* administrative support team, Burkhead is in his junior semester of a MFA in Writing program where he just finished his first novel: "Our mentors will work out beautifully," Burkhead said, "because they know how it feels to be creative writing students who work with mentors."

In order to create a sense of community among the students and mentors throughout the semester, Burkhead said that his Division will use both a traditional paper newsletter and e-mail communications, as well as the Internet; *The Writer's Loft* has a special Web site that will serve as an information hub.

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"There's more than the mentors; although, they would be enough," Burkhead said. "A key part of our Division's mission is a public service component, and we have worked hard to make *The Writer's Loft* available to everyone in Tennessee, and even in Kentucky and beyond."

The Writer's Loft has partnered with Davis-Kidd Booksellers in Nashville (Green Hills) to host one of the certificate's three public readings, as well as a panel discussion on "Getting Published: from Manuscript to Book." And two more public readings will take place in Murfreesboro, as will six writing workshops. Tuition guarantees admission to any three workshops, and the general public is allowed to register for and attend workshops. (The panel discussion is open to the public, too, at no charge.) And there's a semester writing competition with the winning entries appearing in an issue of *Sidelines*, the MTSU student newspaper.

"Anyone serious about the craft of writing can submit an application," Burkhead said. "Our goal is to help people improve, whether you're 85-years-old or just getting out of high school."

In fact, Burkhead indicated that some high school seniors could be eligible to participate: "Everyone here in *The Writer's Loft* knows that many high schools have wonderful school newspapers, and if there is a high school senior with some writing experience and a drive to work, we'll take a serious look at his or her application package."

Burkhead added that there is no competitive component to the application process, but he said that space is limited. Since the certificate has ten mentors, the five-to-one student-teacher ratio restricts the first semester's class to 50 participants.

"Those who respond the fastest will have the best chance at getting in," Burkhead said. "And the rest could end up on a waiting list for the next semester."

The Writer's Loft's Tuition is \$3,750, which covers all three semesters.

"The students can pay as they go," Burkhead said. "Each semester is \$1,250, and if a student thinks that he or she may not take all three semesters one after the other, then this may be the best route, but we offer a significant savings for those who pay the entire tuition up front. We will reduce the \$3,750 tuition to \$3,500."

For a complete Fall schedule and additional information, please call *The Writer's Loft* at (615) 898-5033 or check it out online at:

www.mtsu.edu/learn/noncredit/theloft.htm

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Contact:

✓ **Roy Burkhead: (615) 898-5033**