

January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020

Professor Adam Banks, Faculty Director  
Program in Writing and Rhetoric  
Sweet Hall, Third Floor  
590 Escondido Mall  
Stanford, CA 94305-3069

Dear Professor Banks and Members of the Search Committee:

Thank you for considering my application to be a lecturer in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric. I earned my Ph.D. in English from UC Santa Barbara in 2018, and I am currently in my second year as a Postdoctoral Fellow in BU's Honors College. In the Honors College, I teach writing courses, serve on the first-year writing curriculum development team, and lead a monthly interdisciplinary pedagogy workshop. At UCSB, I taught first-year academic composition in the Writing Program from 2013-2014, as well as public speaking and writing-centric literature courses from 2013-2018.

The two-semester first-year writing course I currently teach at BU mirrors the structure of PWR courses in a number of ways. Students complete a sequence of three analytic and research based assignments each semester: this fall, these included analytic essays, arts reviews based on a visit to the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art, and oral pitches for argumentative papers. In the spring, the course focuses on writing research papers, which are re-mediated into multimedia texts for non-academic audiences. These assignments are scaffolded through short in-class and take-home assignments, and produced as a series of drafts that undergo peer, self, and instructor review. Each semester, students in this course meet with me for three one-on-one tutorials, where they receive verbal feedback, and develop their confidence utilizing the valuable resource of office hours.

I was trained to teach writing through the approaches of Rhetorical Genre Studies, which I continue to draw on. I promote genre awareness as a tool for success both within and across disciplines and beyond the academy, assisting students in recognizing they are already skilled practitioners of this method. For instance, early in the semester, I give my classes decontextualized quotidian texts including personal ads, cough medicine labels, and biology textbooks—asking them to recognize these familiar genres through their rhetorical features, before performing a similar analysis on the genres the course requires. When supervising BU students developing senior honors capstone projects in their home disciplines, I ask them to perform similar rhetorical analyses on the genres they plan to produce. I have found that students feel empowered and engaged when asked to write for audiences beyond the classroom, and I have worked with the Wikipedia Education organization to develop assignments in which students re-mediate their research papers into Wikipedia entries.

I strive to respond to feedback and react quickly to classroom challenges. Last year, mid-way through the semester with an engaged group of first-years, I realized that, despite the seminar-style seating and the students' willingness to speak, they weren't looking at each other—instead directing all their ideas towards me. When verbal reminders to engage with one another didn't spark a change, I recognized that discussion is a skill that can be scaffolded and practiced, like any other. I began by giving students the transcript of a scholarly round-table, and asked them to stage a reading of it. The next week, I handed out discussion prompts, and tasked each student with leading the conversation around a question, while I kept my eyes down and took notes. The change was remarkable: in the later part of the semester, students consistently responded to one another, without relying on my approval. I like to think I'm always this responsive to the problems I recognize in the classroom, and

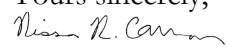
the feedback I receive. I solicit feedback through mid-term evaluations, so that I can make adjustments during the semester. I seek out pedagogical training opportunities, including a certificate earned through UCSB's Summer Teaching Institute, coursework in writing studies, and ongoing efforts to keep abreast of books and podcasts on inclusive and effective teaching practices. I am excited about the pedagogical support and training provided to lecturers in PWR.

My experience teaching at a public university in California and in the city of Boston means my classes have always included students from a broad range of cultural, economic, and linguistic backgrounds. I have experience teaching writing to students at a range of English language proficiency levels. I am a first-generation traditional college student, and demystifying the expectations of the classroom and university are important parts of my pedagogy. With first-year students, this includes making assignment expectations explicit and detailing appropriate practices for communicating with faculty on my syllabus. I believe models are key, and provide examples of analysis produced by peers and professionals. Last year, as my students scaffolded research papers across a range of disciplines with proposals, abstracts, and annotated bibliographies, I mirrored their process—sharing samples of these genres from my own writing and that of my colleagues.

My own research draws on new modernist studies, periodical studies, and citizenship studies to examine the relationship between material culture and national identity in transatlantic, twentieth-century literature. I focus on the familiar, yet ill-defined, figure of the expatriate: sharpening a definition of this term. Twenty-first century migration relies on legal and technological systems nascent in the early-twentieth, and my work draws a through-line from the twentieth-century experience of displacement to today, when there are life or death stakes in distinguishing the “asylum seeker” from the “refugee” or the “migrant.” This work engages with a broad range of written genres, including creative and technical texts, and I find that the pairing of text-based scholarship with material culture resonates with students, and provides memorable learning opportunities. This year, while considering minority disenfranchisement, my class visited the library archive to look at documents from human and voting rights movements around the globe, including letters from Mahatma Gandhi and pamphlets from the Wounded Knee protests, putting these documents in dialog with one another in written responses. In a previous course, students used an 1841 encyclopedia, the 1840 census, and abolitionist pamphlets to produce analytic footnotes for the 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, developing their ability to see writing as a collaborative process that engages with and integrates others’ work, while honing their powers of research and critique. I use reflective writing to promote knowledge transfer, and these archival experiences are frequently cited as the point when students internalized the course’s overarching ideas.

I take real pleasure in being an active member of a departmental community. I have been involved in outreach programs to recruit underrepresented students at both UCSB and BU; instituted an annual voter registration drive in the Honors College; and recently organized an interdisciplinary panel on “Passports and Documentation,” which brought together scholars and immigration activists. I have initiated and led pedagogy and professionalization workshops for graduate students and postdocs at UCSB and BU and am excited about the opportunity to continue this mentoring work as a lecturer in PWR. I would look forward to contributing to student and faculty success in PWR and beyond.

I would be delighted to speak with you further about this position. I can be reached at (831) 539-8493 or [nissaren@gmail.com](mailto:nissaren@gmail.com).

Yours sincerely,  
  
Nissa Ren Cannon