2011 RSC Grant Application

Submitted by Rebecca T. Fremo

Project Title: *Chasing Northern Lights* (chapbook of poems)

I. Description of previous projects funded by RSC grants

I received RSC grants in 2002 and 2003 to pursue two distinct lines of scholarship. My primary focus was a book manuscript (a revision of my dissertation that required two new chapters). A secondary focus was a book chapter that applied the critical tools of feminism and rhetoric to analyze my work as a WAC and Writing Center director. The book project received most of my attention. The project description from 2002 appears below:

*Toward a Rhetoric of Reading* examines what I call "the moment of encounter" between a teacher and her student's text. I draw upon two primary methodologies, ethnography and historiography, and the end result is two pairs of case studies. The first two chapters are ethnographic studies of specific basic writing teachers and their reading practices, and the second two chapters are historical studies of the ways that academic journals in my field represent teachers in the act of reading their students' papers. The argument that weaves the case studies together suggests that a) we must pay more careful attention to the ways that our professional and cultural identities mesh—or even clash—in the classroom; and b) the messages our professional journals send about what it means to read student writing often belie our "real" classroom practices as readers.

In 2002, I used my RSC grant to fund a full summer of work on *Toward a Rhetoric of Reading*. First, I revised Chapter One of my dissertation, which in turn became the first of two sample chapters for my book manuscript. I also reworked one of my case study chapters, which became the second sample chapter to accompany the book prospectus. This chapter was later published as ""Reading What Students Have Written": A Case Study from the Basic Writing Classroom"" in *Reader: Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism, and Pedagogy.* Finally, I conducted a thorough literature review in order to update my manuscript and prepare the prospectus. As a result, in the fall of 2002 I submitted my prospectus and two sample chapters to three presses: Studies in Writing and Rhetoric (SWR), The LEA Series (NCTE/ LEA), and Heinemann/ Boynton Cook.

When I received my second RSC grant in 2003, I used my summer to respond to requests for additional manuscript chapters from the three presses mentioned above. Thus I used my RSC stipend to revise existing chapters and frame new material for the book's two new chapters. In addition, I dedicated one month of the summer to revise a book chapter titled "Redefining Our Rhetorical Situation: JWPAs in the Small College Context," which was later published in *Untenured Faculty as Writing Program Administrators: Institutional Practices and Politics* (eds. Alice Horning and Deborah Dew). The book chapter wasn't published until 2007; editorial
changes at Parlor Press held up the manuscript. This book chapter integrates my scholarship and the realities of my situation as a writing program administrator.

The rest, as the cliché goes, is history. From 2003-2005, I revised my book manuscript for Robert Brooke, the SWR series editor at the time. Brooke suggested that Toward a Rhetoric of Reading end with an additional case study based upon my own reading of student-authored texts. After submitting a plan to IRB, I interviewed students at Gustavus about my reading practices, transcribed those interviews, and drafted two final chapters for the book. I’m sorry to say that between 2003 and 2005, SWR changed editors, and thus I had to resubmit all of my materials—from the prospectus stage—in 2005. The new editor, Joe Harris, again requested additional materials, but after a lengthy “revise and resubmit” cycle, the manuscript (now newly titled Locating Readers) was finally rejected by SWR.

Needless to say, I was frustrated by the experience, and I decided in 2009 to try to break the project down into publishable articles. As I mentioned above, “Reading What Students Have Written” was published in 2002. A second article, “You Are a Reader, and That’s What I Need”: Expectations of Proximity, Authority, and Enjoyment at a Liberal Arts College,” was accepted by READER in fall of 2010 and is now slated to be the lead article in a special issue devoted to teaching reading and writing in the liberal arts college context. A third article, “Assumptions, Theories, and Best Guesses: First Year Students Reflect on Audience,” is now under submission to my discipline’s flagship journal, College English.

II. Purpose, Feasibility, and Project Design: Chasing Northern Lights (chapbook)

Introduction

Seismic changes in my own personal and intellectual life have resulted in a similar paradigm shift for me as a writer. In the last six years, I’ve produced a considerable number of poems and essays in addition to scholarly articles and chapters. This creative writing has been more satisfying to me, frankly, than my previous scholarship. It has also been well received. I’ve published poems in literary journals and I’ve had some success entering regional writing competitions. I’ve participated in readings at the Saint Peter Arts Center and shared my work with colleagues and students here at Gustavus. I am applying for the 2011 RSC grant in order to fund my work on a chapbook of poem titled Chasing Northern Lights. Approximately 50% of the manuscript is now in draft form. I will devote summer of 2011 to generating new material for the manuscript and researching marketing resources / publishing venues.

Purpose

I write about disorientation, near-misses, and the oxymoronic moments of everyday life. As a Jewish woman living in a Lutheran community, a southerner uprooted to the Northern Plains, a suburbanite in a small town, an academic married to a blue-collar worker, a middle-aged mother of three boys ranging from teen to toddler, I find myself constantly puzzled and sometimes amused by the incongruities of life around me. This theme of trying to locate myself while lost is what binds my current work in progress, a chapbook of poems titled Chasing Northern Lights.

I’m fascinated by the line between what we might call “cliché” and what we chalk up to commonly shared human experience. Like most writers, I’m eager to explore what things look like in my
tiny corner of the universe. I am drawn to the simplicity and accessibility of contemporary Midwestern poets, and my own poems reflect this influence. Like poets Joyce Sutphen and Connie Wanek, I am fascinated by the minutiae of everyday life, as well as the objects that fill our days. At the same time, I view myself as a nomad, a transplant, a person whose own southern roots are not quite genuine, since my own parents were natives of Brooklyn, New York who never quite mastered the Richmond, Virginia ethos and accent. In some ways, my poems examine both what it means to live authentically and what it means to be a fraud. My poems are at their best when they explore the space in between—this, I would argue, is where my own identity seems to fracture most.

My poems range in length and all feature a commitment to simple language and accessible, everyday images. I do not explore the metaphysical. I don’t typically mention Greek mythology or the Norse gods, though I am fascinated (and sometimes exhausted) by the Scandinavian work ethic. My poems don’t explore religious topics from theological perspectives, but they do consider how our cultural heritage can shape or even skew how we view the world. For instance, last fall I returned home to Richmond, Virginia, for my Grandmother Miriam’s funeral. Miriam, a devout Jew whose parents were killed in Poland when she was a baby, was “prepared” for her funeral by Bliley’s, a southern funeral home that’s become an institution in Richmond. The funeral parlor, like most historic buildings in Richmond, is something of a Civil War memorial. But the Bliley family had the good sense to reach out to the Jewish community decades ago, building a chapel specifically for Jewish funerals. They’re the only game in town when Jews die in Richmond. I write about that chapel in a four part piece titled “Miriam’s Funeral.” In that poem, I examine the gap between my own memory of Miriam and the memories of other family members.

Likewise, my poems consider what we can learn from everyday occurrences: judging an elementary school science fair where oranges conduct electricity; stumbling upon the infamous yellow mustang convertible, the “Jesus” car, in the parking lot of my dentist’s office; washing children in a bathtub, recognizing the growing separation we feel from one another. In every instance, no matter what I’m describing, my poems try to make sense of my own role in a series of local contexts that sometimes feel not quite real.

Feasibility

I hold the PhD in English with a Rhetoric and Composition focus (Ohio State University 2000). I completed my BA and MA in English (Virginia Tech 1991, 1995). I am currently Associate Professor of English at Gustavus, and I have directed our Writing Center since 2000. I also directed our Writing Across the Curriculum program from 2000-2005. In fall of 2011, I begin a three-year term as Chair of the English Department. I teach courses ranging from Academic Writing to Adolescent Literature and Literacy, as well as pedagogy courses for pre-service teachers. My scholarly work has appeared in journals including Composition Studies, the Writing Lab Newsletter, Journal of Basic Writing, and READER.

I was awarded an Honorable Mention in The Loft Literary Center’s 2010-2011 Mentor Series competition for poetry, and I am once again preparing a portfolio for this year’s competition. I also submitted a portfolio to The Loft’s 2011 Minnesota Emerging Writers’ Grant competition. My first two poems were published in a collection titled County Lines (Loonfeather Press) in 2007. This anthology, co-edited by my former colleague, John Rezmerski, featured the work of poets from all the counties in Minnesota. My poems, “Jesus Goes to the Dentist” and “La Qui Parle Show and Tell” represented Nicollet and Lac Qui Parle counties, respectively. The poems are in good company; poems by Phil Bryant, Joyce Sutphen, Connie Wanek, and Robert Bly also appear in the volume.
My poems have also been published in *Tidal Basin Review*, *River Poets Journal*, and *Naugatuck River Review*. I currently have poems under submission at *Poetica Magazine* and *Water Stone Review*. I've read my work at the annual "Reading Day" event at the Saint Peter Arts Center several times. Finally, in 2008, several of my poems received honors from the League of Minnesota Poets: "Judging the Elementary School Science Fair" received a Merit for the Burns and Hall Memorial Award; "Ice Cream Girl" received a Citation for the same award. "Pruning" also received Merit for the Mabel Nyrop Short Poem Award. Finally, I completed a poetry workshop at the Loft in spring of 2010 with John Lehman.

My creative work is being taken seriously and I am eager to continue. Approximately 50% of the chapbook is complete. It is entirely feasible for me to devote 30 hours weekly throughout the summer to drafting new material and editing existing poems for the chapbook. I also plan to set aside three days over the summer (one in each month) for visits to the Loft Literary Center’s library, where I’ll do additional research on manuscript preparation and marketing strategies.

**Project Design**

My new role as English Dept. Chair will be time consuming. Thus I want to spend the summer of 2011 working exclusively on my writing. I want to produce as much new material for the chapbook as I can and research publication venues before I begin this new administrative work. I will use the RSC grant stipend to support fulltime work on the chapbook in the summer of 2011, using any additional funds to defray costs as I travel three times to and from the Loft in Minneapolis to utilize their library of writers’ resources.

*Chasing Northern Lights* will contain three primary sections: one devoted to poems about place, a second section devoted to snapshots of individual people, and a third section that highlights images of displacement and disorientation. The title poem, "Chasing Northern Lights," emphasizes the primary themes of the work by describing various elements of the rural landscape on a winter’s night, all of which conspire to make the speaker believe she has finally caught a glimpse of the elusive Northern Lights.

Below I offer a calendar to explain the stages of my project:

- **June 2011-August 2011**: Daily periods of writing and revision for *Chasing Northern Lights*. Take one trip to The Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis each month in order to utilize their library and resources for writers; seek contact information for publishing houses and literary magazines.
- **September –November 2011**: Submit new poems to literary journals. Focus primarily on regional publications, including *Water Stone Review*, *Blue Earth Review*, *South Dakota Review*, and other literary journals of the upper Midwest.
- **January 2012**: Prepare proposal and supporting materials to submit to small presses.
- **Summer 2012**: Submit *Chasing Northern Lights* to small regional presses.

In terms of desired outcomes, I simply want to work toward completion of my manuscript and learn more about how to market it.

Thanks for considering this application.
RSC GRANT BUDGET: 2011

Rebecca T. Fremo

Project Title: *Chasing Northern Lights*

**Preliminary Budget**

$600.00  stipend (Associate Professor level)

$210.00  Mileage reimbursement for three day trips to Minneapolis to utilize resources at The Loft (mileage only at 50 cents per mile for 140 miles each round trip)

$30.00   Meals for three day trips to Minneapolis (coffee shop located in The Open Book/Loft Literary Center)

**Total Amount Requested: $840.00**
Research, Scholarship, and Creativity Grant: BUDGET INFORMATION
If successful, my proposal can be used as an example to assist future faculty applications. This decision will not in any way influence the evaluation of my application. Yes/No (please circle one)

Directions:
1. Enter your Name
2. Enter the Stipend Costs
3. Enter the Project Costs (both individual costs and Total Project Cost)
4. Enter Total Amount Requested (Total Project Cost + Stipend)

NAME Rebecca T. Fremon

STIPEND (Please check one box to indicate your distribution preference)
Note: The RSC grant will fund up to 1,500 towards Project Costs. If your project costs will exceed this amount, you may opt to apply a portion (or all) of your stipend to cover these additional costs. If this option is your preference, please select “Partial Amount”.

- [ ] Full Amount ($700- assistant professor; $600- associate professor; $500- full professor)
- [ ] Partial Amount (apply a portion of the full amount to project costs)

Partial Amount: Please indicate the amount that you would like to apply towards project costs ($_________) and the remaining stipend after this deduction ($_________)

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TOTAL PROJECT COSTS $240.00

TOTAL AMOUNT REQUESTED (Total Project Costs + Stipend) $840.00
(Note: The RSC grant will fund up to an amount equal to your Full Stipend + 1,500 for Project Costs)