Writing creatively

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The four tenured professors in the Tulane Creative Writing Program are masters in creating literature that crosses boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, redefining genres and taking risks.

“These are all writers who are at the top of their game,” says Michael Kuczynski, English Department chair. “They’re getting the kinds of accolades only the very best writers are able to capture.”

The program’s director, Peter Cooley, is a poet who has been at Tulane since 1975. In 2014, Cooley released his ninth collection of poetry, *Night Bus to the Afterlife*. In it, he turned his lyrical pen to Hurricane Katrina, capturing the desolation and hope that the storm brought to New Orleans.

Non-fiction writer Thomas Beller, who joined Tulane in 2008, recently received great acclaim for *J. D. Salinger: The Escape Artist*. Critics have raved that this 2014 biography of the reclusive author is a vibrant portrait of Beller as well as of his subject. The book received the New York City Book Award for Biography/Memoir.

Zachary Lazar, at Tulane since 2011, blends fact and fiction in his 2014 novel *I Pity the Poor Immigrant*, in which a fictional journalist investigates real-life gangster Meyer Lansky. The *New York Times* named the book as one of the “100 Notable Books of 2014.” Lazar recently won the John Updike award from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which honors “a mid-career author who has consistently done outstanding work.” In addition to his newest book, the award acknowledges Lazar’s three earlier books: *Aaron Approximately*, *Sway*, and *Evening’s Empire: The Story of My Father’s Murder*.

The newest member of the team, Jesmyn Ward, the Paul and Debra Gibbons Professor, joined the faculty in 2014. She won the 2011 National Book Award for fiction for her second novel, *Salvage the Bones*. Set in a fictional town based on her Mississippi home, the book follows a family devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Her latest work is a 2013 memoir, *Men We Reaped*, in which Ward writes honestly and lyrically about the death of five young men with whom she was close, including her brother. Among other awards, the book received the 2014 Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize for Nonfiction.

The Tulane creative writing faculty are not only outstanding writers but incredible teachers as well. Through their classes, they inspire the next generation of storytellers to draw on their own experiences, breaking new ground, in award-winning, critically acclaimed ways.