

Creative Life
Series with
Ani DiFranco



FEATURED AUTHORS:

Adam Aleksic
Jelani Cobb
Allegra Goodman
David Guterson
Tom Junod
David Nasaw
Kirstin Valdez Quade

Literary Conversation
with Mahogany L. Browne

FEATURED EVENTS:

Albany Film Festival

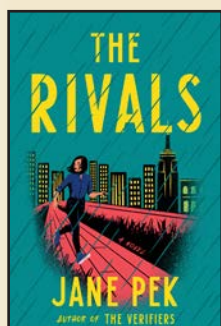
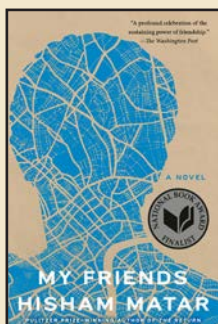
Creative Life Series
with Ani DiFranco

Frederick Douglass and
Toni Morrison Celebration

Selected Shorts



Photo: Jennie Bergqvist

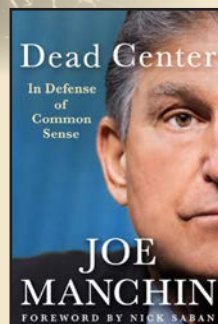


Albany Film
Festival



UNIVERSITY
AT ALBANY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

SPRING EVENTS 2026





GREETINGS FROM THE DIRECTOR

When I started out in the newspaper business nearly 50 years ago, typesetters in the “hot type” era could read upside down and backwards.

It seemed like a magic trick, but it was their craft. They melted lead to cast lines of type and spoke of pigs, slugs, and hellboxes.

Digital printing bypassed them and killed their colorful lingo, while A.I. is reshaping every aspect of the written word at warp speed.

Don't despair. At the Writers Institute, our superpower since 1983 is looking backward and forward simultaneously, while showcasing human creativity. Nothing artificial added. This spring, we'll introduce fresh voices in emerging genres such as podcasters and influencers, while honoring canonical literary figures from our past.

It's our commitment to inspire, enlighten, and entertain our audiences, who range in age from 8 to 98.

It's not a magic trick. It's our commitment to inspire, enlighten, and entertain our audiences, who range in age from 8 to 98. We welcome the world's most diverse and dynamic writers to foster a vibrant community of readers and writers who engage in meaningful dialogue.

We launch the season with linguist **Adam Aleksic** (Jan. 29), an Albany High School graduate and self-described “Etymology Nerd,” with over 3 million followers across social media and a *New York Times* bestselling book, *Algospeak: How Social Media Is Transforming the Future of Language*.

We'll honor the UAlbany legacy of Nobel Prize-winning novelist Toni Morrison (Feb. 13) by unveiling a permanent exhibit with her desk and chair used while writing her masterpiece *Beloved* as a faculty member here from 1984 to 1989. It's part of a Frederick Douglass program to highlight archival preservation of Black history.

We'll host our 6th annual “bookish” **Albany Film Festival** (March 28) with dozens of short films and conversations with filmmakers. We'll present an Ironweed Award to Schenectady native son **John Sayles**, acclaimed director, screenwriter, and novelist. We'll screen his debut film, *RETURN OF THE SECAUCUS 7* (Feb. 27) in the run-up to the festival.

Podcasters **Andrew Leland** and Albany High School graduate **Adam Colman** (April 27) will talk about their craft and debut a five-part Writers Institute podcast that taps into our vast archive of recorded voices of literary giants who visited campus.

Perennial favorite **Selected Shorts** (May 2) is back. We close out the season celebrating the publication of Writers Institute founder William Kennedy's *Library of America* edition (date TBD), placing his Albany cycle of novels in the pantheon of American literature.

Paul Grondahl
Opalka Endowed Director, NYS Writers Institute



SPRING 2026 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

EVENT GUIDELINES

Events are free and open to the public and take place on the University at Albany's Uptown Campus, unless otherwise noted. All events are subject to change. Refer to page 24 for information on free on-campus parking for events.

For the most up-to-date event information, visit our website:
www.nyswritersinstitute.org

DISCOVER MORE EVENTS Sign up for email updates and additional information on events, **visit: www.nyswritersinstitute.org**

JANUARY

THE FUTURE OF LANGUAGE

Adam Aleksic

January 29 (Thursday)

4:30 p.m.

Conversation / Q&A

**Main Theatre, UAlbany
Performing Arts Center,
Uptown Campus**

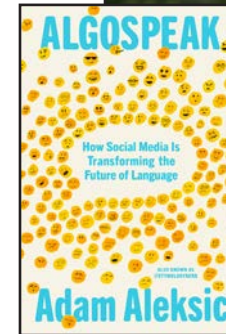


Photo: Alefiyah Gandhi

Adam Aleksic, linguist and “Etymology Nerd,” is a social media celebrity with more than 3 million followers across all platforms. A 2019 Albany High School graduate—the son of Serbian parents who immigrated to Albany in the 1990s—Aleksic achieved online stardom by exploring the unexpected origins of words and phrases. His new book is the *New York Times* bestseller, *Algospeak: How Social Media Is Transforming the Future of Language* (2025). He investigates the brave new world of “meme-driven” change and upheaval, from “brainrot” and “incel slang” to emojis and A.I. accents. The *Washington Post* called Aleksic “a code-switcher for the algorithmic age, fluent in both the old language and the new.”



In association with the launch of Thrive UAlbany, a new initiative to help every Great Dane stay healthy, feel supported and reach their goals. For more information, visit www.albany.edu/thrive-ualbany

Cosponsored by the AI & Society College and Research Center, and the Information Sciences and Technology Department of the College of Emergency Preparedness, Homeland Security and Cybersecurity (CEHC), and the Honors College.

FEBRUARY

THE SCIENCE OF EXCELLENCE

February 3 (Tuesday)

Brad Stulberg

4:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A

Campus Center Ballroom,
Uptown Campus

Brad Stulberg, bestselling author, performance coach and “excellence guru,” is the author of *The Way of Excellence: A Guide to True Greatness and Deep Satisfaction in a Chaotic World* (2026). The book teaches and encourages goal setting, achieving focus, confidence-building, and other crucial skills. Steve Kerr, 9-time NBA champion, coach of the Golden State Warriors and Team USA, called it, “An absolutely beautiful book that captures a lot of what I believe as a coach.” On faculty at the University of Michigan (Health Management and Policy), Stulberg is also the bestselling author of *Master of Change* (2023) and *The Practice of Groundedness* (2021), and co-author of *Peak Performance* (2017).

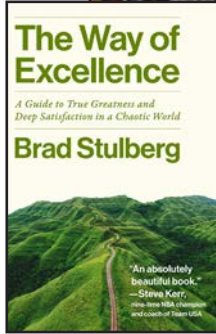


Photo: Sandlin Gaither



In association with the launch of Thrive UAlbany, a new initiative to help every Great Dane stay healthy, feel supported and reach their goals. For more information, visit www.albany.edu/thrive-ualbany

FAMILY CONFLICT

February 11 (Wednesday)

Allegra Goodman

7:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A

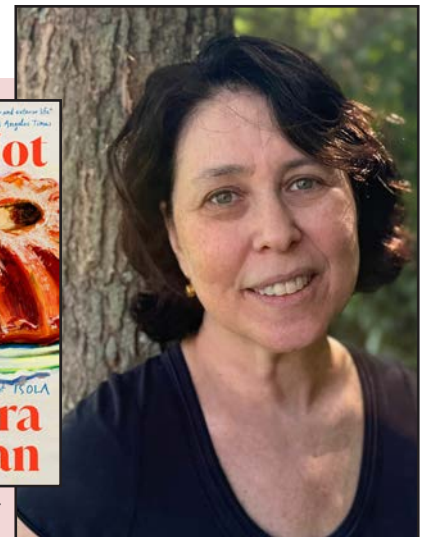
Recital Hall, UAlbany Performing Arts Center, Uptown Campus

Allegra Goodman, major contemporary fiction writer, is the author of the new novel, *This Is Not About Us* (2026), a kaleidoscopic portrait of a modern family torn apart by a senseless fight between two grandmothers, Sylvia and Helen Rubinstein, about apple cake. Goodman is also the author of the national bestseller, *Isola* (paperback, 2025), about a young noblewoman and her lover marooned on an island — as a penalty for forbidden love — in the Gulf of St.



Photo: Joshua Meyer

Lawrence in the 16th century. Based on a real historical incident, *Isola* was named a “Best Book of the Year” by *TIME* and *The Washington Post*. Her previous novels include the National Book Award finalist *Kaaterskill Falls* (1998), and *Intuition* (2006).



FALLING IN LOVE WITH ROBOTS

February 5 (Thursday)

Margaret Rhee

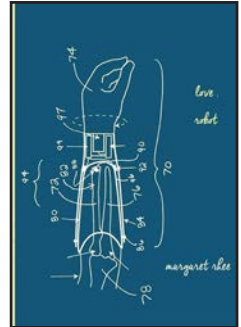
4:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A

Multi-Purpose Room, Campus Center West
Addition, Uptown Campus

Margaret Rhee is an award-winning poet who explores the subjects of robots, race, sexuality and the human body. Her debut collection, *Love, Robot* (2017), is an experimental text about romantic relationships between humans and technology. Pulitzer Prize winner Viet Thanh Nguyen said, “In a paradoxical and wonderful way, Margaret Rhee’s robot love affairs make us rethink what it might mean to be human.” Chair of Arts Writing at The New School in NYC, she is currently completing two books with Duke University Press: *Machine Dreams: Race, Robots, and the Asian American Body*, and *Poetry Machines* — essays on poetry and technology.

Photo: Zohreh Zadbood

Cosponsored by the AI & Society College and Research Center, and the Information Sciences and Technology Department of the College of Emergency Preparedness, Homeland Security and Cybersecurity (CEHC), and the Honors College.



TONI MORRISON AND FREDERICK DOUGLASS CELEBRATION

February 13 (Friday)

Join us in celebrating Toni Morrison and Frederick Douglass.

Toni Morrison Exhibit Unveiling

10:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.,
Science Library Lobby, Uptown Campus

We will unveil a new exhibit to honor Nobel Prize-winning novelist Toni Morrison (1931-2019), who taught at the University at Albany in the English Department from 1984 to 1989. The author of many classic works of literature, she wrote her masterpiece, *Beloved* (1987), while at UAlbany. The exhibit features the writing desk and chair she used during her tenure here.



Photo: Times Union

Frederick Douglass Day Transcribe-a-thon: A Celebration of Black History & Archives

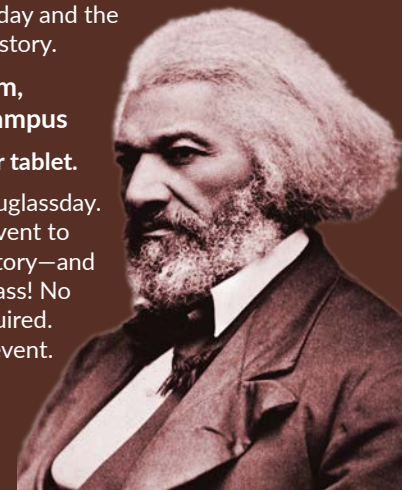
Join us in celebrating Frederick Douglass's birthday and the ongoing work of writing and preserving Black history.

12:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m., Multi-Purpose Room,
Campus Center West Addition, Uptown Campus

NOTE: All participants need to bring a laptop or tablet.

The Douglass Day Transcribe-a-thon (<https://douglassday.org>), is a national, crowdsourced transcription event to create new and free materials to learn Black history—and enjoy a birthday cake honoring Frederick Douglass! No pre-knowledge of history or transcription is required. Come and go anytime during the transcription event.

Presented by the UAlbany English Department,
and cosponsored by University Auxiliary Services
(UAS), the College of Arts & Sciences, and the NYS
Writers Institute.



ROUNDTABLE ON CURATING BLACK HISTORY WITH AUTUMN WOMACK AND DOROTHY BERRY

11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.,
Multi-Purpose Room, Campus Center West Addition, Uptown Campus



Autumn Womack, Princeton University professor, is the curator of the Princeton exhibit, "Toni Morrison: Sites of Memory," and author of *The Matter of Black Living: The Aesthetic Experiment of Racial Data, 1880-1930* (2022), winner of the 2022 Modern Language Association's William Sanders Scarborough Prize, and shortlisted for the Modernist Studies Association's First Book Prize.



Dorothy Berry, archivist and writer, is the author of *The House Archives Built & Other Thoughts on Black Archival Possibilities* (2025). Featured at many cultural heritage institutions, her curatorial work is notable for implementing creative methods to make archival collections related to Black life more accessible and available, and for imagining new strategies for showcasing historical materials.



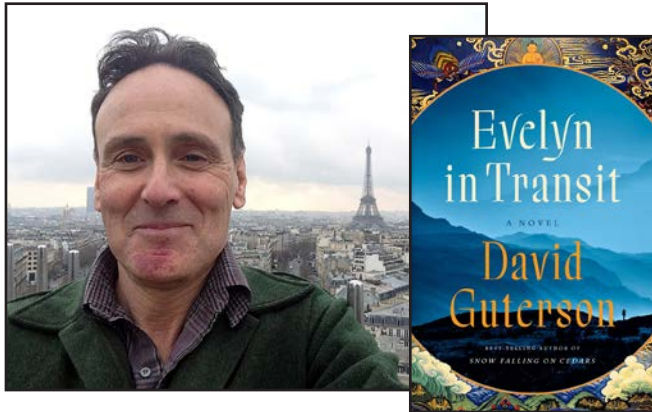
A FREE SPIRIT

February 19
(Thursday)

**David
Guterson**

7:30 p.m.
Conversation / Q&A

Page Hall,
135 Western Avenue,
Downtown Campus



David Guterson is the author of the #1 national bestselling novel, *Snow Falling on Cedars* (1994), the legal drama of a Japanese American accused of killing a white fisherman on San Piedro Island, off the coast of Washington state in 1954. The book sold approximately 4 million copies worldwide. His new novel is *Evelyn in Transit* (2026), the story of a free-spirited woman who hitchhikes across the American West taking odd jobs. One day, a trio of Buddhist lamas show up at her door to announce that her five-year-old son Cliff is the seventh reincarnation of the illustrious Norbu Rinpoche, the Tibetan Buddhist master—setting off a family crisis and a media firestorm over Cliff's future. Paul Harding called it, “an inspired portrait that is both cosmic and sacred.”

Cosponsored by the English Department's Creative Writing Program and Young Writers Project.



Photo: Angela Yuan

DATING A.I.

February 26 (Thursday)

Jane Pek

4:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A

Campus Center 375,
Uptown Campus

Jane Pek is the author of *The Rivals*, a novel that imagines AI's dystopian impact on the world of online dating, and one of *The Washington Post's* “10 Best Mystery Novels of

2024.” The book's protagonist, Claudia Lin—mystery novel superfan and, until recently, underemployed English major—has scored her dream job: co-running Veracity, a dating detective agency for chronically online New Yorkers who want to know if their prospective partners are telling the truth. Unfortunately, along the way, she and her colleagues—tech savant Squirrel, and the elegant and intimidating Becks—have uncovered a far-reaching AI conspiracy. Pek's first book in the new Claudia Lin series was *The Verifiers* (2022), also a *Washington Post* “Best Mystery” of the year.

Cosponsored by the AI & Society College and Research Center, and the Information Sciences and Technology Department of the College of Emergency Preparedness, Homeland Security and Cybersecurity (CEHC), the Honors College, and the Justice & Multiculturalism in the 21st Century Project of the School of Criminal Justice.

FILM SCREENING

February 20 (Friday)

THE LIBRARIANS

7:00 p.m. — Screening & Panel Discussion

Page Hall, 135 Western Avenue,
Downtown Campus

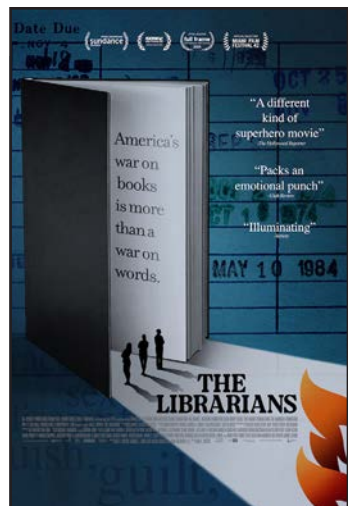
(United States, 2025, 92 minutes, color)
Directed by Kim Snyder

Join us for a screening of this surprise hit documentary film, followed by a conversation and

Q&A with a panel of local librarians, including Alicia Abdul of Albany High School, Roger Green of the Albany Public Library Foundation, and Amanda Lowe of the University at Albany Libraries.

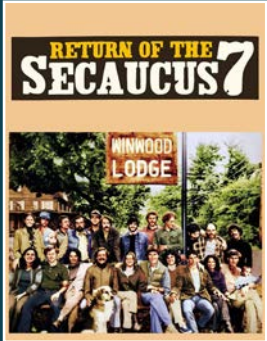
The film profiles librarians across America as they face and combat book-banning—defending intellectual freedom on democracy's frontlines amid unprecedented censorship in Texas, Florida, and beyond. The film features librarians who have been fired for refusing to remove books from the shelves, or simply for questioning the directive to do so. *The New York Times* said, “From its superb opening-credits sequence paying tribute to card catalogs of yore to its sharp selection of vintage clips and intimate reportage, *The Librarians* is as well-crafted as it is profoundly alarming.”

Cosponsored by the Capital District Library Council (CDLC).





Meet visionary film director **John Sayles**, who grew up in Schenectady, at the **6th annual Albany Film Festival on Saturday, March 28th**. Sayles will talk about his life and work, and his new historical novel, *Crucible* (2026), about Henry Ford, the ruthless, power-mad “tech bro” of his generation.



FILM SCREENING

February 27 (Friday)

RETURN OF THE SECAUCUS SEVEN

7:00 p.m. — Screening

Page Hall, 135 Western Avenue,
Downtown Campus

(United States, 1980, 110 minutes, color)
Directed by John Sayles. Starring Bruce MacDonald,
Maggie Renzi, David Strathairn.

Seven former college activists reunite for a weekend in New Hampshire to mark the 10th anniversary of their arrest while driving from Boston to Washington D.C. to protest the Vietnam War. The reunion forces them to confront changes in their lives, values and relationships. Made on a very small budget, the film is regarded as a landmark of American independent cinema.



Meet **Mayukh Sen**, author of a revelatory new biography of Hollywood star Merle Oberon, *Love, Queenie: Merle Oberon, Hollywood's First South Asian Star* (2025), at the **Albany Film Festival on Saturday, March 28th**. Born in Bombay, Oberon hid her Asian origins throughout her career to escape racism in the film industry.



FILM SCREENING

March 6 (Friday)

WUTHERING HEIGHTS

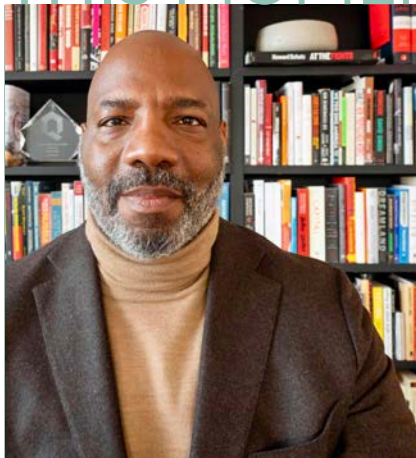
7:00 p.m. — Screening

Page Hall, 135 Western Avenue,
Downtown Campus

(United States, 1939, 104 minutes, black & white)
Directed by William Wyler. Starring Merle Oberon,
Laurence Olivier, David Niven.

This adaptation of Emily Brontë's classic 1847 novel about destructive love, obsession, jealousy and revenge stars Merle Oberon as Catherine Earnshaw, daughter of a wealthy landowner, and Laurence Olivier as Heathcliff, a “dark-skinned” orphan of uncertain origins. The film was nominated for eight Oscars, including Best Picture, Best Director and Best Actor.

MARCH THIS MOMENT IN HISTORY



March 2 (Monday)

Jelani Cobb

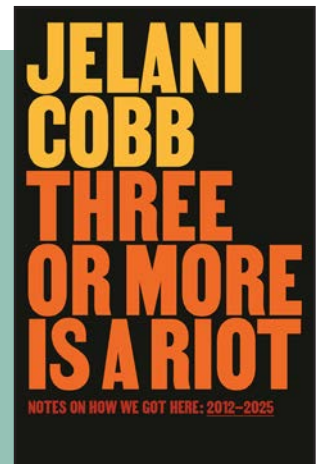
7:30 p.m. — Conversation / Q&A

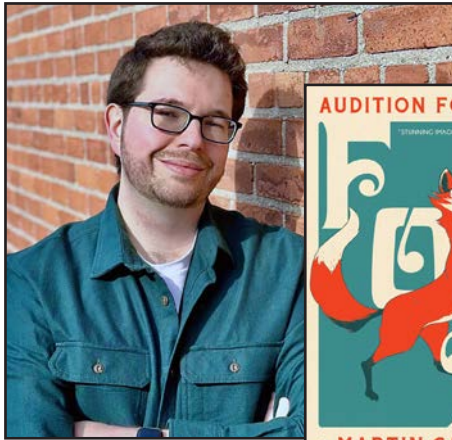
Page Hall, 135 Western Avenue,
Downtown Campus

Jelani Cobb, eminent American journalist and influential commentator, is the author of *Three or More Is a Riot: Notes on How We Got Here: 2012-2025*, an anthology of his recent work in *The New Yorker*, and a real-

time portrait of our chaotic historical moment. *The New York Times* said, “In this collection of cultural criticism and reportage... Cobb offers a clear-eyed look at a turbulent decade of grass-roots social movements and the eventual right-wing backlash they inspired.” Dean of the Columbia Journalism School, Cobb received the 2020 Peabody Award for the *Frontline* documentary, *Whose Vote Counts?*, and was a finalist for the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for commentary.

Cosponsored by the Program in Journalism, Department of Communication at UAlbany, and the Justice & Multiculturalism in the 21st Century Project of the School of Criminal Justice.





NEW FANTASY FICTION

March 10 (Tuesday)

Martin Cahill

4:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A
Multi-Purpose Room, Campus
Center West Addition,
Uptown Campus

Martin Cahill, fantasy writer and UAlbany graduate (BA '12, English), is the author of the debut novel, *Audition for the Fox* (2025), the tale of Nesi, an underachieving girl who is challenged by a trickster fox god to save herself by saving her



own ancestors. A 2025 *USA Today* bestseller, the book bears praise by major fantasy novelist N. K. Jemisin, who said, "If you love my worlds, you're going to love Cahill's: stunning imagination, daring premises, and deep character dives. A new author to watch." Bestselling novelist Karen Russell called it, "A wondrous, time-traveling, shape-shifting fable that was just what I needed to read."

Cosponsored by the English Department's Creative Writing Program and Young Writers Project.



Meet trailblazing filmmakers **Joe Brewster** and **Michèle Stephenson** at the **Albany Film Festival** on **Saturday, March 28th**. Brewster and Stephenson are cofounders of Rada Studio, a production company that foregrounds the stories of communities neglected by the mainstream media.



FILM SCREENING

March 13 (Friday)

GOING TO MARS: THE NIKKI GIOVANNI PROJECT

7:00 p.m. — Screening

Page Hall, 135 Western Avenue, Downtown Campus

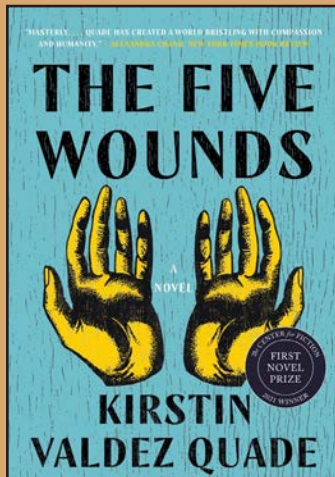
(United States, 2023, 102 minutes, color)

Directed by Joe Brewster and Michèle Stephenson.

Starring Nikki Giovanni, Taraji P. Henson, James Baldwin

This acclaimed documentary follows the life of beloved American poet Nikki Giovanni—firebrand, radical, healer, sage— across the turbulent 20th and early 21st centuries, from the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter. The film won both a Primetime Emmy and the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance.

WORKING-CLASS STRUGGLES



March 12 (Thursday)

Kirstin Valdez Quade

4:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A
Recital Hall, UAlbany Performing Arts Center,
Uptown Campus

Kirstin Valdez Quade, celebrated contemporary author, explores the experiences of working-class Latinx New Mexicans in her fiction. Her debut story collection, *Night at the Fiestas* (2015) won the National Book Foundation "5 under 35" Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award for first book in any genre. *The*

New York Times called the stories "legitimate masterpieces" in a "haunting and beautiful debut." Her first novel, *The Five Wounds* (2021), recounts the tribulations of the Padillo family of Las Penas, New Mexico: Amadeo, a recovering alcoholic struggling with poverty and unemployment, Angel, his pregnant 15-year-old daughter, and Yolanda, his ailing mother. The book won the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize, and was named a "Best book of the Year" by NPR.

Cosponsored by the English Department's Creative Writing Program and Young Writers Project, and the major in Latin American, Caribbean and Latinx Studies at UAlbany.





Photo: Jennie Bergqvist

THE COVID GENERATION

March 18 (Wednesday)

Mahogany L. Browne

6:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A
The Alice Moore Black Arts and Cultural Center, 135 South Pearl Street, Albany

Mahogany L. Browne, notable American poet, writer, organizer, and educator, is the author of the new YA novel, *A Bird in the Air Means We Can Still Breathe* (2025). Longlisted for the National Book Award, the book follows a variety of New York City teenagers as they cope with isolation and interrupted lives during the COVID-era lockdown, seeking purpose as well as joy. Brendan Kiely called it, “A gorgeous, tender testament to the generation of young people who shouldered the pandemic.” Her previous YA novels include *Chlorine Sky* (2021) and *Vinyl Moon* (2022). Her books of poetry include *Chrome Valley* (2023), a *TIME* Best Book of the Year, and the celebrated book-length poem, *Black Girl Magic* (2018).

Earlier the same day, the author will visit with students at various schools in Albany.



Cosponsored by the Alice Moore Black Arts and Cultural Center (AMBACC). Major support and funding provided by the Carl E. Touhey Foundation.

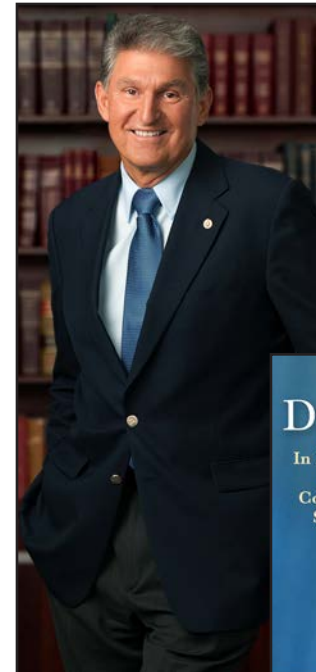


Photo: U.S. Senate

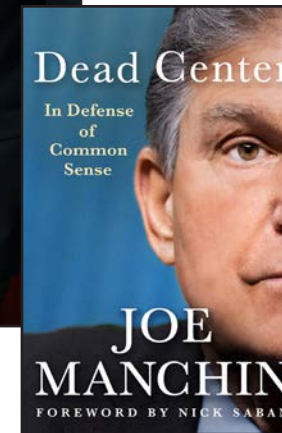
SEEKING THE CENTER

March 23 (Monday)

Joe Manchin

7:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A
Page Hall, 135 Western Avenue, Downtown Campus

Joe Manchin, a steadfast, outspoken, and often controversial advocate of political centrism during a time of extraordinary polarization, served as U.S. Senator from West Virginia for 15 years (2010- 2025). He also served as West Virginia's governor from 2005



to 2010. His new book is *Dead Center: In Defense of Common Sense* (2025), a *New York Times* bestseller that presents his plan “to tame the anger, bitterness, intolerance, and tribalism that have infected our political system.” The book is replete with stories of his complicated relationships with two presidents: Trump and Biden. He writes, “I have watched the Democratic Party leave me and my state, and I have watched the Republican Party lose itself to one man.”



Meet **Elijah Wald**, author of the book, *Dylan Goes Electric* (2015), the inspiration for *A COMPLETE UNKNOWN*, at the **Albany Film Festival on Saturday, March 28th**. Janet Maslin in *The New York Times* called it, “splendid, colorful work,” and John Harris of *The Guardian* ranked it “among the best music books I have ever read.”

FILM SCREENING

March 20 (Friday)

A COMPLETE UNKNOWN

7:00 p.m. — Screening
Page Hall, 135 Western Avenue, Downtown Campus



(United States, 2024, 141 minutes, color)
Directed by James Mangold. Starring Timothée Chalamet, Edward Norton, Elle Fanning

Timothée Chalamet portrays Bob Dylan in this biographical tale of a celebrated young folk singer who, controversially, came to adopt electric instruments at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, enraging folk music purists. Edward Norton and Elle Fanning play Pete Seeger and Sylvie Russo in a film that received eight Oscar nominations, including Best Picture, Best Director and Best Actor.

The Creative Life

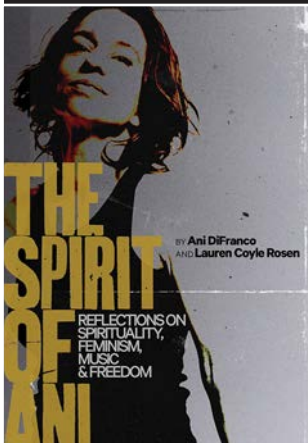
Produced by the New York State Writers Institute in collaboration with WAMC Northeast Public Radio, this series features leading figures from a variety of artistic disciplines in conversation with WAMC's "Roundtable" host Joe Donahue about creative inspiration, craft, and career.

A Conversation Series at UAlbany

Ani DiFranco & Lauren Coyle Rosen

March 24 (Tuesday)

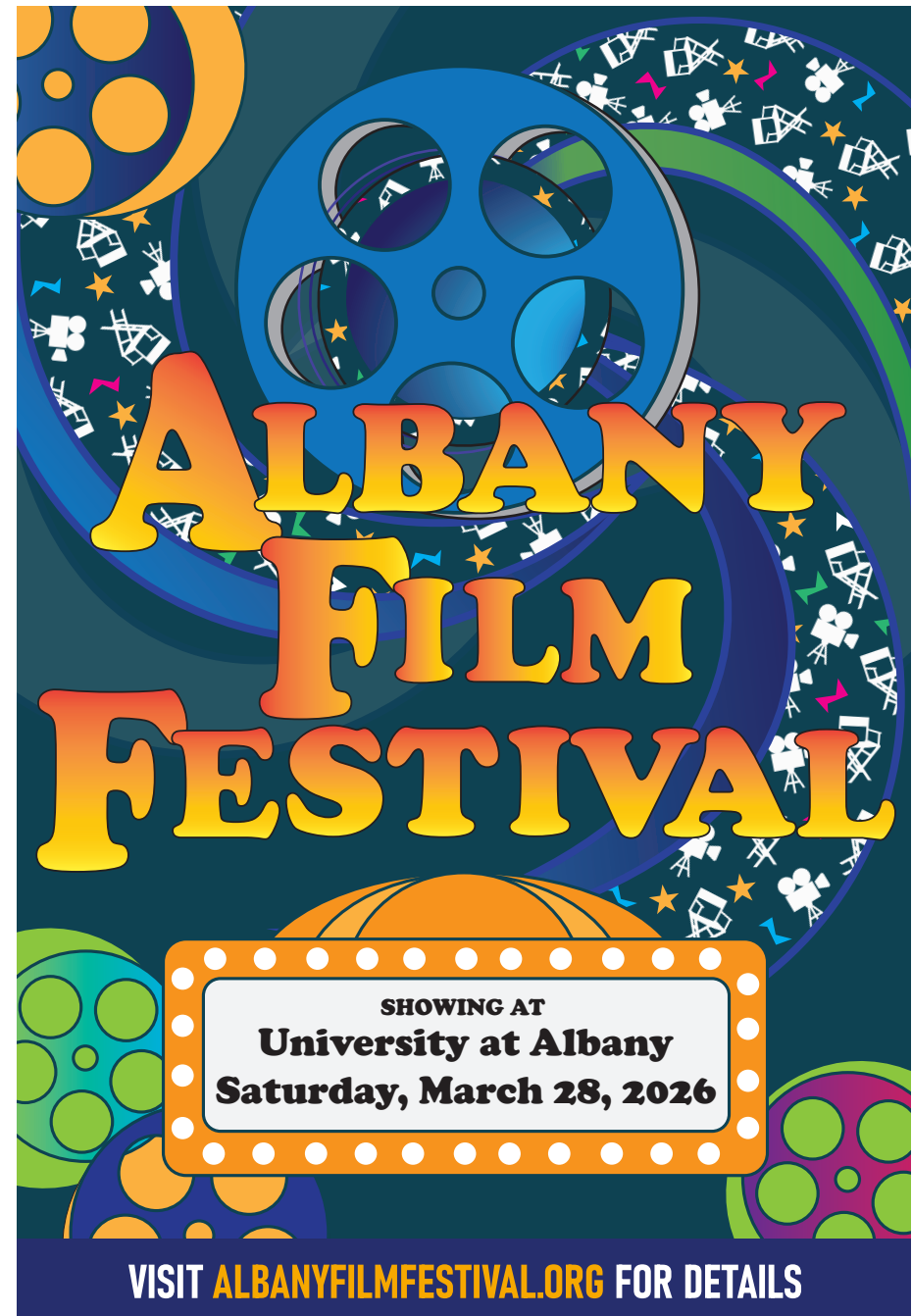
7:30 p.m. — Conversation/ Q&A, with WAMC's Joe Donahue
Page Hall, 135 Western Avenue, Downtown Campus



Ani DiFranco, a pathbreaking and highly original artist, is one of the most influential singer-songwriters of her generation. Her newest book is *The Spirit of Ani: Reflections on Spirituality, Feminism, Music, and Freedom* (2026), an intimate exploration of her personal journey, creative process, spirituality, activism, and evolving consciousness in conversation with coauthor Lauren Coyle Rosen. A Grammy winner and feminist icon, she created her own record label, Righteous Babe Records, in 1990. Her memoir, *No Walls and the Recurring Dream*, was a *New York Times* bestseller, and she is the author of two children's books, *The Knowing* and *Show Up and Vote*. In 2024, she completed a five-month run on Broadway in the role of Persephone in *Hadestown*.

Lauren Coyle Rosen is an award-winning author, artist, singer-songwriter, and cultural anthropologist. Her nonfiction books include *Hannibal Lokumbe* (2024, coauthored with jazz trumpeter Hannibal Lokumbe), *Law in Light* (2024), and *Fires of Gold* (2020). She founded and writes for *The Spiritual Muses* journal and is a fellow at Harvard University. She was formerly a cultural anthropology professor at Princeton University, where she received the President's Award in Distinguished Teaching. Coyle Rosen has also published eight volumes of poetry and art. She is currently at work on her next nonfiction book on female spirituality, *Goddess: A History*. In 2025, she released her first four music albums, including, most recently, *Athena Visions*.

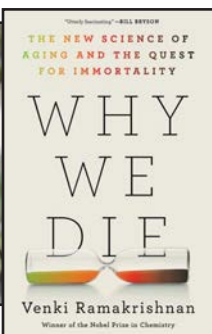
Major support for *The Creative Life* is provided by the University at Albany Foundation.



**ALBANY
FILM
FESTIVAL**

SHOWING AT
University at Albany
Saturday, March 28, 2026

VISIT [ALBANYFILMFESTIVAL.ORG](https://albanyfilmfestival.org) FOR DETAILS



WHY WE DIE

March 31 (Tuesday)

Venki Ramakrishnan

4:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A
Campus Center Ballroom,
Uptown Campus

Followed by post-talk reception

Venki Ramakrishnan, Nobel
Prize-winning structural
biologist, is the author of an

Photo: Kate Joyce and Santa Fe Institute

acclaimed new book for mainstream readers, *Why We Die: The New Science of Aging and the Quest for Immortality* (2025). Bestselling author Bill Bryson (*A Walk in the Woods*) called it, "Utterly fascinating," and said, "Venki Ramakrishnan's ability to take the most challenging subjects and make them clear, enthralling and packed with insights fills me with awe." *LitHub* called him "a knockout writer." Ramakrishnan shared the 2009 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his work on the nature of ribosomes, the molecular machines found in all living cells that synthesize proteins by translating the genetic information carried by messenger RNA.

Cosponsored by The RNA Institute at the University at Albany and the Honors College.

APRIL

Tom Junod

April 7 (Tuesday)

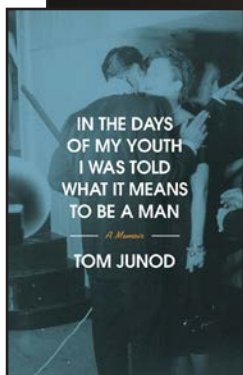
4:30 p.m.

Conversation / Q&A

Multi-Purpose Room,
Campus Center
West Addition,
Uptown Campus

Tom Junod, celebrated
magazine journalist,
UAlbany graduate (Class
of 1980), and winner of
two National Magazine

Awards, will present his new memoir, *In the Days of My Youth I Was Told What It Means to Be a Man* (2026). The book explores his relationship with his father, "Big Lou" Junod, a traveling handbag salesman "who dominated every room he entered, worshipped the sun and the sea, his own bronzed body, Frank Sinatra, and beautiful women." Junod disentangles his memories and feelings about a charismatic, philandering father who tried to mold his son in his image, the many secrets he hid, and ultimately, the true meaning of manhood. Ayad Akhtar called it, "a deeply affecting search for truth, as brave as it is beautiful."



BEING A MAN

2026 ANNUAL MCKINNEY CONTEST GUEST SPEAKER

Hisham Matar

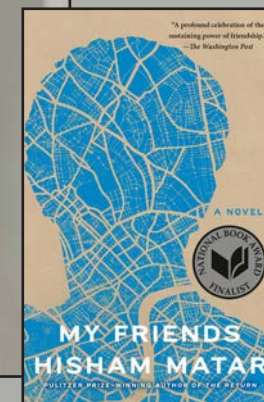
April 9 (Thursday)

7:00 p.m.— Reading and McKinney Writing Contest Awards

Heffner Alumni House,
Rensselaer (RPI), 110 8th St, Troy



Photo: Diana Matar



Hisham Matar, Libyan American and British author, won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for his memoir, *The Return*, about his search for his missing father, a political dissident in Libya. His new novel is *My Friends* (paperback, 2025), a National Book Award finalist. A young man growing up in Benghazi, Libya, embarks on a journey far from home to pursue the life of the mind at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. He makes new friends and experiences profound changes in his sense of self, as he watches the world rapidly transform, politically and culturally, around him. *The Washington Post* reviewer called it, "A profound celebration of the sustaining power of friendship, of the ways we mold ourselves against the indentations of those few people whom fate presses against us."

Sponsored by Rensselaer's Annual McKinney Writing Contest and Reading in partnership with the NYS Writers Institute.

For more information, contact McKinney@rpi.edu

DISRUPTING POLITICS

April 16 (Thursday)

Andrew Yang

7:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A

Page Hall, 135 Western Avenue,
Downtown Campus

Andrew Yang rose to national prominence during the 2020 U.S. presidential campaign, running on a platform promoting “universal basic income,” and a number of libertarian policies, including decriminalizing drugs, data privacy rights, and ending corporate welfare. In 2021, he ran for mayor of New York City. He currently heads a centrist third party, The Forward Party, whose motto is “Not Left. Not Right. Forward.” His new book is *Hey Yang, Where’s My Thousand Bucks?: And Other True Stories of Staggering Depth* (2026). In this frank, often hilarious memoir, the political trailblazer examines America’s breakdown through the lens of his unexpected journey from entrepreneur to presidential candidate.



Photo: Gage Skidmore

THE PROBLEM WITH PLASTIC

April 20 (Monday)

Judith Enck

7:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A

Page Hall, 135 Western Avenue,
Downtown Campus

Judith Enck is the author of *The Problem with Plastic: How We Can Save Ourselves and Our Planet Before It’s Too Late* (2025), a powerful investigation into plastic’s impact on human health and the environment, and how concerned citizens can fight back. *New York Times* columnist David Wallace Wells called it, “A vivid, enraging *cri de coeur* against contamination and the forces that have done the most prolific polluting.” Enck is the founder and president of Beyond Plastics, whose goal is eliminating plastic pollution everywhere. In 2009, she was appointed by President Barack Obama to serve as regional administrator at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. She also served as Deputy Secretary for the Environment in the New York Governor’s Office.

Cosponsored by the Office of Sustainability at UAlbany.



SAVING DEMOCRACY WITH ONLINE TOOLS

April 22 (Wednesday)

Heidi Boghosian

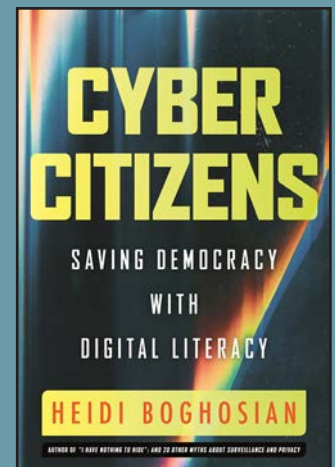
4:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A

Multi-Purpose Room, Campus Center West
Addition, Uptown Campus

Heidi Boghosian, lawyer, radio host, writer, and surveillance and privacy expert, is the author of *Cyber Citizens: Saving Democracy with Digital Literacy* (2025), which argues that our best chance of thriving in the digital era lies in

taking care of our “smart” selves as diligently as we maintain our “smart” devices. She also guides us in learning to master the rights and duties of citizenship, in order to meet the looming challenges to democracy posed by AI and other emerging technologies. For 21 years she has hosted the radio show and podcast *Law & Disorder Radio*. Her previous book was “*I Have Nothing to Hide: And 20 Other Myths About Surveillance and Privacy* (2021).

Major support and funding provided by The Professor Ben-Ami Lipetz NYSWI Fund. Cosponsored by the College of Emergency Preparedness, Homeland Security and Cybersecurity (CEHC).



THE ART OF PODCASTING

Adam Colman and Andrew Leland



April 27 (Monday)

7:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A

Recital Hall, UAlbany Performing Arts Center, Uptown Campus

Join us for a rich conversation about the art of podcasting, and “The Writers Institute” podcast and radio hour, a program that follows writers on adventures into the ultimate literary treasure vault: the audio archives of the New York State Writers Institute. On this show, Jonathan Franzen listens to archival tape of Don DeLillo’s 2009 Writers Institute event,

and Susan Choi hears Grace Paley’s voice for the first time– and that’s just some of what you’ll find in the first season. For season two, out in 2026, the show joins writers listening to the archival sound of Toni Morrison, Lorrie Moore, Francis Ford Coppola, and much more.



Adam Colman, writer and radio producer, hosts and produces “The Writers Institute” show. He grew up in Albany, where NYS Writers Institute events were crucial for his own literary education. He also hosts and produces *Lit Hub*’s “Cosmic Library” podcast, and has produced shows for public radio and *McSweeney’s* “Organist.” His writing has appeared in *The Believer* magazine and *The Boston Globe*, and he is the author of

two books that, like “The Writers Institute” show, zoom across different eras of literary history.

Andrew Leland, writer and podcaster, hosted and produced *McSweeney’s* “Organist,” an unconventional arts-and-culture podcast, for KCRW from 2013-2019. The program offers “a weird, thoughtful and pleasurable journey into literature, music, art, philosophy, the internet, language, and history.” Leland, who is visually impaired, is also the author of *The Country of the Blind: A Memoir at the End of Sight* (2023), a Pulitzer Prize finalist, and one of the “Top 10 Books of 2023” in *Publishers Weekly* and *The Atlantic*.

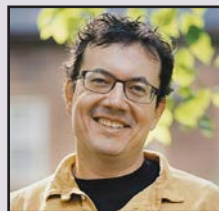


Photo: Gregory Halpern

MAY

LITERATURE IN PERFORMANCE

May 2, 2026 (Saturday)

selected SHORTS
Let us tell you a story.

Performance — 7:00 p.m.

**Main Theatre, UAlbany Performing Arts Center,
Uptown Campus**

Advance tickets: \$15 general public • \$10 students, seniors & UAlbany faculty-staff.

Day of show tickets: \$20 general public • \$15 students, seniors & UAlbany faculty-staff. For tickets, visit www.nyswritersinstitute.org

It’s story time...
for adults

The hit public radio and podcast series comes to town again bringing three great actors and a rich diversity of voices from literature, film, theater, and comedy. Public Radio International’s wildly popular series and podcast goes live in a unique evening of literature in performance. **Stay tuned to nyswritersinstitute.org for more updates on the featured stories and cast.**

THE WOUNDED GENERATION

May 7 (Thursday)

David Nasaw

7:30 p.m. – Conversation / Q&A

Campus Center West Auditorium, Uptown Campus

David Nasaw, major American historian and two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist, is the author of *The Wounded Generation: Coming Home After World War II* (2025). The heroism of the men and women who won WWII may be well documented, but we know too little about the pain and hardships the veterans endured. Contrary to the prevailing narratives of triumph, this new history presents the largely unacknowledged realities the veterans— and the nation— faced, radically reshaping our understanding of American history. *The Wall Street*

Journal said, “As [Nasaw]... makes emphatically clear, a good war is an oxymoron. Just wars there are and necessary wars, but there are no good wars.”

Cosponsored by the History Department of the College of Arts and Sciences at UAlbany.

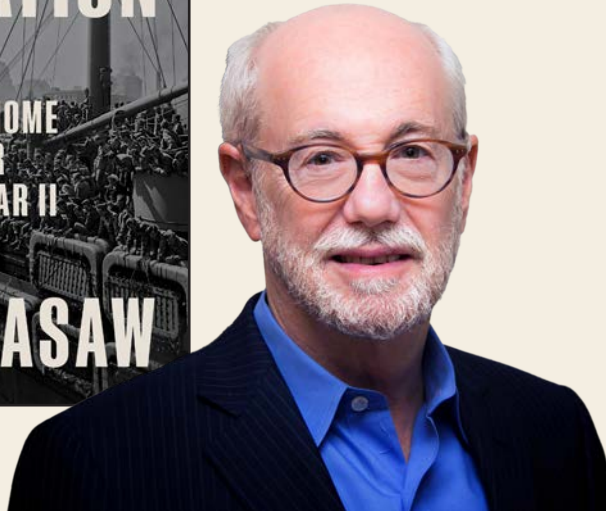
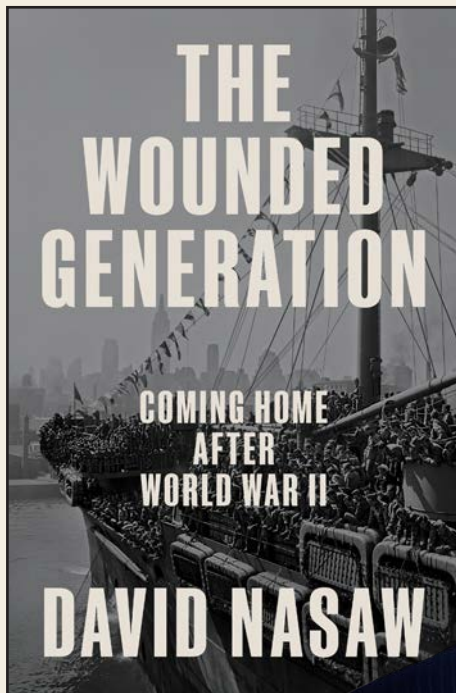


Photo: Alex Irklievski

THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE

May 8 (Friday)

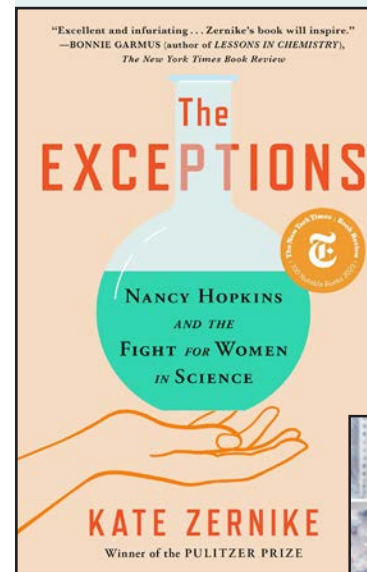
Nancy Hopkins and Kate Zernike

12:00 p.m. – ONLINE EVENT

Visit nyswritersinstitute.org for more details on this online event.



Nancy Hopkins, eminent molecular biologist, is the subject of Kate Zernike's book, *The Exceptions: Nancy Hopkins, MIT, and the Fight for Women in Science* (2023). At age 19, in the early 1960s, Hopkins fell in love with genetics and embarked on what was then considered to be an unusual path for a woman: a career in scientific research. Expecting a pure meritocracy, she faced decades of discrimination, low pay, and lack of recognition, as well as sexual harassment. A professor of biology at MIT, she is celebrated for her research on the genetics of zebrafish and mouse RNA tumor viruses, and for her activism promoting equality for women in science.



Kate Zernike, national correspondent for *The New York Times*, is the author of *The Exceptions: Nancy Hopkins, MIT, and the Fight for Women in Science* (2023), a *New York Times* “Notable Book” about a reluctant feminist who became a hero to generations of women scientists. Angela Duckworth (*Grit*) called it, “A story that I wouldn’t believe except that it’s true, told by the reporter who broke it first.” Siddhartha Mukherjee (*The Emperor of All Maladies*) called it, “Exceptional—a condemnation of the treatment of women in science and a riveting story about the drive to pursue science.” Zernike shared the Pulitzer

Prize for Explanatory Reporting about al-Qaeda in 2002.

Cosponsored by The RNA Institute and Women in Science and Health (WISH) at the University at Albany.



Photo: Harry Zernike

To sign up for email updates and for additional information on events, video clips, and literary news, visit our website at:

www.nyswritersinstitute.org and follow us on **Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Bluesky, and Twitter (X).**

On Campus Parking:

Courtesy parking for Writers Institute events on the Uptown Campus will be available in the **State Quad Student Parking Lot** one hour prior to and one hour after events.

Visitor Parking lots are also available for \$5 per vehicle, though parking spaces are very limited.

For Downtown Campus events, courtesy parking will be available in the **Thurlow Student Parking lot** on Western Avenue. **Handicapped entrances available:** Milne Hall (from Washington Avenue) and Richardson Hall (Page Courtyard, Western Avenue).

For maps of the campuses including parking lots, visit:
www.albany.edu/map

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SPRING 2026
Schedule of Events