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UCSB Writing Program names inaugural M. Garren Tinney fellows

Keith Hamm
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A trio of UC Santa Barbara undergraduate students in the midst of book-length writing projects have been selected as the inaugural M. Garren Tinney fellows — an award that comes with financial support and mentoring. Each recipient is a senior in the UCSB Writing Program, majoring in writing and literature in the College of Creative Studies (CCS).

“In reading all of the applications, we were overwhelmed by the talent of our UCSB undergraduate writers and the high quality of all of the submissions,” said Robert Krut, who teaches in the UCSB Writing Program and serves as the committee chair of the newly established M. Garren Tinney Memorial Fund. “It is a wonderful reminder of the excellent writing being done on campus, and the ongoing potential of our undergraduates.”

Sophia Campion’s project is a family novel in the genre of magical realism; her faculty mentor is CCS assistant teaching professor Michelle Grue. Maya Salem is compiling a collection of essays related to her father’s immigration from Lebanon and growing up in a mixed-heritage family; she’s getting guidance from CCS lecturer

and published memoirist Ellen Whittet. And lastly, Elaina Smolin's collection of personal essays promotes a more inclusive and productive discourse on mental health, particularly obsessive-compulsive disorder; Smolin's faculty mentor is CCS writing and literature program coordinator Kara Mae Brown.

The fellowships, Krut noted, aim to support the completion of the students' projects by the end of the academic year, with mentors providing technical and thematic guidance and to help open doors to professional writing and literary opportunities after graduation.

"Each fellowship represents an opportunity for the recipient to complete a unique, often personal, project that will introduce their writing to the world," said Karen Lunsford, chair of the UCSB Writing Program.

Established by Tinney's mother, Donna "Dee Dee" Tinney, the memorial fund honors her son's passion for writing. Garren Tinney, who died in 2019 at the age of 41, studied English at UCSB and journalism at Columbia University. He championed free speech, education and using the written word as a means to communicate the many insights he garnered as a survivor of grief and student of the human condition, according to a press release announcing the inaugural awardees. Tinney worked in politics in Washington, D.C., in entertainment in Los Angeles, and in journalism and public relations in Manhattan. He finally achieved his lifelong dream of becoming a writer in Pasadena, where he completed dozens of short stories, novellas and novels.

The fund is currently accepting applications for the Tinney Travel Awards to help cover costs of research trips and writing conferences. It is open to all UCSB undergraduate students.

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