

**WE CAN
ENSURE
THERE IS A
FUTURE
BY FIGHTING FOR
PERMANENCE
IN THE
PRESENT**

-Solastalgia, Hannah Lindberg

CHANGING SKIES

CREATIVE NONFICTION

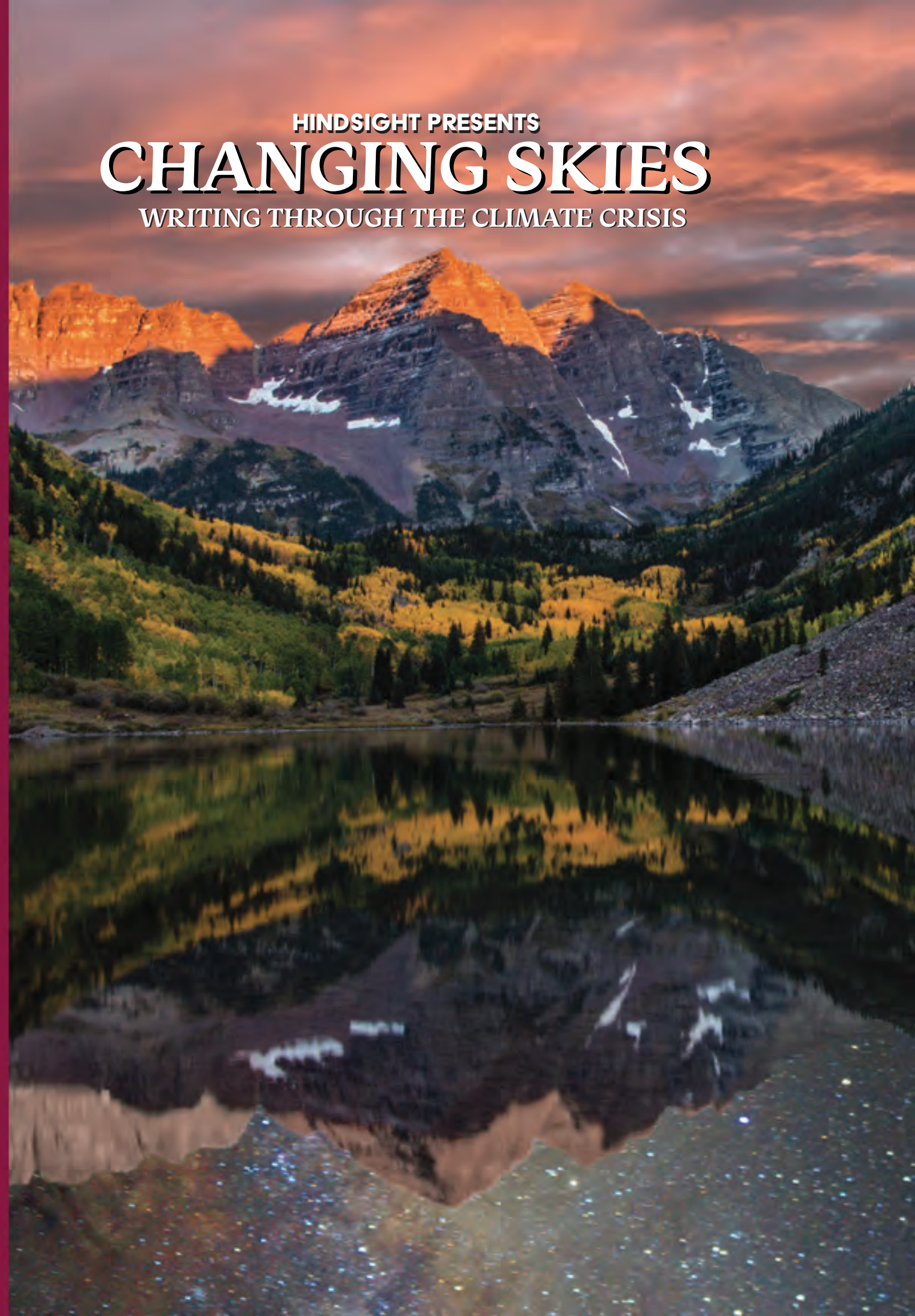
2022



UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

CREATIVE NONFICTION

THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC and MISSION ZERO



HINDSIGHT PRESENTS
CHANGING SKIES
WRITING THROUGH THE CLIMATE CRISIS

CHANGING SKIES
creative nonfiction

2022
VOLUME ONE

Volume One, First Edition, October 2022.
University of Colorado Boulder Imaging Services.

The first volume of CHANGING SKIES is made possible thanks to the support of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric's faculty and staff, especially Program Manager Melynda Slaughter, Professor Steve Lamos, and Director John Stevenson; and grants from the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program, Director Joan Gabriele and Assistant Director Tim O'Neil. The University of Colorado Boulder's Student Organization Allocation Committee generously provides support through our Creative Nonfiction Club. The climate change writing in this issue was provided in part through the University of Colorado Boulder's Program for Writing and Rhetoric and MISSION ZERO contests, founded by Scott King. Additional funding for the production of this issue has been provided by MISSION ZERO, founded by Scott King.

CHANGING SKIES is a subsidiary of HINDSIGHT and The University of Colorado Boulder's Program for Writing and Rhetoric. We acquire First North American Serial Rights, welcoming all artists and writers of creative nonfiction to future issues. See our submission guidelines on our website: CHANGINGSKIES.ORG

Queries: HINDSIGHT, Program for Writing and Rhetoric, UCB 317, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0359; or hindsight@colorado.edu. We only accept submissions through Submittable—See our submissions guidelines at the end of this issue. We are a green journal and prefer electronic submissions and correspondence. Printed on recycled stock and fully recyclable. Single copy costs are \$20.00 per issue in the U.S. and Canada, and \$25.00 outside North America.

Cover Design: Ian Hall
Cover Images: Iona Bruce, Leah Duff, and Jack Elder
Foreword Art: Claire Flippen



FALL STAFF

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Ian Hall	AUDIO-VIDEO PRODUCER Ethan Geiger
ASSISTANT EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Christopher Pham	ART DIRECTOR George Hakala
MANAGING EDITORS Shadia Nagati Marisa Lange	ASSISTANT ART DIRECTOR Melissa Schirmer
ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR Edward Kincaid	DIGITAL PRODUCTION MANAGER Claire Flippen
BUSINESS DIRECTOR Jack Duggan	WEBMASTER Zane Bjornerud
ASSISTANT BUSINESS DIRECTOR Lauren Canepa	EDITORIAL STAFF Eid Almujaibel Chloe Arroyo Chloe Glass Por Jaijongkit Graham Mauer Vivian Pham Kaylie Stenberg Mark Whooley
MARKETING DIRECTOR Julia Cleyman	
ASSISTANT MARKETING DIRECTOR Andy Merrill	

SPRING STAFF

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Charlotte Whitney	DIGITAL PRODUCTION MANAGER Claire Flippen
ASSISTANT EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Liv Wolfe	ASSISTANT DIGITAL PRODUCTION Ian Hall
MANAGING EDITOR Kaylie Stenberg	MARKETING DIRECTOR Julia Cleyman
ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR Shadia Nagati	ASSISTANT MARKETING DIRECTOR Nelly Gruener
EDITORIAL STAFF Eid Almujaibel Juliana Birkenkamp Anna Haynes Marisa Lange Graham Mauer Jesse Ransford Dylan Simpson	MARKETING STAFF Shristi Anand Isaac Oh Liz Wilson
WEBMASTER Zane Bjornerud	AUDIO-VIDEO PRODUCERS Zenghiog Ng Sarah Perkinson
BUSINESS DIRECTOR Riley Spitzenberger	ART DIRECTOR Aidan Jones
	ASSISTANT ART DIRECTOR George Hakala

FACULTY ADVISORS

Jay Ellis
Eric Burger, Dawn Colley, Peter Kratzke, and Jason Lagapa

CONTENTS

MISSION ZERO CLIMATE CHANGE CONTEST ROUND TWO FIRST PLACE
SOLASTALGIA HANNAH LINDBERG 8

THE LAST HAWTHORN TREE KRISHNA SHARMA 12

THOMAS A. J. ADAMS 14

A CONSERVATIVE PROPOSAL SHADIA NAGATI 18

IN THE DEEP WHITE CLAYTON MONTGOMERY 23

DESIDERIUM GRACE SCHWENK 28

MISSION ZERO CLIMATE CHANGE CONTEST ROUND ONE SECOND PLACE
THE RAINS MELIA HAWTHORNE KLINGLER 30

WHEN THE CLIMATE CHANGES, WE CHANGE CHRISTINA EISERT 33

THE SAN JUAN RIVER KATE BAUGH 39

THE LANDING PLACE AN INTERVIEW WITH LONNI PEARCE 44

THE CUBE JAKE SZABO 49

MISSION ZERO CLIMATE CHANGE CONTEST ROUND ONE FIRST PLACE
SEVEN YEARS GRACE DONNER 53

EARTH OVERVIEW MARCUS TEN LOW 56

BURN AREA GEORGE HAKALA 59

A STUDY IN ELUSIVENESS TASHA SMITH 62

NYC, 20TH CENTURY TAMAR SHAPIRO-TAMIR 66

MISSION ZERO CLIMATE CHANGE CONTEST ROUND TWO SECOND PLACE
INDICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: A BARRIER ISLAND CLARA MASSEAU 68

THE LAST SONGBIRD DONALD GUADAGNI 70

DESTRUCTION OF THE AMAZON KIMBERLY CASTELINO 72

WHERE LIGHTNING STRIKES THE SAND HOLLY HAGMAN 76

REMEMBERING WHAT I FIGHT FOR PALOMA SIEGEL 78

WHEN THE FIRES CAME JEANINE PFEIFFER 80

A REAL-LIFE ABILITY TO SEE THESTRALS J. MAAK 84

HAVE YOU LISTENED TO WILDFIRE? J. MAAK 87

MISSION ZERO CLIMATE CHANGE CONTEST ROUND THREE FIRST PLACE
MINING OURSELVES INTO A HOLE MCKINLEY NAHUM 89

THE UNFORTUNATE TRUTH OF SUNSCREEN IN THE CLOUD FOREST ISABELLE SEASE 93

MY PLASTIC DINOSAUR SPENCER STEPANEK 100

THOMAS

A.J. ADAMS

Natural disasters never come at a good time. In December 2017, the searing grind of completing my dissertation had barely abated, and I was still adjusting to life. Yet, the wildfire that would become the largest in California history—for a short time—ignited when extreme winds brought two power lines into contact, showering molten aluminum into the crispy undergrowth in the canyon below. The fire was named Thomas—after the nearest landmark to the ignition site, Thomas Aquinas College—the saint who insisted that faith and reason are not mutually exclusive.

In December, autumn rains would have normally soaked the vegetation, ending the fire season. In the fall of 2017 that did not happen. Scientists have tracked the shrinking California rainy season: as it contracts into shorter timeframes, it lengthens the fire season and focuses intense rain into shorter periods,¹ creating a perfect storm for late autumn wildfires immediately followed by heavy rains, which in turn create mud flows.

This is exactly what happened.

That night, while heading into a late meeting with colleagues, I had to lean into the wind to keep my footing. It blew sand into my eyes and dry leaves into my hair. Two hours passed indoors. When the meeting had ended, I checked my phone. I had an unusual number of text messages, none of which made any sense:

“You can stay at my place if you need to.”

“Stay put. I’ve got the dogs and I’m coming to meet you.”

“Hey, I saw about the fire. Are you ok?”

My colleagues and I pieced together the rapidly-unfolding events. A wildfire had started just to the east. The wind was pushing it rapidly toward town. We had to get to our families and get out. Goodbye. We literally scattered to the winds, in the direction of what matters most.

Outside, the dry gale picked up intensity. I couldn’t smell smoke yet. My spouse pulled into the parking lot just as I was stepping outside. I climbed into the front seat. The dogs were happy to see me, as usual, but anxious. The back seat was piled high with blankets, sleeping bags, dog food. We didn’t yet know where we were going.

I texted back the friend who had offered the four of us a place to stay in her little apartment southwest of town.

Once we arrived, we were still exchanging polite greetings when one of our dogs relieved herself in the middle of the living room floor. Embarrassed, already feeling like

1. Swain, Daniel L. A Shorter, Sharper Rainy Season Amplifies California Wildfire Risk. *Geophysical Research Letters* 48, no. 5 (2021).



a burden, I leapt with cupped hands to catch the rest of the warm lumps before they, too, landed on the carpet. We were all laughing at the absurdity of it—I couldn't myself believe what I had just done—and I made my way to the toilet to flush them.

"Wait—where are you going?! Take it outside!!" She yelled. But it was too late. I washed my hands. All five of us were on edge.

She generously gave us her bed and took the sofa, though we knew none of us would be getting much sleep. This would be the first of many sleepless nights. At dawn, she gently tapped on the door, her voice muffled from concern but sharp as it squeezed through the crack in the door jamb.

"Guys?"

"Yeah?"

"The fire is getting close to here now too. It's time to go."

She was eerily calm, despite the fact that we were all trying to escape the biggest natural disaster any of us had ever experienced. She works for a nonprofit that deploys dogs to search for victims in the eye of the world's biggest crises. Her composure was steadying, strengthening mine.

Bleary-eyed and sleep-deprived, we packed our things. Where would we go next? Whom should we call? Clearly, going west again was not a good idea; if the fire was really this out of control, it would burn all the way to the coast (and it did). I took a chance.

"Meet me at Esther's," I said. "I'll call her on my way."

She answered immediately.

"Hi—are you ok?"

"Can we come over?" I asked, giving up trying to hide the shaking in my voice, finally grasping the magnitude of the situation.

"Come over." It was more of a demand, as if to say, don't think. Don't ask. Just come.

I took a deep breath and gripped the wheel tightly. I was dizzy. It was difficult to focus. The sun was coming up and the birds were at their peak daybreak energy. A small songbird flew directly into the left headlight of the pickup and ricocheted at an angle into the shrubs at the side of the road. None of us saw this coming.

We should have, though. Our area had not burned for more than 30 years, creating a buildup of fuel for an intense wildfire. It had not rained yet this water year, which began in October. The intense, easterly, dry, hot winds, which usually abate by mid-fall, were still here, and were in full force.

We caravanned and took the coast, trying to give the approaching front of the wildfire a wide berth. Cars flowed north on the 101, meeting their daily rush hour appointment for gridlock as if nothing was amiss. Overhead, a reddish-brown sky streak stretched across the highway and out to the ocean. It reminded me of the midcentury horror movie *The Blob*: a sinister, amorphous being wreaking havoc on unsuspecting victims just trying to have a nice time at the local swimming hole. The beach was tranquil, the ocean on a different time sequence than the fire.



We arrived at Esther's. In Oxnard, south of Ventura, we were sure to be safe, separated from the fire by concrete, agricultural fields, freeways. And we were. We walked into the house and while we were exchanging our greetings, as if on cue, our other dog relieved herself on the rug in the middle of the living room floor. This time I neglected to dive for it. I was tired.

"It's alright," Esther reassured us. "This carpet has seen worse than that."

Although we did not yet know it, this would be our home for the next ten days. We had more questions than answers. The local news was not helpful, just reel after reel of reporters standing in front of one burning mansion after another, lamenting the loss of people's stuff. The most useful information came from a community group formed on social media. Our neighbors were reporting from the front lines. Some had decided not to evacuate, to instead weather the firestorm with garden hoses, rakes, and shovels.

As it was December, Esther had decorated her house, with delicious delights in reach. I wasn't very hungry during the evacuation, but one thing I did find appealing was the dish of red and green chocolate candies that sat on the counter. I ate so many, emptied and refilled the dish so many times, that I felt guilty and bought more bags to replace them before we left. I mindlessly popped them like pills while scrolling social media, refreshing, refreshing, hoping for answers that slowly trickled in, then having to separate the alarmist chaff from the information wheat.

Night after night we tossed and turned, lucky if we got a few hours' sleep. Still, we were safe and warm. Each night Esther and I would get together in the living room to eat ice cream and watch DVDs of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. Esther grew up in New York City at the time that the storyline is set. Observing her watching was more fulfilling than watching the show myself. For those couple of hours each night, I was elsewhere. I would see comfort and nostalgia in her eyes and would miss a past I had never even known. ♪





GET PUBLISHED

IN PRINT OR ONLINE

Any writer, anywhere, is eligible to submit creative nonfiction prose and poetry for consideration by CHANGING SKIES. Submissions go through blind review by our editorial staff. We seek only previously unpublished creative nonfiction with a focus on climate change in any of its genres:

- Creative Scholarship
- Narrative Journalism
- Humor
- Lyric Essay—the truth told with a poetic slant
- Portraiture and Memoir
- Graphic Creative Nonfiction
- Digital Compositions and Videos for Web Publication

Artists, send us your work to accompany writing in CHANGING SKIES print, online, or marketing. We accept previously unpublished work including but not limited to visual art, video, or music.

JOIN OUR STAFF

Take the Journal Practicum (WRTG 3090) or sign up for a one, two, or three-credit INTERNSHIP with one of our Faculty Advisors. Internships are offered at both the upper and lower division level. We seek anyone wanting to learn Editorial, Art Direction, Digital Production, Podcasting and Video Production, or the Business and Marketing of a print and online journal of creative nonfiction—no previous experience required. A position on staff fosters professional skills while learning about the exciting genres of creative nonfiction. As a member of staff working on a premier print and online journal of only creative nonfiction, students learn with other students, gaining an unparalleled experience on campus. We exist to serve and further a community of creative nonfiction writers (and artists) across campus.

FIND US ONLINE AT
CHANGINGSKIES.ORG