

# UT workshop encourages, connects young writers



Dr. Marilyn Kallet listens to a student at the Young Writers' Institute.

**By Michelle Gibson**  
 Special Publications staff writer

In this “just the facts” world, creativity is nurtured at the University of Tennessee’s Brian N. Conley Young Writers’ Institute as part of the College of Arts & Sciences academic outreach mission. For the past 15 years, UT faculty members and students have inspired area high school students and their teachers to write prose and poetry.

More than 1,300 students have attended the annual daylong workshop, which is free and offers lunch. Formerly known as the Young Writers’ Institute, the program was renamed to honor UT alumnus and former *Metro Pulse* owner Brian N. Conley, who gave an endowment to the program a decade ago, ensuring that it will continue for many years to come.

Dr. Marilyn Kallet, UT’s Lindsay Young Professor of English, poetry instructor and Hodges Chair for Distinguished Teaching, began directing YWI in its infancy. Serving the Department of English since 1981, Kallet has consistently provided outreach

teaching through workshops like YWI. Kallet will co-chair the 2008 Young Writers’ Institute with Ph.D. student Casie Fedukovich and remains a passionate supporter of the program and its mission.

YWI is different from other initiatives because it targets achieving students who are enthusiastic about writing, says Kallet, whose long-standing personal affinity for poetry has resulted in several published books.

“The students are really terrific,” she says. “And those who decide to come out on a Saturday to write are really the very ones we are targeting.

“They are highly motivated, and that sense of belonging, and being part of a club with others who write, is invaluable to them.”

UT sophomore Melanie Williams attended the event as a high school student after her English teacher at Oak Ridge High School prompted her to go. She recalls her experience as “very warm and encouraging” and one that later led her to major in English with a creative writing emphasis. Williams is mulling how writing will be incorporated into her

personal and professional future.

“I’m actually considering teaching English,” she says, adding that she has also been writing for contests and publications and recently won UT’s highly competitive Knickerbocker Poetry Contest.

Williams’ former English teacher, Jane Sasser Coffee, who has attended numerous YWI workshops, is herself considered “a fantastic poet,” says Kallet.

“That is one thing that is so great about YWI – it encourages students and their teachers, and they are all in a position to learn and be inspired by fellow writers.”

But the event is more than just writing, Kallet says. The generous UT faculty members and students who lead YWI are poets, fiction scribes, songwriters, storytellers, musicians and performance poets. Each workshop focuses on a different genre of writing, and all help students visualize the importance of styles, tone, description, brevity and clarity.

YWI traditionally concludes with an open-mike event for participants to share their stories, poems and songs.