

# The Community Literacy Center

## A new resource for students and educators

Wednesday, November 1, 2017



(PICTURED CENTER) BETHANY SILVA, DIRECTOR OF THE COMMUNITY LITERACY CENTER

Bethany Silva, assistant research professor of education and director of the newly opened [Community Literacy Center](#) at Morrill Hall, describes her new position as her “dream job.” The New Hampshire native, who began her

## Special Events and Programs for Children, Teens and Educators

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literacy work as an Americorps instructor in Manchester nearly 20 years ago, recently earned her doctorate in reading, writing and literacy at the University of Pennsylvania. She also earned a Master of Fine Arts in writing for children and young adults at the Vermont College of Fine Arts.

“Reading, writing and teaching have always held such an important place in my life. To be able to share those passions in the state where I grew up is the best university position I could think of,” Silva says.

Silva was in the writing phase of her dissertation when she was invited to interview for the CLC director position. Initially hired for the job in 2016, she worked remotely for the first few months, and during that time established goals for the center in concert with associate professor Ruth Wharton-McDonald and graduate assistant Joy

evening drop-in program for youth in grades 7-12, will pair volunteers who will work as writing coaches with students who need help with school essays, poems or their own creative writing. Scheduled to run from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. later this fall and during the spring semester, the program is still [recruiting volunteers](#), who are encouraged to apply.

› [Literary Explorations in Critical Times](#), a book group for teachers that aims to develop strategies for engaging students in discussions about complicated issues, will take place Tuesday, Nov. 21 and Nov. 28 from 3:30 to 5 p.m. The workshops will be taught by Silva and professor Paula Salvio, chair of the UNH education department, and focus on the book "How it Went Down," by Kekla Magoon.

Erickson. Together, they developed plans for the center's renovations and developed its digital presence before Silva relocated to New Hampshire in June 2017.

Wharton-McDonald, a member of the CLC advisory board, says that Silva really stood out as the best candidate for the job after a months-long national search.

"Bethany has not only run a literacy center before, she also has great experience with middle school children and writing," Wharton-McDonald says. "I have a lot of experience with younger children and reading, and we both have spent lots of time with teachers — so we have a nice blend of expertise in making decisions about how we want to interact with area schools."

## CLC Made Possible by the Generosity of Donors

Silva was hired as the center's full-time director thanks to a \$1 million gift made by three anonymous donors in 2015. Two of the donors are a married couple. Both UNH alumni, they graduated in the early 1970s. One had a personal connection to literacy education at UNH and had tutored students as an undergraduate before embarking on a decades-long teaching career. The donor remarked that as an undergraduate tutor, she had never had any formal training. Now, the CLC will train preservice teachers in literacy assessment and intervention before they lead their own

› [Literacy Specialists Forum](#), an opportunity for literacy specialists from around the state to gather and discuss topics they select, will take place on Dec 7 from 4:30-6:00 p.m., and will focus on the new dyslexia laws.

Those interested in upcoming CLC programs and events may [subscribe to the mailing list](#) to receive updates.

classrooms. The alumna met with Wharton-McDonald, who had already laid plans for a community literacy center, but needed additional funds to establish it in the larger community.

“I was very impressed with her commitment to the Community Literacy Center and believe in education,” the donor says. “It seemed like a good investment.”

She adds that the center will also fulfill another interest of hers: it will allow teachers to evaluate their own work and see how effective their literacy strategies are.

“Tutoring needs to be available and convenient to the community. Reaching kids has always been an interest of mine,” the donor says.

Wharton-McDonald says the CLC remains strongly committed to not only supporting preservice teachers at UNH, but also providing outreach to area schools and access to research.

“We are working really hard this semester to make connections with schools and let parents and teachers know we are here,” Wharton-McDonald says.

## Setting the Framework: Launching Programs for Students and Teachers

During the fall semester, many programs are being held in the newly renovated Morrill Hall space; but later, the CLC intends to bring programs to area classrooms, “to meet teachers and students where they are,” says Wharton-McDonald. The \$100,000, 700-square-foot



CALLIE BURNS '18 IS A CHILD DEVELOPMENT MAJOR WHO WORKS IN THE CENTER AS SERVICE LEARNING FOR HER SENIOR CAPSTONE AND A SPECIAL NEEDS COURSE.

renovation allowed the CLC to create a welcoming space that includes a multi-purpose room, a conference board room and a small room for one-on-one instruction.

The space also includes two-way windows that allow teachers to watch tutoring sessions and observe, discuss and reflect on what is working without interrupting the one-on-one work between student and instructor.

“We demolished a wall, added wiring and included observation windows,” says Silva, who included more than 50 before and after photos on the center’s [Facebook page](#). “We wanted the space to be very fluid.”

Silva says she’s also excited to continue to build upon her research, which looks at diverse groups of teens’ digital writing processes in out-of-school settings. In addition, she’s co-directed multiple practitioner inquiry groups that seek to recognize and honor the professional knowledge that educators bring to their work with youth and adults.

In her role as director of the CLC, she will work with students across the state from age pre-K to 12 and collaborate with professors, teachers, youth and families to nurture and grow New Hampshire’s literacy network. The center will focus on developing and sustaining literacy programming that values the many ways individuals and communities engage with literacy in pursuit of their goals.



JOY ERICKSON IS A PH.D. STUDENT IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. HER RESEARCH IS ON LITERATURE, LANGUAGE AND MOTIVATION.



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WRITTEN [Krysten Godfrey Maddocks '96](#) | College of Liberal  
BY: [Arts](#) | [krysten.godfreymaddocks@unh.edu](mailto:krysten.godfreymaddocks@unh.edu)

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