

THE COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY MFA PROGRAM: THE REAL DEAL

STUDENT LIFE

Before we get to the extracurricular details, i.e., what you'll be doing when you're not writing, let's get to some information about CSU and MFA student life. The following includes brief descriptions of organizations and events relevant to MFAers, plus some important phone numbers (area code is 970, unless otherwise indicated).

The Organization of Graduate Student Writers

According to its constitution, OGSW serves as a literary group for writers of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction; sponsors public readings by visiting writers as well as by group members; acts as a forum for discussion about graduate student policies and curriculum; and promotes the free exchange of ideas within an active, artistic group of writers at CSU. But those are our *formal* duties.

OGSW is a primary reason why the writing program at CSU maintain such a strong sense of community. Through regular meetings, Open Mic readings at local establishments, reading by the first- and second-year MFA candidates, and other social events (including parties, and, yes, karaoke), OGSW allows students to learn what others in the program are writing, reading, and thinking. In 2002, OGSW will hold its first annual writing retreat in Estes Park--yet another opportunity for students to gather, write, and have just a wee bit of fun in the Great Outdoors.

OGSW also serves as a voice for MFA students within the English Department. Through the organization, students can express their opinions about potential visiting writers, department policies, curriculum, assistantship opportunities, and whatever other issues arise during their writing careers at CSU. In short, OGSW represents the essence of our MFA program: Serious, scholarly, and creative, combined with the ability to have fun.

The Reading Series

The Colorado State University MFA Program and English Department support an extensive and impressive reading series. The series serves the students, so those in the writing program have a strong voice in who they'd like to have come to campus. In addition to a reading, most visiting writers also do a workshop about a craft issue or publishing or about anything of interest to the visiting writer and the students. At CSU, visiting writers spend ample social time with the students, answering questions and offering advice. We encourage MFA students to become involved in the reading series and to make it an essential part of their graduate program; it's yet another opportunity to learn about writing and writers.

Recent visiting writers include: Antonya Nelson, Robert Boswell, Arnost Lustig, Bei Dao, Alison Deming, Lois-Ann Yamanaka, John Yau, Robin Becker, Evan Boland, Carole Maso, Jack Collum, Yusef Komunyakaa, Jewell Parker Rhodes, Wendy Rawlings, Tomaz Salamun, Brian Evenson, Erika Krouse, and Akilah Oliver. Visiting writers read from their work, and grad students often have the opportunity to go to meals with them and attend a workshop run by the writer.

Student Groups

Asian/Pacific American Student Services www.colostate.edu/Depts/APASS	970-491-6154
Black Student Services	491-5781
El Centro Student Services www.colostate.edu/elcentro	491-5722
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Services www.colostate.edu/Depts/glbts	491-4342
Hillel Jewish Student Organization http://hillelcolorado.org	491-2080
Native American Student Services www.sc.colostate.edu/nass	491-1332
Resources for Disabled Students www.colostate.edu/Depts/RDS	491-6385
Women's Resource Center	491-6384

Renter's Information

Off-Campus Student Services	491-2248
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THE REST OF IT

Sure, we have an outstanding faculty, challenging academic program, and superb students, but the CSU MFA Program also boasts a setting to die for. Fort Collins, Colorado, and the surrounding area, including Denver, offer students rich recreational (how does America spell "skiing"?), cultural (literary readings almost every night), and intellectual (four major university campuses within a sixty-mile radius) opportunities.

OUR TOWN

You've seen the brochure with the mountains, but have you seen the Swetsville Zoo? The Fort Collins Trolley? Alpine Fun-tier? Granted, the mountains and ski lodges might provide a jet-set snow-club setting full of hip young people going 20 mph down fresh powder, but can such posh resorts boast steel dinosaurs, more microbreweries per capita, or a downtown area which inspired Disney's Main Street USA? After all, while you might have the chance to escape to the mountains a few times during your graduate career, most of your time will be spent east of the Foothills, in Fort Collins.

Ranked 10th on A & E Network's "Best Cities to Have it All" in 1999, ranked 1st in *Money Magazine's* "Top Ten Places to Retire" in 2000, and *Reader's Digest* 3rd "Best City in the Country to Raise a Family" in 1997, Fort Collins easily lives up to its nickname, "The Choice City."

In a 1997 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Richard Francaviglia quotes Fort Collins native Harper Goff, who designed Disney's "Main Street USA," as saying that the Fort Collins of his youth was "a very prosperous town. We had banks that looked like banks, you know, and there was a Victorian city hall." Francaviglia confirms that the Old Town area of Fort Collins "does indeed possess many of the distinct features seen along Disney's Main Street, including ingeniously angled intersections, the park-like circle around which the town's streetcars looped, and the prominently positioned railroad depot." If you take College Street north to Magnolia and continue on to LaPorte, you'll see some of the same features Goff describes. (For more information on "Main Street USA," aka old Fort Collins: <http://www.thrillmountain.com/disney/art/art-11.html>)

Near Coopersmith's on Mountain Avenue just east of College, you'll also see a steel dinosaur looming over the bike racks near an entrance to Old Town Square. This is the work of Bill Swets, a welder with a lot of spare time who constructed an entire zoo of metal creatures aptly named the "Swetsville Zoo." His first sculpture was a buzzard with a shovel for folded wings and bicycle fork legs. From there, he went on to build various animals using tractor parts, rebar, and whatever piece of scrap metal he could find. All of the sculptures on Swets's 2.3 acres of land outside Fort Collins are made entirely of recycled materials. Be warned, though: the alien section inside is a little spooky. All in all, though, the Swetsville Zoo makes for a cheap date--it's free. (For more information on the Swetsville Zoo: <http://hotwired.lycos.com/dispatch/95/46/index1a.html>)

Besides cruising through American kitsch, what else is there to do in Fort Collins? While the following is not an exhaustive list of social and leisure opportunities in Fort

Collins, we hope the lists and links below will give you some ideas about a grad student's life in the city. Of course, one's free time should always be spent writing, but when the muse has retired for the day, check out the collection of restaurants, bars, theatres, bookstores, and other venues below.

For more general information on Fort Collins:

<http://www.downtownfortcollins.com/eat.cfm>

http://www.fcchamper.org/Sub_snapshot.asp

For *The Coloradoan's* "Best of Fort Collins" listings:

http://www.coloradoannews.com/bestof/bestof_intro.html

Old Town

The Vault--Blues-themed bar set in an old bank building. A great place in winter with fireplace and comfy chairs. One of two great jukeboxes in Fort Collins: lots of Billie Holliday, John Lee Hooker, Parliament, Johnny Cash, etc.

Surfside 7--Sidewalk surfing bar. Great jukebox, and they actually have a "Budget Beer Night." Currently boasts one of the best wait-persons in Fort Collins.

Coopersmith's--Brew their own beer, pub and "pool side." Fancy pub cuisine featuring black bean raviolis, a selection of burgers, tuna and chicken sandwiches. Shoot pool by the hour. Try the Sidga Chili beer, a grad-student favorite.

Rasta-Pasta--Huge spicy portions of Jamaica-flavored cuisine you can easily share with a friend or two, or three. Good vegetarian options; bands on Friday and Saturday nights.

Rio Grande--Mexican restaurant with the best margaritas in town (for very good reasons, they have a three-margarita limit). Usually packed close to the weekend.
(<http://riograndeftcollins.citysearch.com>)

Ciao Vino--A newer wine bar (for when the student loan check comes in). Fancy conversation and knowledgeable waitstaff. On average, most Fort Collinsians go casual, but that wouldn't do here.

Elliot's Martini Bar--A fancy martini bar. This would be where you wear the black pants and bring a cigarette holder. Extensive mixed-drink menu.

Just Off the Tracks: Laurel and College Aves., Mason Street

Avogadro's Number--Bar and "granola" cuisine. A favorite venue for poetry slams, open mics, bluegrass jams, readings and OGSW (Organization of Graduate Student Writers) meetings. Home of the \$1 Olympia beer.

Pickle Barrel--Hot and cold, very yummy subs, good french onion soup and bench seats outside. Popular post-workshop pub with Mason jar beers.

Just North of Campus

Pizza Casbah--New York slices for low dough. \$8 for a large pie; good pizza to eat cold for breakfast the next morning.

Toy's Thai--Good Phad Thai. Cheaper than other Thai restaurants in town. You will talk to the owner during your visit--count on it.

Woody's--Right on the edge of campus. Best pizza buffet in town. \$1 wood-fired pizza slices, \$1 microbrews on Thursdays.

Big City Burrito--Burritos the size of your head. Also check out their other restaurant, Big City Burgers. Try the shoelace fries. Mmm-good.

West Side

Diamond's Billiard--One of the best places to karaoke in Fort Collins. Trust us, we know. We've tried them all.

C. B. Pott's--Brewpub with pub/pool side set-up.

Sullivan's--Good burgers, sandwiches, and drink deals. Go on a non-frat or sorority night to avoid carousing undergrads. You might call ahead to find out when they hit the place.

Coffee Bars

Starry Night--A Van Gogh-inspired mural of Fort Collins on the wall and a gas stove with a hearth. Nice place to eavesdrop for material.

Déjà vu--College and Laurel. Cozy atmosphere and big muffins.

Java Plaza--On College just south of LaPorte. Quieter than Starry Night and not as busy, it can be a good place to study.

Coffee Connection--West Side. You might see a group of robot-battle guys there. Who knows?

Jon's Blue Note--West Oak Street in Old Town. Like having coffee in someone's basement, but in a good way. What aficionados might call a "true" coffee bar.

Starbucks--Yes, we have a few, but who needs them with this line-up?

Microbrewery Tours

New Belgium Brewery--Home of Fat Tire, 1554, Sunshine Wheat, and Abbey Ale. After the tour, or anytime during business hours, the bar's open with free tastings of all their current beers. Be sure to bring a designated driver. www.newbelgium.com

O'Dell's Brewery--90 Shilling, Easy Street Wheat, and Levity Ale are their more popular brews. www.odells.com

H.C. Berger Brewery--Yet another microbrewery in Fort Collins. www.hcberger.com

Budweiser--Pet the Clydesdales and the Dalmatians. Bring nose plugs, though: This tour shows how beer brewing can be a stinky business. www.budweisertours.com/docs/ftcolns.htm

Festivals

Colorado Brewer's Festival--Fort Collins, CO
<http://celebrator.com/9408/COBrwrFest.html>

Mike The Headless Chicken Festival--Fruita, CO
<http://www.miketheheadlesschicken.org/>

Scottish-Irish Highlands Festival--Longs Peak, CO
<http://www.scotfest.com/>

New West Fest--Fort Collins, CO. Koko Taylor, Kansas (yes, "Dust in the Wind"), and The Cowboy Junkies played here last year.
<http://www.downtownfortcollins.com/4.htm>

Cheyenne Frontier Days--Cheyenne, WY. Rodeo action an hour away from Fort Collins. Bring your boots and your appetite for red meat.
<http://www.cfdrodeo.com/>

Oktoberfest--Fort Collins, CO. Old Town is overrun with long community tables, bratwurst, sauerkraut, and *Bier*.

Bookstores

Jade Creek Books--On College between LaPorte and Mountain. Locally-owned independent bookstore in Old Town that sponsors the CSU Reading Series and MFA readings. The best place to buy and order books.

Old Corner Bookstore--Used books in Old Town.

Barnes and Noble--South of Horsetooth between College and Mason. They carry the titles, but their poetry offerings are thin.

Music Venues

The Aggie Theater
<http://www.aggietheater.com/>

The Starlight
<http://www.thestarlight.com/>

Mishawaka Amphitheatre
<http://www.mishawakaconcerts.com/>

Movies

CSU Film Series--Art films during the school year. The 2001-2002 season brought *Before Night Falls*, *Gleaners*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, and others. \$2 for CSU students, \$3 for non-students.

Cinema Saver--\$2 for previously-viewed movies. Actually a nice, cheap theater.

All other seats about \$6 around town with student ID. Look at <http://www.frii.com/community/movies/> for the Carmike 10, Cinemark 16, Campus West, and Holiday Twin Drive-In theater listings and showtimes.

Drama

Black Box Theatre--CSU student-produced, student-cast playhouse.

Lincoln Center--Small Box Theatre, Concert Series, musicals and comedians. The bigger acts usually come through here.

Performing Arts Center--In the works at CSU. This promises to be an elegant setting for nationally-known dance, theater, concerts, etc.

Bas Bleu-- A wonderful old theater in Old Town. A venue for some new and innovative plays; they also sponsor poetry and prose readings.

Shopping

Old Town--Offers many varied shopping opportunities, including thrift stores, vintage clothing stores, home and houseware stores, boutiques, curio shops, toy stores, costume shops, and pretty much anything else you might need.

The Rest of the City--If you crave the comfort of national chains (Target, K-Mart, Old Navy, Bed, Bath, and Beyond, etc.), we have more than our share south of campus. And if you need to get in touch with your suburban roots, try the Foothills Fashion Mall; it has The Gap, JC Penny, Sears, and other mallish standards, including Orange Julius.

Bowling

Monte Carlo Lanes--North of LaPorte on College. Do not forget your socks. Old-school atmosphere with the carpeted walls to prove it; it's a good place to mingle with high schoolers and townies. Also to bowl.

Playing with Large Walking Mice

Chuck E. Cheese--Need to work out your hostilities? Try the video arcade or Whack-A-Mole here. They also have pizza, but note--this is not listed under restaurants.

For more information about Fort Collins's nightlife, try this link to *The Coloradoan's* "About Fort Collins" site:

<http://www.coloradoan.com/answer/2001answer/nightlife.html>

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

Fort Collins is the gateway to any kind of recreational activity. Partly because of our location--where the plains meet the mountains--we're the starting point for those who want to hike, fish, ride, kayak, rock climb, bird watch, swim, ski, or snowshoe. What follows are some recreational highlights, many right in the city, others only an hour's drive from Fort Collins; you'll soon learn why Coloradans spend an inordinate amount of time outdoors (the 350-plus days of sunshine a year don't hurt). So remember: When you're not writing, you can be out frolicking.

Fort Collins and Close By

Starting from inside the city limits: Fort Collins has an extensive city park system, encompassing walking and biking trails that circle and dissect the city, several

public golf courses, a real piece of prairie, and many wildlife areas. Go to enormous City Park, on Mulberry Street, for picnics, paddle boating on the small lake, touch football, or golf on its adjacent course. You can find trails along the Poudre River (which runs through Fort Collins) and along Spring Creek, which runs past nesting waterfowl and fox dens; both trails cross the city for several miles and are perfect for walking, running, and biking.

More wild but still nearby is Horsetooth Mountain Park, 4000 acres of rocky reservoir shoreline and backcountry available for horseback riding, hiking, and camping. For more information on Horsetooth, call the Larimer County Parks Department, 970-226-4517.

A fifteen-minute drive from town is Lory State Park. Lory has two dozen hiking trails, a livery stable for guided rides, fishing areas, some of the best bird watching in the county, and a spectacular display of wildflowers in spring and early summer. Find out more about Lory by calling the Colorado Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, 970-226-6641.

Going a Little Farther

North and west of Fort Collins, about fifty miles, is Red Feather Lakes, by all accounts the area's premier fishing area--primarily for fly fishing (there are some experts here!). To find out more about fishing opportunities as well as camping, mountain biking, and hiking in the Red Feather Lakes area, call the Ranger Station, 970-881-2937.

About 70 miles west of Fort Collins is the Colorado State Forest, full of hiking trails, but also the site for the Never Summer Nordic Yurt System. Never Nordic provides a series of sleeping huts for cross-country skiers in the winter and mountain bikers in the summer; "yurting" is an unusual backcountry experience. Colorado State Forest: 970-723-8366; Never Nordic: 970-484-3903.

One hundred and five miles west of Fort Collins is the Arapahoe National Wildlife Refuge, a sanctuary for nearly 200 species of birds. The highlight at Arapahoe is the elaborate spring mating ritual of the sage grouse. For more on Sage Grouse Tours and on the Refuge itself, call the Refuge Manager, 970-723-8202.

Finally, about an hour's drive east of Fort is the Pawnee National Grassland, home of the amazing Pawnee Buttes. The Buttes rise to about 300 feet out of a kind of moonscape smack in the middle of rolling plains. The Buttes provide nesting areas for several birds of prey, including golden eagles, prairie falcons, and sharp-shinned hawks. Trails, wildflowers, and rare prairie grasses abound. For more information, call the Ranger Station, 970-353-5004.

Rocky Mountain National Park

Over 400 square miles of scenic wilderness, with 147 lakes, hundreds of miles of hiking trails, Alpine tundra, and unparalleled wildlife: bald eagles, elk (come in the early fall to hear the males bugle, or call for mates), bighorn sheep, coyotes, even some shy bears and mountain lions. Rocky Mountain is little over an hour's drive from Fort Collins, but it's a world away in topography, even weather. For one thing, the Park is where amateurs and pros go to climb mountains: Long's Peak at 14,255 feet or Twin

Sisters Peak at 11,428 feet are challenging, yet doable even for novices. In Rocky Mountain, you can also pursue the usual panoply of Colorado activities such as hiking, camping, backpacking, mountain biking, horseback riding, rock climbing, and snowshoeing and ice fishing in the winter. Call the Headquarters Visitors Center at 970-586-1206, for more information.

What Else? Oh, Yeah, Skiing

Thousands of tourists come to Colorado every year just to get some of our spectacular powder. But you'll be living here, so you barely have to travel in order to recreate that ski brochure photo you've been admiring since childhood. This is simply the best skiing anywhere.

You've probably already heard of some of our big name resorts: Vail (a three and a half hour drive from Fort Collins with \$60 lift tickets), and the place no MFA students could afford, Aspen (a six hour drive from Fort Collins). A bit closer and a bit cheaper lies Summit County. Here you'll find Breckenridge, Keystone, Copper Mountain, and A-Basin in about a two and half hour drive. These places all compete for Front Range snow lovers, so they offer some great deals. A season pass to Copper Mountain runs about \$250, and a pass that includes Keystone, Breckenridge, A-Basin, and a couple of days at Vail is about \$300. If you won't get up enough to make use of a season pass, there are also countless deals offered throughout the year. For example, Copper Mountain offered a four-day ticket for \$75 during the 2000-2001 season. With a one-day ticket running at least \$50, that's a great deal. The mountains in Summit County have nice green terrain for beginners, loads of blue runs, and respectable bowls, tree-filled steeps, moguls, and half-pipes for anyone looking to tear it up. For some great expert terrain, of the kind that will give you vertigo when standing at the top of the slope, look to Crested Butte (about a five or six hour drive, but a weekend there is worth it when they have some new snow) or Steamboat (a three or four hour drive). For those looking to cut down on drive time, Loveland ski area is less than an hour from Fort Collins.

For those who don't wish to go down big hills, there are many cross-country trails around; some of these are hiking trails through the Arapahoe National Forest that are used for skiing in the winter--and they're free! There are also opportunities for outdoor or indoor ice skating, snowmobiling, snow shoeing, and ice climbing. And if the relatives are in town and you want to take them to a postcard-worthy winter setting, go on a local sleigh ride or visit quaint, Victorian-style shops in Breckenridge and Steamboat Springs.

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY

When you've exhausted all of the things that Fort Collins has to offer, Denver is only an hour's drive away. It's a city rich in culture, with a lively nightlife.

For anyone interested in the arts, Denver has plenty of theaters and museums. The Denver Performing Arts Complex has multiple theaters, allowing for many different shows in one night. Here, you can find touring Broadway musicals, plays performed by the Tony-winning Denver Center Theater Company, Colorado Symphony concerts, and

dance from the Colorado Ballet or other dance companies. The DPAC even has student rates, up to half-off regular ticket prices. The Colorado Symphony is not your stuffy big-city orchestra, either; they put on a jazz-influenced Handel's Messiah every year at Christmas that gets its audience literally dancing in the aisles. Acclaimed modern dance troupe Cleo Parker Robinson Dance performs at DPAC as well. If you're interested in more experimental theater, Denver is also home to the LIDA Project and the HorseChart Theater Company, among others. Museums: Denver's Natural History Museum and the city's Botanical Gardens keep visitors up on fossils, flora, fauna, and everything in between. The Denver Art Museum will satisfy cravings for the visual arts, and it's FREE to Colorado residents on Saturdays. If you're in the mood to play (or if your kids are), there's the Children's Museum, chock-full of hands-on fun. If you're looking for wildlife, check out Ocean Journey or the Denver Zoo.

If you're in the mood for low(er) culture, well, Denver's got that, too. National comedians and a local improv group perform at Comedy Works. If you're interested in music, you can find big national acts at the Pepsi Center, Invesco Field at Mile High, Fiddler's Green, the Bluebird, Paramount, Ogden, Gothic or Fillmore Theaters. If you want to catch some local music, check out the punk rock at 15th Street Tavern, various acts at the Soiled Dove, rock at Herman's Hideaway, or jazz at several different bars. At Red Rocks, you can listen to your favorite music in a natural outdoor amphitheater, surrounded by looming red rock walls. Red Rocks also has a summer movies and music series, in which a local band plays before a classic movie such as *Casablanca* or *Star Wars*. And speaking of movies, Denver's got three theatres that show independent films: The Mayan, The Esquire, and Chez Artiste.

Of course, Denver has a thriving night club and bar scene, if that's more your style. You can dance the night away in the remodeled sanctuary of the Church, or check out the posh Alley Cat, or the cheap and dirty Deadbeat Club. LoDo, the moniker for Lower Downtown, is a revived former warehouse district filled with bars.

Sports fans will flock to Denver for the big games. Check out the Denver Broncos at the brand new Invesco Field at Mile High Stadium, or the Colorado Avalanche (Stanley Cup winners) at the Pepsi Center. Denver is also home to the Colorado Rockies (Coors Field) and the Denver Nuggets (Pepsi Center). These two teams haven't been as successful as the Broncos or Avalanche, but their games are still a good time, and tickets are cheap. Colorado's major league soccer team, the Colorado Rapids, also plays at Mile High.

Last but not least is The Tattered Cover, one of the country's best independent bookstores and a highlight of any trip to Denver. With two locations, both with three stories and a basement chock full of books, and friendly staff who will order anything for you (and usually get the book within a week or two), the Tattered Cover is a reader's and writer's heaven. Best of all, the store hosts readings by nationally- and locally-known writers several times a week.