

**Application for TLAC Conference Grant**  
**Dr. Wendy A. Farkas**  
**Dr. Rachel May**

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# TLAC Conference Grant Program

*Application for Grant: November 1, 2019*

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A conference presented by Åbo Akademi University: *Curriculum for Social Justice; May 6-8, 2020; Vaasa, Finland.*

*At the Curriculum for Social Justice conference, we will learn how to better frame our social justice teaching using culturally and socially just pedagogies to improve students' critical literacy skills. Additionally, we want to learn how to support students in reflecting on their own biases to help them broaden their worldviews and to recognize systemic oppression through a critical approach to reading text.*

## **Essay**

When students are actively engaged in critically examining texts, their notions of what is viewed as normal, fair, and just is disrupted. Learning how to best teach and engage students in developing critical literacy skills will help us as educators in providing a foundation for students to become agents of positive change in society. We want to acquire tools for our pedagogical toolbox that will help us guide students in understanding their power to not only tell their own stories when those stories are so often silenced in society, but to also learn how to transform voicelessness into being heard and to understand the role that literacy can play in that transformation. We need resources and instructional strategies to help our students navigate conversations and classroom experiences that will disrupt the –isms: racism, classicism, ableism, sexism, etc., the –isms that so often take center stage in classrooms and that are intricately tied to identity, power, and equity. We want to do this hard work by scaffolding students' learning while implementing socially just and culturally relevant pedagogies.

We teach a variety of classes and work with the most diverse population of students on campus, first-year students on academic probation, as well as undergraduates at all levels, and graduate students. Many of our first-year probationary students come from poor urban and rural environments and are students of color. They are underprepared for college for a variety of reasons, many of which are directly tied to pervasive institutional racism, classism, ableism etc. They face the additional challenge of being hours from their homes in a predominantly white, rural, and isolated small town. By having these students read young adult and adult literature that explores the intersection of their lives and the impact of societal power structures, we want to ask students to do coursework that challenges their worldviews. We need more guidance in how to facilitate students in removing their blinders to see that they may not be as open-minded as they thought before participating in classroom activities that challenge their biases and how they perceive the world and their positions within that world. After attending the conference, we hope to be better prepared to teach students how to understand and thus *see* the evidence that “inequality not only exists, but is deeply structured into society in ways that secure its reproduction” and “contrary to what [they] have always been taught, [that] categories of difference (such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and class) rather than merit alone, *do* matter and contribute significantly to people’s experiences and life opportunities” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2018, p. 1). The sessions we attend at the conference will not only help us teach NMU’s underprepared students through a critical social justice framework, but will also help us

understand how to better train pre-service teachers, undergraduate tutors, and graduate student teaching assistants working with this population of students. Additionally, all of our students will benefit when we learn how to design our course curriculums and teach through a critical justice framework using culturally relevant and socially just pedagogies.

We are, have, and will teach the following courses: EN 103 Approaches to Academic Literacy and Study; EN 110 Good Books; EN 309 Teaching of Writing; EN 345 and EN 512 Teaching of Literature (undergrad and graduate); EN 511 Teaching of Reading; EN 302 Nonfiction Writing; EN 402 Nonfiction Writing Seminar; EN 250 Images of Women; EN 410/505 Genres in Writing; EN 502 Creative Nonfiction Workshop; EN 595 Special Topics; EN 602 Creative Nonfiction Workshop; and, EN 640 Form & Techniques courses. Together, we have extensive professional and academic experience and knowledge of fiction and nonfiction literature, education and literacy pedagogies, education and literacy theory, critical race theory, gender studies and feminist theory, and working with young adult and adult learners. A key component in effectively teaching through a critical social justice framework is the integration of research-based instructional practices and quality literature; attending the Curriculums of Social Justice conference will *immediately improve our teaching* in all of the courses we have listed above. Experts in the field of critical social justice and critical literacy research have argued that teaching diverse, thematic texts through a critical social justice lens using socially just and culturally relevant pedagogies encourages and supports students' critical literacy development by (a) helping improve students' reading comprehension skills; (b) encouraging students to reflect on their positionality; and, (c) implementing inclusive, diverse curriculum where students are able to see themselves as agents of change, in the context of issues important to them. We will attend sessions that will help strengthen our teaching in each of the above areas.

Specifically, we plan to attend sessions focused on the most recent critical literacy research, therefore, learning how to better teach students how to critically read complex disciplinary texts to help them civically engage at the local, state, national, and global levels. Knowing how difficult it is to transverse the overwhelming amount of misinformation in the world today, we want to learn how to better instruct our students in their endeavors to read critically, write effectively, and communicate ethically in a world where lies and manipulations and biases are harder and harder to detect, making many people's ability to vote in their best interests difficult. Critically reading the world should be at the forefront of every educator's teaching practices today, and we want to make sure we are prepared to do the job well.

The minority research profile at Åbo Akademi University has invited experts from around the world to its fifth annual seminar with the purpose of collectively discussing how to develop justice-oriented pedagogies. In its call, the organizers stated, with the permeating signs of racism, harassment and violence, as well as increasing social inequalities both locally and globally, there is a need to reflect on the role of education in relation to social justice. Social justice is not restricted to questions of material deprivation or differences in income, but also considers other aspects of social life, such as cultures, identities, environments and epistemologies. There is a need for reflection on how we – as educators, researchers, students, activists, and most importantly, human beings – can consider these burning and often controversial topics.

It is imperative that we better understand how to uplift diverse voices and perspectives and to promote the development of literacy and language through learning and teaching of culturally relevant and socially just pedagogies. **Note:** We have submitted a paper proposal for presentation at the Social Justice Curriculums conference, which was accepted.

### **Funding Request**

We are eager to collaborate with teacher educators who are experts in critical social justice literacy and pedagogy research. We want to attend sessions to help us more effectively teach through a critical social justice framework and integrate research-based practices grounded in critical social justice and critical literacy research. In addition, we want to learn about designing curriculums that will help us create teaching and learning environments where students feel both safe and compelled to take academic and social risks. Our students will benefit immediately, as the Social Justice Curriculums conference fee includes many sessions on these very topics.

We are requesting \$1,500 to supplement our Departmental Professional Development funds to attend the Social Justice Curriculums conference.

### **Eligibility**

Wendy Farkas is an associate professor and Rachel May is a tenure-track, assistant professor teaching in the Department of English. We teach English education, creative nonfiction, literacy, and literature courses.

### **Interest in Teaching and Pedagogy**

We specialize in pedagogical research and teaching, and work with both undergraduate and graduate students, graduate students in creative writing and pedagogy who will go on to further graduate work and teaching roles. We are also responsible for the preparation of secondary English teachers and creative writing, composition, and literature instructors at the college level; it is our responsibility to prepare these young professionals for teaching literature, writing, and reading. Our students graduate and take positions as middle and high school English teachers, adjunct instructors, and professional tutors in composition and reading (where they often work with the university's most vulnerable populations), literature, and creative writing. Because we are literacy and creative writing professors specializing in teacher education, literature, and creative writing pedagogies, as well as work with students in developmental literacy courses and graduate writing, pedagogy, and literature courses, we seek to expand our pedagogical knowledge to better understand how to reach a diverse population of students. At every level, introductory, undergraduate to advanced graduate, we encounter students who resist reading texts focused on issues of race, gender, sexuality, and ability. We want to develop more strategies for engaging these students and helping them to critically read all texts and respond with informed action plans grounded in credible information. Consequently, we will be better prepared to teach pre-service teachers and college instructors for the contemporary English, literature, and writing classrooms and better engage reluctant, under-prepared first-year students enrolled in developmental reading and writing courses, as well as undergraduate and graduate students in more advanced courses. Our publication/presentation records include publications and presentations on literacy pedagogies, YA literature reviews, engaging reluctant, under-prepared students, creative nonfiction and critical race theory, analyzing pop culture through a feminist lens, and pedagogy for graduate student writing courses. Notable peer-reviewed publications/presentations include:

**Farkas, W. A.** (2016, September). Review of the book *The Forgetting*. *The ALAN Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.alan-ya.org/alan-picks-augsep-2016/>.

**Farkas, W. A.** (2016). Exploring the professional development of a first-year teacher: Literacy specialist as mentor. *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, 31(2), 52-61.

**Farkas, W. A.** (2015). *Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating a Middle School English Language Arts Program: A Mixed Methods Approach* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest.

- Farkas, W. A., & Jang, B. G.** (2019). Designing, implementing, and evaluating a school-based literacy program for adolescent learners with reading difficulties: A mixed-methods study. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 35 (4), 305-321, DOI: [10.1080/10573569.2018.1541770](https://doi.org/10.1080/10573569.2018.1541770)
- Jang, B.G., Guzniczak, L., McEneaney, J., Blunt, J., Liu, Y., Wu, W., Pei, L., & **Farkas, W. A.** (2016). *Influences of a university-school partnership project on pre-service teachers' efficacy and pedagogical content knowledge in reading*. Discussant at the Literacy Research Association Conference, Nashville, TN.
- Jang, B. G., Wiens, P., **Farkas, W. A.**, & Meyer, C. ( resubmit). Pre-Service teachers' attitudes toward and knowledge of content literacy instruction. Manuscript submitted to *Journal of Teacher Education*.
- May, Rachel.** *An American Quilt: Unfolding a Story of Family and Slavery*. May 2018. Paperback release October 2019. New York: Pegasus Books.
- May, Rachel.** Incomplete & Endless: Writing Nonfiction from the Archives. *LiteraryHub*, (forthcoming) November 2019.
- May, Rachel.** How to Teach Literary Magazines in the Classroom and Why. Panelist, AWP Podcast Series, Episode 114, 10 February 2016.
- May, Rachel.** The Pen & the Needle: Intersections of Text & Textile in and as Nonfiction, *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies*, 5.1 (2018, Fall).
- May, Rachel** and Linda Welters. The Cushman Quilts: Two Hundred Years of History, co-author with Linda Welters. *Uncoverings: The Journal of the American Quilt Study Group* (2017).
- May, Rachel.** Presenter, Teaching Activist Writing in the Creative Nonfiction Classroom. NonfictionNOW Conference, Reykjavik, Iceland. June 1-4, 2017.
- May, Rachel.** Presenter, Re-Seeing the Archive: Race, History, & Erasure in a 19<sup>th</sup> century quilt. National Women's Studies Association Annual Conference, Montréal, Canada. Nov. 18, 2016.
- May, Rachel.** Panel organizer & presenter. Race, Ethnicity, and Cultural Myths. NonfictionNow Conference, Flagstaff, AZ. October 2015.
- McEneaney, J., Gillette, C., **Farkas, W. A.**, Yeaton, C., & Guzniczak, L. (2016, Fall). A grounded theory inquiry into an everyday digital literacy. *Journal of Literacy and Technology*, 17(3), 219-255.

### **Sharing Information**

We will share the knowledge we gain with colleagues in the English and Education Departments, in particular those who work with underprepared students, pre-service and in-service teachers, graduate teaching assistants, peer tutors, and contingent faculty. Specifically, we will present at the English department's Professional Development Workshop and the Upper Peninsula Reading Conference (attended by many NMU students and graduates).

### **Budget**

Lodging - \$160/night x 5 - \$800  
 Registration Fees - \$124 x 2 - \$288  
 Meals – (32 X 6) - \$192.00 x 2 - \$384.00  
 Flight – 800.00 x 2 - 1,600  
 Ground Transportation - \$300.00  
 TOTAL - \$3,372

**Abbreviated CVs and the conference acceptance letter follow.**

*Curriculum Vita*  
**Wendy A. Farkas**

**Teaching Experience at the University Level**

- 2014-Present    **Associate Professor of English**, Northern Michigan University  
*Teaching Reading in the English Classroom* (EN/ED 511)  
*Teaching of Literature* (E512)  
*The Teaching of Writing* (EN 309)  
*Tutoring Students in Developmental Courses* (EN 308)  
*Young Adult Literature* (EN/ED 462 (50)—Online)  
*English Methods and Materials for Teaching English Composition* (EN 350 (80)—Hybrid)  
*Good Books* (EN 110 (50)—Online)  
*Approaches to Academic Literacy and Study* (EN 103)  
*Personal Reading Improvement* (EN 102)  
*Learning Skills Development* (EN 101)  
Supervised Student Teachers  
Directed Independent Studies  
Directed Internships  
Directed Theses
- 2010-2014    **Special Lecturer**, Oakland University  
*Composition I* (WRT 150—Hybrid)  
*Composition II* (WRT 160—Hybrid)  
*Literature: Middle/Senior Schools* (RDG 573)
- 2010            **Instructor**, Saginaw Valley State University  
*College Reading and Study Strategies* (RDG 103—Hybrid)

**Published Manuscripts (see Interest in Teaching and Pedagogy section above)**

**Manuscripts under Review**

- Farkas, W. A., & Anderson, C** (2019). The complexity of teaching reading through a critical Social justice framework, Submitted to *Michigan Reading Journal*.

**Grants**

- Farkas, W.A.** (2018). Civic engagement in English: Framing student learning outcomes within a social justice/literary/literacy framework to promote civic engagement. *Endeavor Foundation Grant*. Funded for \$850.

**Presentations at National/International Conferences**

- Farkas, W. A., & Anderson, C.** (2018, November). *Broadening world views and becoming agents of change: Examining the --isms through ya literature*. Assembly of Literature for Young Adults (ALAN) Conference, Houston, TX.
- Farkas, W. A., Richmond, K., & Olan, E.L.** (2017, November). *Asking the tough questions: Teaching literature and nonfiction through critical literacy to recapture our voices, agency, and mission*. To be presented at the NCTE Conference, St. Louis, MO.
- Farkas, W. A., Richmond, K., & Olan, E.L.** (2017, November). *Disrupting notions of stigma while empowering voices: Examining language identity, mental illness, and disability through young adult literature*. Workshop to be presented at the ALAN Conference, St. Louis, MO.
- Farkas, W. A., Tavalsky, H., & Beamish, G.** (2016). *Literacy pedagogy: Broadening world views through exploration of the --isms in texts*. Workshop presented at the Lilly Conference, Traverse City, MI.

*Curriculum Vitae*  
**Rachel S. May**

**Selected Teaching Experience**

Courses Taught, Assistant Professor, **Northern Michigan University**, 2015-present:

EN 640, Techniques in Fiction and Nonfiction: Image+Text (2016)

Pull the Thread Taut: Narrative Tension (2019)

EN 602, Creative Nonfiction Workshop

EN 595, Material Culture & Literature/Creative Writing

EN 595 Image+Text History, Theory, Practice, co-taught with Russ Prather

EN 502, Creative Nonfiction Workshop

EN 410/505 *Online*, Genres of Writing

Travel Writing

Micros: Fiction & Nonfiction in Short Shorts

Books with Pictures

EN 402, Advanced Creative Nonfiction

EN 400, Narrative Writing Seminar

EN 302, Introduction to Creative Nonfiction

EN 250, Images of Women

EN 498, Directed Study: Novel Writing

EN 498, Directed Study: Compiling a Story Collection

EN 698, Directed Study: Writing & Printmaking

**The University of Rhode Island**, Kingston, RI

**Lecturer (2006-2007):**

ENG 305, Creative Writing: Advanced Fiction Workshop

ENG 205 *Online*, Intro to Creative Writing: Fiction

ENG 243, The Short Story (Literature)

**Graduate Student TA (2011-2015):**

ENG 205B, Creative Writing: Fiction Workshop

ENG 205C, Creative Writing: Nonfiction Workshop

ENG 243, The Short Story (Literature)

ENG 160, World Literature

WRT 104, Writing to Inform and Explain

**Selected Publications (see Interest in Teaching and Pedagogy section above)**

**Books**

*An American Quilt: Unfolding a Story of Family and Slavery*, May 2018, Paperback: October 2019.

*The Benedictines: a Novel*, Braddock Avenue Books, 2016.

*The Experiments: A Legend in Pictures & Words*, Dusie Press, 2016.

*Quilting with a Modern Slant*, Storey/Workman, 2014.

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**Minority Seminar 2020 - submission accepted**

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minorityseminar2020 <minorityseminar2020@abo.fi>  
To: "wfarkas@nmu.edu" <wfarkas@nmu.edu>

Mon, Oct 14, 2019 at 12:13 PM

Dear Wendy Farkas,

We are pleased to inform you that your paper based on the abstract "Supporting Students in Becoming Agents of Positive Change" has been accepted to the conference "Curriculum for Social Justice" taking place May 6th-8th, 2020 at Åbo Akademi University's Vaasa campus.

We are aware that you may need an invitation letter from us for visa purposes. You can check the [visa requirements and travel documents accepted by Finland on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland webpage](#). If you require an invitation letter, we need two pieces of information from you: (1) nationality and (2) your date of birth. The letter of invitation will be signed by the head of the faculty of education and sent to you by e-mail as soon as it is signed.

To confirm your participation and attendance, you will need to register to the conference before January 31st, 2020. A link to the registration page will be sent to you in the near future.

Many thanks again for your submission. Please feel free to email us with any question or request.

Kind regards,

The Minority Seminar Committee