

New Faculty Spotlight

This fall we are pleased to welcome Erin Belieu and Francine J. Harris to the UH CWP! We recently chatted with our newest faculty members about teaching, writing, and, of course, their early impressions of Houston.



Francine J. Harris



Erin Belieu

What's your favorite aspect of Houston so far?

I'm really excited to be part of the Houston community and have been enjoying these big, wide Texas skies. But more importantly, I think I'm most impressed that every time I go to an event here in Houston - be it attending a Poison Pen reading at Poison Girl, or this week's LatinX showcase at The Transart Foundation - the room, the yard, the setting feels full and warm. People seem to come together here and there's an impressive amount of huddling. What are you all talking about over there, Houston huddlers? I already want in.

How do you aim to challenge the students within the program?

I'm most excited to be part of the program here so that I can challenge students to really think about the craft that goes into their writing. Writers need a healthy balance of study, optimism, history, passion and technical savvy. I'm really into thinking about the technical aspect. I like working with undergrads to help them learn the tools of the trade, and with graduate students to get them to practice using those tools like a boss. I also want students to be clear about their personal contributions and investment in this art. It's a lifelong endeavor that I take seriously and I want my students to take seriously, too. I should also just say: I'm just overjoyed by the energy at UH. It's the most diverse campus I've been on, either as a student or a teacher and the energy here is exciting. The students here are engaged, motivated and supportive of one another. Nothing could make me a happier as a teacher.

What are you working on right now?

I'm working on a fourth manuscript. It's about communing. Or maybe celibacy. Or maybe personal saviors. Or maybe alternative sex. I'm not sure yet.

What do you like most about Houston?

I'm tempted to say the constant breeze (as Tallahassee has none). But beyond this, I love Houston's clear enthusiasms--people here expect to eat well, drink well, have fun, and listen to good music whenever possible. Houston so far feels like an especially vital, optimistic place to me. I also appreciate that, while the highways are truly insane, most people on the roads have decent driving manners. I find it's like driving in Boston, but without the constant open hostility.

Do you have a teaching horror story?

You know the kind of blouses that have those slippery, fabric covered buttons. And how they come unbuttoned quite easily without you noticing? I think it's best to just leave it at that...

How do you aim to challenge the students within the program?

It's easy to get pulled into whatever the present poetic fashion is, if one starts chasing publications, I think. I challenge my students to *make* the fashion.

What are you working on right now?

Presently I'm finishing my 5th book with Copper Canyon Press. It's titled *Come Hither Honeycomb*, to be published in late 2020. So I'm locked in my apartment for the most part, trying to make my December deadline.

What are you most excited about for the future of writing?

I'm always excited to see what emerging poets are doing. I learn so much from my students in that regard.

Should you have queries or wish to support the cwp: cwp@uh.edu