CITY BRINK
Harry S Truman College Literary Magazine

Issue 1 Fall 2012
Student Editors

Alaa Wasfie & Zaien A. Wasfi

Faculty Editors

Julie D. Dockery & Joshua Thusat

Cover Art

Bernadetaa Zawiejska

Graphic Artist

Emily S. Belknap
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Dear readers and fellow students,

Firstly, we would like to thank all the participants and the people who made the literary magazine in your hands possible. Having an active voice for students to express their diversity and creativity to unite us together was and will continue to be our greatest motivation for working on this project. We hope that every page of this literary magazine will deepen the sea of knowledge of our readers, open the doors of encouragement by putting their pens to paper, and create new worlds. And this is what our magazine strives to achieve: the ability to gain original perspectives on life with all its diverse collections of writings. We hope you enjoy it!

Alaa Wasfie and Zaien Wasfi
City Brink Student Editors
Greetings!

I am so excited about *City Brink Literary Magazine*. This publication will allow readers to enjoy the artistic and scholastic creations of people whose backgrounds and experiences span the gamut. It’s a real opportunity to observe that no matter the demographic or psychographic traits placed upon us, we are all breathing, living human beings who share the same pain, joy, love, strife, uncertainty, failure and triumph. What’s more, this is an egalitarian forum for students, faculty, staff, and community members to come together as contemporaries, unrestricted by titles and accomplishments, for the sole purpose of expressing oneself authentically and creatively. I truly hope you enjoy the voices inside the works and let your minds evoke storylines, feelings, sentiments and images that carry on to the *brink* and *far beyond* these pages.

--Julie D. Dockery, Communications
He shall come to the Brink of a Precipice. George Berkeley

Sometimes, on the very brink of certainty, I failed. M.W. Shelley

And now, Reader, I introduce you to the new literary magazine of Truman College, City Brink, which presents creative work from students, faculty, staff and community members. Allow me to set the stage for this inaugural publication by discussing the name. You may, naturally, interpret City Brink any way you like, but I will share several interpretations of my own. First of all, students are often on the brink, which could mean you are preparing to transfer to another school, move in to a job, or simply return to a job after developing new skills. Secondly, the magazine might refer to Uptown, which is at the edge of Lake Michigan, and nearly at the edge of the city. Also, many of us often pursue education so that we can move from the brink, or margins, of life to a center, where our voices can be heard. Finally, creativity often exemplifies our seeking, expressive selves as we give flesh to ideas—ideas that are merely at the brink of being discovered.

I thought the Shelley quote above was appropriate, as it comes from Frankenstein, which has the subtitle of the Modern Prometheus. As Dr. Frankenstein goes about his studies, he loses track of time, missing even the passing of the seasons; and in the end, what he creates is monstrous. He is consistently “on the very brink of certainty,” but his failed creation is a successful reminder of our humanity. My hope is that our magazine will remind us that, as we seek knowledge and skill, we should give voice to our time, and in our creativity, look up from our studies to mark its passage.

--Joshua Thusat, Communications
An everyday poem

by Hulliams Kamlem

There is a rooster in my phone that awakes with the dawn
It sings and roars and moans until my eyes roll upward
Consciousness or something else retells me I’m alive
Once again there is this first thought…

Today is going to kill me

Emptiness of my heartbeat in the shadow of a long gone kiss
Howlin’ Wolf’s blues ballad pours sugar in my sour and gray sky
The last part of my dream looks for her hair on my pillows
Gillette – Old Spice – Cheerios – Sensodyne – Yves St-Laurent
Then out into the world of air gasoline
Once again there is this first thought…

Today is going to kill me a little bit more

Vroom – Foster Avenue – Vroom – Clark Street – Vroom – Wilson Avenue

The wristwatch dictates my steps and swallows grievance
Class atmosphere and someone upright with hard talc between thumb and index
Books open on page six hundred nineteen

The title says “Because I Could Not Forget My Love”

Today is going to kill me a little bit more than yesterday did

Chicago, April 18 2012.

About the Author: I'm Hulliams Kamlem, born in 1982 in Cameroon. I have been a Truman student since fall, 2011, and I am working toward a Bachelor’s Degree in Health Sciences. I also enjoy literature and write in French, German, and Medumba (my mother-tongue). I have published works for poem collections and literary magazines, along with animated lyrical blogs: www.windfederspiele.over-blog.de www.poesieduvent.over-blog.com
Sonnet Poem

by Megan Mia

Blurry Blue Blouse.
Teal Target Tee.
Green Grey leggings.
Dark Drowsy circles.
Olive Toned Tan.
Silver Silly Smile.

Prissy Purple Nails.
Beat Brown Boots.
Crooked Choppy hair.
Moody Minded lady.
Disordered Normal Day.
A Dash of Steel

by Derek Lazarski

At the initial screech a half-block away, I rip my wallet from my pocket and take off like the noise is a shot from a starting gun. Or any gun. I'm sprinting through the loose crowd, careful to avoid, of course, but also with complete abandonment of self-consciousness. My limbs helicopter and slip with my backpack slapping my kidneys in sharp claps. In one motion I swim through the station door, pinwheel my card into the turnstile, and explode off scrawny legs up the steel corridor. The train’s open doors hum above. People file past me down the stairs and into the station.

I’m stepping up quick and pumping those stairs like bike pedals up the hill in first speed—up that hill! up that hill!—when I hear the doors, finally, exhale shut. The train rolls away with plastic-lined steel rooms, its rigid rows of seats, its ads with fluorescent glows, its atmospheres of moving air owned by all internal organs. Each car locks together, bolting in a biting chain, as if holding hands with metallic modesty, as if conceding the commonalties of existence. Unlike, of course, those waiting for the next train, stifled in the elevated silence of the platform, still heaving after losing a race to chance.

The price? Five minutes of occupying consciousness. Five minutes of analyzing graffiti or dancing in fantasy instead of riding over the scene crawling outside Wrigley, instead of casting off this moment for the next: the descent into the subway, when we crane our necks upward to simultaneously gasp one last breath of sunlight before racing into the darkness of the subway below, as if dragged down by the undertow.
"Roses! Roses! One for two, three for five."
the blind man chants to a crowd he can’t see
a box of thorned flowers around his neck.
The illusions shuffle past his corner.

The blind man chants to a crowd he can’t see:
“Hey, how’s it goin’? Hey there. Roses!”
The illusions shuffle past his corner,
dismissing his walking cane and holed shoes.

“Hey there, how you doin? Roses here! Hi.”
His tarred smile greets even the wind’s short breath
which dismisses his walking cane and moldy coat
as another crazy kook craving sidewalk attention.

His tarry smile even greets the wind’s short breath.
“Hi there. How about a rose? Roses here!”
Like any other crazy clown craving sidewalk attention,
heard without choice, chosen not to be seen.

“Hi. Roses here! Hey there. Like a rose?”
A box of thorny flowers around his neck,
chosen not to be seen but heard without choice:
“Roses! Roses! One for two, three for five.”
At Montrose Beach

by Derek Lazarski

Down by the harbor, wrinkled men in baseball hats and Budweiser shirts sit on the cement edge overlooking boats parked in rows. They fish with folding chairs and buckets. In the heating May morning, their bobbers plop and bob with hope. Schoolbuses line the back fence, while down at the dockside the year-end field trip laughs, slinging reels and rocks into the face of the lake.

Seagulls stand at attention, lining the rusted teeth of the water’s cement edge, staring out at the invisible border of blue on blue. Artificial boulders bulge out against the break, fruit flies dotting the air. With an unfocusing of the eyes, their civilization appears on the rocks as thousands of block dots crawling in random patterns like bees swarming a hive.

People rejoice in the half-naked possibilities of morning. Their dogs are wet, wet as the breath of the air, a cooling contrast to the bright burning eye. Not a glance away, towers are packed with people filing paperwork. Apart from newspaper tumbleweed and beer bottle labels, there is no paper in the sand. Just the uncountable grains of carpet breaking between toes, tenor to three forms of matter in a sensory chorus, the air an alto, the water a bass. The line between the three only as close as the hearing can focus. The melody could be the grinding of steel. The melody could be muzak. To algae, the melody is nothing. How many bacteria measured in parts per million, how many just energy recycling energy. How many for one unthinking fish to be washed up the warm rug of the beach, or for one seagull to sit beneath the miracle of the sun’s shelter as it picks the thing’s skeleton clean.
In Our Seats

by Derek Lazarski

On the midnight train escaping
the bowels of Chicago,

both the older black woman with
curly gold hair, pink socks propped
on the seat, resting while reading,

and the white woman with the phone
wedged beneath her wall of black hair,
brown boots bracing on the seat
next to her pea coat and pink Coach purse

are oblivious to the fact that
those two girls in the front of the train
are in love. They didn’t walk in
as friends suggesting a sitting space,
but as a couple, making room, straining necks

each ensuring the other’s comfort
before their own. And when they sank,
side by side, into a cushioned bench in the row,
the white girl, dangling earrings and
frizzy black hair back in a baret and band,
leaned, like an innocent sigh, against her lover,

the Asian girl, also no more than twenty,
sharp dark glasses and delicate brown jacket,
who sighed herself, before letting out
a fairy giggle, the kind that can escape anyone
when two thin fingers pinch your inside thigh
like it’s theirs, the same way her fingers
run through that frizzy black hair, oblivious
to the train’s humming pumping,
or the stories of homes and stores
in the conveyoring world
out the window.
Elevated

by Derek Lazarski

Carl Sandburg’s scripture whispers from the walls of Sheridan’s leaky dungeon: “Night from a railcar window is a great, dark, soft thing broken across with slashes of light.”

Slatted black steel stairs to the platform: a medieval arena, as if ascending to slay a shiny snake of solid lead who slashes the saran wrapped silence of the canlight city.

In the ascending corridor, a cold vanilla cage prevents cement alcoves from use as shelter, scabs of time peel from the skin of steel, a fixed outline, a boundary of freedom.

The chamber roars like a firefight in war folks pouring into the corridor clasping their collars, screaming into phones over steel crushing towards walls of wilted ivy.

But once elevated above the concrete electricity, the den evacuated after the last wave, wooden planks laid with the faith of the gallows, a clothesline of cars and buses beneath,

there are no things. Just names and numbers labels intimating inches of a gridded city, lines in pillowy telephone books, destination dots on L train maps
guiding the screaming of a slinking skyscraper
violently grinding against the horizon.
Just once, on the nipple blue safety edge,
I’d like to stick my hand into the train’s savage path

and feel the indifference of the first law of motion,
the inertia of technology, the energy of evolution,
the strength of momentum and what it leaves behind,
to touch a rigid reality, not just guess it with eyes.

But maybe I’ll save it for another segmented snake,
always more glowing rooms rolling through the weather,
so I study the great softness from a railcar seat
and listen for the darkness to whisper its name.

About the Author: Derek Lazarski is the Coordinator of the Writing Center at Truman College. The poems here are from his collection Reflections in Black Glass. In 2007, he received his MA in Writing from DePaul University. His first novel, The Job Will Be Done, is as yet unpublished. He is currently working on his second novel.
In Roseland

by Raymond Berry

Boys in white tees crowd chicago streets
2-by-4’s in hand
Will become men today
As they beat a kid who could easily be them
Shirts removed
They rub their sixpacks

Grow harder with each kick
Mouths water
Like bees for pollen, they thirst
For sweat and blood
He bleeds/they ejaculate
Over lifeless body

And come into manhood
Because your house has lions

by Raymond Berry

For Diane Latiker

Your southside home turned into refuge
Where teens gather to love, bend, cry

Question who they could have been
Even after witnessing their fallen

Community invisible to outsiders
Now, they must learn to lean

Believe power is people
And open tightly closed fists

Reveal their dreams too
Intact in cracked bare hands

About the Author: Raymond Berry is the author of the Lambda-nominated poetry collection, Diagnosis. He is publications include Warpland, To Be Left with the Body, Reverie, and Spaces Between Us. His readings include the Gwendolyn Books Conference and the AWP Writer’s Conference. Berry was a finalist for the 2008 and 2009 Autumn House Poetry Book Award for his manuscript, World Left to Us. He is a recent Colrain Conference attendee, and is a recipient of the 2012 James Richardson, Jr. scholarship. A native Chicagoan, Berry is English faculty at Truman College.
Pivot

by Kenyatta Rogers

Tell me what color a poem is
tell me how the person you love
loves the type of people you are both supposed to.

Tell me about the kiss you gave another girl
about chicken blood on houses for luck,
tell me about hand prints and your tongue.

About sunning yourself like a lilac
about hugging things that will never breath
about eating a granola bar.

In a poem there should be a pivot,
like how in a life there’s a time to quite a job
or a time to follow the rhythm of a beat you can feel but can’t hear.

What color is a fox when it isn’t a fox?

Try describing the color blue to someone who’s never seen a robin’s egg.

Tell me this: why are you ashamed of your body and try to silence laugh?

Let me be honest: the truth is college will take you longer the 4 years,
this isn’t the 70’s or the 80’s
nobody lives by the beating of a fist into a brain.

Tell me how afraid you are
and I’ll tell you I feel like that all the time

I know someone who broke the same hand 5 times
I say: that doesn’t make it any less of a hand or less of part of the body to be touched.
A man tried to kiss me in a hallway once
and this poem has a mentioned lips 3 times so far

Tell me what color is a cavity in the brain
or the fox that gets scared off by a hen?

If the letter “Q” could speak to you what would it say?
Imagine if I was the letter “Q.”

Here’s the truth
I don’t know how many blocks you have to walk

or buses you take
or trains
or tables you had duck behind to avoid spraying glass
or people you have to avoid
or people you have to embrace to get here

but that’s why I’ll listen
why we can speak about being woken up at 4am
and about caterpillars or a giant canary
that talks to a woolly mammoth
in an alley
on a street named after a seed.

Tell me about the point of this poem
and I’ll say you’re right

moments are meant to be right
the way beats are right

the way The Joker told Batman:

“just do things.”
In many ways he was right.
About the Author: *Kenyatta Rogers is the 2012-2013 Visiting Poet at Columbia College Chicago; he is also Cave Canem Fellow and holds a MFA in Creative Writing Poetry from Columbia College Chicago. He also holds a BA in English from Kent State University in Ohio. He is a founding member of the Chicago Poetry Bordello and has taught for the Chicago City Colleges, Kent State University, The Children's Humanities Festivals "Words@Play" Program and was a Professional English Tutor with the Truman College TRiO program. He is a Poet in Residence for the Hands on Stanzas program through the Chicago Poetry Center. His poems have been published or forthcoming from Cave Canem Anthology XIII, Vinyl, The Arsenic Lobster, Columbia Poetry Review, Court Green, 350poems.blogspot, among others and was also featured in Word 4: Type+Image Exhibit. He frequently does readings in Chicago and in 2009 he was nominated for an Illinois Arts Council Literacy Award for his poem “Safety.”
Catharsis

by Lucy Jung

Thought drops.
Walls crack.
Light penetrates.
Can you hear the cries?
The stains on my leg
Things I was afraid to say.
Words that can’t make it past my lips
My cries,
silenced words.
No. There shouldn’t be this urge
by Lucy Jung

This cycle.
This pain.
This yearning.
Change the bad into good.
Can you see the pain beyond?
Maybe my motivation will be strong.
Maybe it’ll go away.
Maybe this aching will stop.
I want to be better.
I need to be different. Yes.

About the Author: Lucy Jung, a soon-to-be graduate of Truman College, is pursuing a degree in physical therapy. Currently, Lucy tutors students in several subjects for the TRiO program. She enjoys writing poetry, reading a wide variety of fiction books, and trying out new foods. Lucy composes poetry in her journal during her spare time with a side of frozen yogurt.
Galician Roses

by Liz Cozzer

In those moments when you are mine
The whole universe embraces me
The visible and invisible come to light
And my soul burns into ashes
Phoenix I am
Flying to find what you leave in this universe
Immortal words of knowledge
Amusing journeys are those I live because of you
And your fate is to be the greatest warrior of this universe
Embrace me always
Love me always
In every garden leave me Galician roses
Petals of wisdom
Fragrances of hope
My mind will forever blossom
Not because you are mine
But because I feel
How beautiful life is
Glances of life falling in love
Reality through immortality
Being reality what I live
So I live because I love
And I love because I feel

About the Author: I was born and raised in Florianopolis, an island located in Southern Brazil. I’ve been living in the United States since 2006, and I’ve been a Business major at the City Colleges of Chicago since 2010. I’m currently working towards my A.A. degree, and I plan to transfer to a university and focus on the areas of International Business and Management.

Writing has been one of my passions since childhood. I enjoy different types of writing, but I write mostly about my travel experiences, stories based on dreams, and poetry. Some of my other interests are traveling, languages, culinary, literature, and philosophy. Although I currently write for pleasure and do not plan on becoming a professional writer, it would be an interesting experience to have the opportunity to work for a travel magazine in the future.
[UNTITLED]

by Zaien Wasfi

| some | three hours |

| some | two people |

some one room

| kiss |

and a sound in the silent house

of bodies

echoing

About the Author: Zaien Wasfi wasn’t open to the world of art and literature from an early age. But now he mostly is a classic-novel reader who can’t help annotate his philosophical novels while sipping a black cup of coffee early Sunday mornings. He enjoys silent conversations with The Girl with The Pearl Earrings while putting a few notes together on a piano and is currently practicing the Moonlight Sonata. Zaien is a student editor of City Brink, English tutor with the SSLI, and member of TRiO supporting program and PTK honor society. His major is engineering.
I Smiled

by Darrin Bradley

I smiled at a girl today

I smiled at her in such a way

I smiled as if I had known her my whole life

I smiled as if to say hello to my beloved wife

I smiled as if I saw my best friend for the first time today

I smiled as if she chased all the pain in the world away

I smiled at a girl today.
It's My Fault

It’s My Fault

It’s My Fault that fear controls me

It’s My Fault that courage was never showed to me

My Fault that i never felt my mother's love

My Fault that I have little to show her

My Fault that I'm fat

My Fault cause i came to terms with that

My Fault that I can’t breathe

My Fault that asthma was born within me

It’s My Fault that I'm afraid of happiness

My Fault that I have never had an example of it

It’s My Fault that I was born last

It’s My Fault I'm never first on anyone’s list

It’s My Fault when you're dumb

It’s My Fault when I'm not wrong

It’s My Fault when I fail
It’s My Fault when I succeed nobody cares
It’s My Fault you betrayed me
It’s My Fault cause I showed loyalty
It’s My Fault that i tell the truth
It’s My Fault if the truth is too strong for you
but Great Men Have Great Faults
Do You?

About the Author: Darrin Bradley was born in a blizzard to a middle class family in Chicago. At an early age, he showed his love for the written word by reading his first book at the age of one, (where the wild things are) and writing his own monster book at the age of two (spiders and other scary things). Darrin is an avid comic book reader and one day hopes to open his own publishing company. Darrin is currently working on his bachelor’s degrees in journalism and creative writing at DePaul University.
Suspension

by Stephanie Roberts

Oil on wood panel
Meditation

oil, graphite and gold leaf on paper

**About the Author:** Stephanie Roberts is Assistant Professor of Art at Truman and an artist who has shown her own work recently in Toronto, Canada, Brussels, Belgium, and in Chicago. She is a figurative painter who uses the figure in visual metaphors that address her exploration of the intersection of the human and the divine. She received her degrees in painting and drawing from Kansas State University and the University of Iowa, with additional studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and L'Universite de Haute Bretagne, France. She teaches painting and drawing courses at Truman College, and seeks to inspire the highest excellence in creative expression and enable the flourishing of her students' talents.
Goose-Down Pillow Cries Blood

by Gayle Lilliana Blakely

as i lay desolate on my goose-down pillow,
it's very touch reminds me of how i have been betrayed,
abused and abandoned from my own flesh

i cry. the feathers soak in my tears,
watering comfort for their thirst
and releasing oceans of trauma

angered with all the incessant pain that has violated me,
like the feathers, torn apart piece by piece,
i blade my arms line by line

blood spills from my broken heart
onto damaged feathers immersed in scarlet,
to brighten their dark cave
and enlighten mine

as i release pain and lay my heavy head on the pillow,
the pressure of all that lies within my nomadic brain
finds comfort from the screaming and bleeding feathers

the coolness on my face on a warm day,
and the warmth on my skin on a winter's night,
i hold and squeeze every ounce of my pillow as i cry

repeatedly i bleed, painting my pillow and the feathers beneath,
until one day it's completely drenched with tears
and blood from a broken heart’s cry
i lay on my pillow and gaze at the stars,
wantering if i'll find release from the mask,
the alternate who created this mess

i take off the case and an angelic feather pokes through,
showing me that comfort is symbolic of its cage

the pillow--my slave--and i am attached,
wantering if my pain will leave once it’s drenched

so i cry and i bleed
and i lay and i squeeze
holding my pain
in the feathers that clench
all the blood and tears
from my heart

will my heart stop beating,
should this pillow fade,
or will it last the rest of my days?

my spell is healing,
the feathers sacrificed,
for a cage, the pillowcase
and the weight of my head,
is the goose-down pillow crying blood

i finally sleep
and rest in peace
as my head nests
on imprisoned feathers,
still soaking in tears and bloodshed
can you hear the cries of the goose and my head?
pieces sacrificed and pain released
in its cries, its lies, its spies

the alternate abandons its wings
and she and i are left for the grave

can you feel death’s decay
as the rigor mortis sets in
to our black hole?

she whispers,
i believe it well that i am healed,
either living and leaving this pillow that lay still,
or i die peacefully with the feathers,
nevermore and forever, harmonized

flying to a place that is far from this hell,
the goose-down pillow cries blood

so i cry and i bleed
and i lay and i squeeze
holding my pain
in the feathers that clench
all the blood and tears
from my heart,
as the goose-down pillow cries blood
School Period

by Gayle Lilliana Blakely

My head ached from the night before. Pillow soaked in sweat and dried tears stuck to my cheeks, I tried washing these all away—or so I thought.

That morning, while sickened by my previous night’s memories of my pedophilic uncle, liquor-smelling dad, and seemingly intangible mother, my ride to school was a relief and, in many ways, an escape. When I arrived on campus, I stepped into a new world, fraught with its own challenges, yet not as painful as home. At school, I was invisible. Nevertheless, I was transparent enough for criticism, scorn, and humiliation. My fifth-grade peers were not shy about expressing their prejudices, and the moment they were finally aware of my existence, my schoolmates would call me names and make fun of my acned skin. I’m sure my hand-me-down clothes and timid personality didn’t help either.

Avoiding the students’ judgmental stares, I slid into my seat. My head continued to pound, and then my stomach cramped up. Trying to censor the preceding night’s transgressions from my nomadic brain, I immediately focused on Mr. Knight’s history lesson. But the more I tried to concentrate, the less I could hear. My teacher’s voice dissipated with the room, and all I felt were thorns stabbing me in my stomach. I sat there with an image of a large, red rose nested on an evil green vine with spears. I felt those thorns protruding forward and stabbing me repeatedly, until I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was Mr. Knight. He implored me to pay attention, so I tried to oblige.
I looked down and saw the bright, fluorescent white paper sitting on my desk. I glanced nervously around the room to gain focus. Then I looked down again. Down below my history lesson, I saw dark crimson stains spreading rapidly onto my light-colored jeans, which was soaking in a pool of blood and dripping onto the tile. The juxtaposition of paper and jeans screamed as it left me panicked and speechless. Frozen, I did not know what to do; embarrassed, ashamed, and afraid, I could not move. My untouched history assignment was the least important thing on my mind, yet the worrisome thought of not finishing it lurked in the background. Numb, I disappeared; transparent, I floated away.

When I finally came to, it felt like hours had passed by before the recess bell rang. Looking up, my teacher approached me in what appeared to be slow motion. Everything was surreal: The classroom set the stage for a blurred horror movie, where I played the lead actor soon to succumb to her death, while the viable montages of suspense tried to placate me.

What’s going to happen to me? What is wrong with me? Am I dying? Am I in trouble for ruining his chair? I can’t let Mr. Knights know about my secrets at home. This is embarrassing. I can’t move.

Once he glanced at the blood, Mr. Knight transformed from “Mr. Homework Nazi” into “Mr. Caring and Concerned.” Immediately, he called the nurse.

Black—that is all I could see, for the space of time trapped me.
During my next awakening moment, I stood nervously at home. Interrogating me with his disturbing questions and aspersions, my father stared viciously into my eyes and shouted out of his liquor-smelling lips: “What did you do? ..You whore! Admit it!”

In a silent response to myself, I shouted back: “No—you’re wrong! It was Uncle Lee! I know it’s all his fault, I think.” I hate him. I hate this. “Dad, why can’t you just love me? Why do you hate me so much?” But I could never tell him what I really feel. My dad cannot know. He’ll just get more mad, more jealous. No one must ever know.

I forcefully stopped having these conversations with myself. Allowing my father’s words to float through the portals of my ears, I returned to the real world and just stood there.

In a mental frenzy, I thought relentlessly about my response, but I could not remember if I had answered my father’s questions. In fact, I did not even recall my drive home. Befuddled by my spacious memory gaps, I was finally excused from my dad’s interrogation and my brain’s overworked voice. I just sat there frozen and dumbfounded for a while. About a half hour later, I walked into my bedroom.

Confused, my eyes focused in on a box. A small, rectangular box lay quietly on my bed next to my sweat-and-tear-drenched pillow. Like a clue within the mysteries of my day, this symmetrical cube sat as if it wanted to tell me something. Immediately I thought, “That box must’ve been here the whole time. Well, it was here before I sat in the room, but it wasn’t here this morning.” Suddenly I recalled the conversation I had with the
nurse earlier today. Comfortingly, she said, “Honey, it’s common for young ladies between eleven and sixteen to go through what you’re going through. It just happened to you sooner, that’s all.” Finally, my fragile nine-year-old body quelled from anxiety when the box whispered, “Puberty birthed before its time.”

About the Author: Gayle Lilliana Blakely is the current editor-in-chief and Web producer for The Uptown Exchange, a member and last semester’s chapter president of Phi Theta Kappa, a member and former secretary of Psi Beta Honor Society, a current student affiliate member of the American Psychological Association, a member of TRiO, and a recent member of the American Association for Women in Community Colleges (AAWCC). Blakely is recognized as a presidential scholar for Spring 2011 and Spring 2012 terms, and as a stellar and current straight-A student. Last semester, she earned the Excellence in Service certificate through the Service Learning & Civic Engagement Program (SLCE) program, a Cook County College Teachers Union Scholar award, an AAWCC award scholarship, a TRiO Scholars award, and a certificate of recognition by her Phi Theta Kappa chapter. She had also published two articles in The Uptown Exchange newspaper.
The latest Black person story out there right now is a real good one. You know, the one about that crazy ass gung ho neighborhood watch cop down there in Florida? The one that shot that boy who was wearin’ a hoodie wid a pack o’ Skittles in his pocket? Got everybody all ova the country all up in arms. Specially Black folks, cuz we know what’s goin’ on. Yes indeed. Dat was sad what he did to dat boy. Now, y’all call him Trayvonn Martin, but we call him Brother.

Yep, we do. Cuz we all got a brother who done been thoo that same thang. Now see we know all about DWB—driving while Black—but WALKING WHILE BLACK?????? Hell das a new one for us! Or maybe it ain’t. Shoot! It get to be so many thangs we git in trouble fuh they all start tuh run together. We know we constantly bein’ watched. But we can’t help it. In a sea of vanilla, you spot a chocolate drop and whatchu do? Yo eyes fixate on that chocolate drop, fuh one reason or anotha. Yeah, dat story made me thank about a whole lotta stuff Black mens go thoo on a daily basis. That boy didn’t stand a chance. Y’all call him Trayvonn Martin, but we call him Son.

Yep, we do. Cuz shortly after everything had went down I was watchin’ the Today Show and this white woman, who um assuming was on the side of what’s right, admitted that in huh world, she wouldn’t never never never worry bout her teenage son walking down the street to go to no stoe. Oooh chile! I know I wuz wrong, but when she said dat I got mad as HELL! I know it ain’t huh fault, but I don’t know one Black woman, specially one with a teenage son, who don’t worry when he walk tuh de mailbox, let alone de corner stoe. And um not talking bout like a long time ago in de “old days”. Um talking bout TODAY.
Hell, YESTUHDAY! 21st century. Two thousand and twelve! Black folks with *good* payin’ jobs living in the suburbs havin’ block parties, community yard sales, livin’ *real* good. They kids even got they own cars, but it don’t matter. They ain’t trying tuh let them kids, *specially* boys, walk down no street, drive round the corner….. Nothin! Cuz they know they *jummmmussssss* might not come back. Just like dat boy down in Florida. Y’all call him Trayvonn Martin, but we call him Father.

Yep, we do. Cuz ev’ry responsible Black man wid a son will tell dat boy what tuh do when they git stopped by the po-lice. Cuz it happened tuh dem least ten times in they life befoe. Piss me off! Hell it’s white folks out there teaching they children bout how to run the family business, hooking em up with they family friend for a scholarship or a reference to a almost ivy league college, even hookin’ em up to stay in the same dorm they stayed in when they was in college. But us? Naw. It’s different. Our Fathers telling ‘em how tuh hold on tuh dat wheel at 10 o’clock an’ 2 o’clock, say yes suh and no suh, give em eye contack, have dem driver license, registration, *and* insurance papers in they wallet or in dat glove box, and dey tell em, “Don’t even THINK bout reachin’ fuh nothin’ til dey tell you to. In fact, when you see dem blue lights come on and you know you bout to be pulled ova, don’t make a move tuh even scratch yo nose cuz any sudden move’ll give ‘em the right tuh bust a cap in yo ass right den and dere and aks questions later. I know what um talkin’ bout. Just like dat lil’ boy. Y’all call him Trayvonn Martin, but we call him Grandson.

Yep, we do. Cuz I feels so bad fuh my grandsons who don’t even git the chance to walk downtown no mo. Yes indeed. Dem rowdy kids down dere, they call it “mobs”, crowdin’ people, beatin’ people up, goin’ to de gold coast snatchin’ phones an actin’ all ignorant, makin’ ev’ry nightly news stereotype about Black folk come true fuh dem
people who live in dem high-rise buildings off Lake Michigan. Dem de ones who mess it up for the good kids, the good ones, like my grandchildren, and like Trayvonn Martin, who jus’ wanna walk down de street and get a cool drink an some candy. An when they beg and plead enough til they Mamas and Daddys let ‘em go downtown it’s a shame how they have tuh go thoo de 3rd degree befoe they git on dat train. They Mamas and Daddys tell ‘em not to go with moe than 2 or 3 other young people. Dey tell ‘em not tuh wear dem baggy pants and white t-shirts –that thug uniform. Dey tell em not tuh hang round no corners, don’t stop tuh buy nothin’, and “Walk cross de street if you see a crowd of young Black boys, cuz you don’t want no trouble you can’t get out of” and they tell em be thoo with whatever you doin’ a whole hour befoe it git dark and they tell ‘em “git yo ass HOME, where I can see you, touch you, hug you, get to tell you I love you one mo night”.

About the author: Julie Dianne Dockery is a transplanted Southerner and English Professor. She describes herself as a “quasi-radical feminist, quasi-environmental steward, and bona fide urban explorer”. In her spare time she likes to learn new things, question EVERYTHING, ponder the hypocrisies of the world, and “do stuff!”
Pangs of Deprivation

by G.G. Allen

Sharp winds blow
piercing the depths of my soul

As I gasp for air, my heart bleeds
under the tarp of grief

Drowning in sorrow
Screaming your name
a million times over…

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

About the author: G.G. Allen is a professor at Truman College and is the author of several poems and short stories. She is currently working on two children's books and a novel. In her spare time, G.G. Allen enjoys long walks, moonlit nights, and fine dining with great company.
My father and I used to walk the railroad tracks every morning before school. We would hurry through breakfast and get dressed so that we might have a few slow-paced moments before what would probably be a busy day.

“C’mon, pick it up,” he would say.

Then we would race. Out the door and into the tree line before the screen slammed shut behind us. The trees were thick and dense, capable of being used to push me upwards by pulling on one after another, up the incline to two metal rails running off forever into everywhere. Huffing and puffing, hands sticky from the sap-laden bark, I would leap to a rail and walk tightrope. My father would walk on the other side, watching me talk or talking himself.

“You know Josh, you shouldn’t come here without me.”

“Yes.”

“Good.”

“But what if it was an emergency?”

“Then get me. Or another adult.” I liked this answer because it assumed I knew of possible emergencies that might require special attention.

“Dad?”

“Yes.”

“Do you read the Bible?”

“Some.”

“What part is your favorite?” I wanted him to say the stories about King David because they were my favorite. I also thought he would like it because his name was David.

“I’ve always liked Ecclesiastes, though it’s more poetic than it is a story. They say it was written by Solomon.” I was quiet. I didn’t know those stories, or why poetic was different. We hadn’t read that far in
school. “What part do you like, Joshua?” My face grew red and I tried to hide it by blowing into my hands for warmth. I liked King David, but now I wasn’t so sure.

“I don’t know, really.”

We walked along for awhile, a soft, metal reverberation ringing, it seemed, from inside the rails. I used to think these vibrations were trains because I could not tell the difference between the noise my feet made and the noise of the railway carts. But now I knew the difference. The sound I made was smaller and inconsistent. The other was low, ominous, and constant. And something else. I couldn’t quite put a name to it. Purposeful, maybe.

“Well you’ll decide on a favorite as you grow older.”

My dad never went to church. I had to go for school and with Mom, but he didn’t. I once heard Mom say it was because of his father, but I wasn’t supposed to know because I learned it from eavesdropping.

We started our slow descent back through the tree line towards the school. Even though I was happy, I was something else. I reached out my hand and held his hand, and our hands stuck together from the sap trees. I imagined our arms as branches and my body moved more slowly, mocking a sped-up progression of a tree’s life in my mind. I was still young enough to hold my father’s hand. And I was still young enough to know my favorite Bible story would be Ecclesiastes.

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**About the author:** Percy Thomas co-wrote “Maltese English and the Nativization Phase of the Dynamic Model” for *English Today*. He regularly writes reviews for the *eLanguage Journal*. 
A Letter to My 15 Year Old Self

by Alaa Wasfie

Dear Alaa,

It is the 1\textsuperscript{st} of January 2005 and I see you crawling up in the corner of your room with your hands covering your ears looking quite terrified and I want to tell you that we in the future understand your fear and your insides, and I'm here now to inform you that miraculously you will survive the American-Iraqi war and will be living in much better place by the time you are in your twenties. I see you waking up in the morning wondering whether you will make it through the day or die by a sudden explosion near your school. I promise you won't always be hiding in a dark basement, listening to a bombing after another, stuck in the city of death all your life, feeling like your life has no significant meaning but to eat, sleep and survive the day. Know that someday you will be living a very different life in a great city called Chicago where you will go to college and do all those things you are good at: drawing, writing, reading novels, being an English tutor and writing strong essays that all your English professors would like you to read out loud in class. Those writings that you do in the middle of night where you'd be standing by the window while the snowflakes shake on your palm, those writings are art. It's the work that you will be doing for the rest of your life so be proud of the things that are easy for you, because if something is easy for you that means a big part of you is being used and you should keep doing it with your eyes open to the world around. Trust me when I tell you that these war hardships that you are going through right now will later make you a stronger person and that in the future you will grow
up to be "somebody" and not "nobody" like how your teenager self seems to think.

It is the end of December 2005 and I see you getting bullied again by your classmates because you don't cover your hair like how the typical Muslim girls do, you don't wear jewelries or dress up in pink and you prefer reading *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* alone in the back of the school's cafeteria rather than gossiping about the people in the magazine. I promise you won't always be treated like an outcast, feeling like if you don't do what the society tells you, there will be more abused unless you wear a false mask to be like them and mock yourself all the time. And all the time knowing the cruelty will come again as soon as the middle eastern community discovers your secret and that your friends will abandon you, that your parents might force you to get married, so you go around wearing a mask or burying yourself inside the closet, devouring books after books, daydreaming of the land where Kafka lived and was free. You are afraid because you feel somehow separated from yourself, disappearing like a smoke, fearing all those things that make you suddenly wonder who you are and what you will be in this life. Puzzled, why you are standing at this minute staring up at the shooting stars, feeling like a tiny seed without soil. What you cannot comprehend right now is the fact that even small seeds can be gigantic trees with a lot of colorful leafs. It is not impossible to be free as I'm telling you that when you reach your twenties, you will be living in a more understanding environment and will meet people like yourself who are into what you are into. The kids in your high school and bigoted people who are mean to you are not worth getting upset about. All the way you let yourself be terrorized by your friends who think your difference and your queer energy is something you should be ashamed for is a big waste of time. Don't let them force you to be someone you are not because if
you pretend to be someone else, you will disappear and there wouldn't be anything left of you. Remember what Dr. Seuss says, "Be who you are and say what you feel, because, those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind."

At fifteen, barely caring the textbooks on your chest, how could you then carry the weight of a twisted mass of burnt decay? You might not have the opportunity to leave at this moment, but know that someday you will be ready and that your destiny is to create your unique life, not theirs, and although it is difficult to leave the place you were born and grew up in, you will always find a better one that is your own. The world out is amazingly wild like a tangled mass of vegetation! But sometimes destiny is a sandstorm that keeps changing direction. No matter where you are heading to, the storm chases you. Try to escape left or right, and it will still plays the dance until it gets you. Why? Because a sandstorm is not something blows in from nothing, but it rises from within you. It's you! You have to go through it even if it will cut through the flesh like a razor blade. But once the storm is over and you walk off, you won't be the same person.

Dry your tears and move forward.

Yourself from the future,

*Alaa
Leaving

by Alaa Wasfie

She was 13 years old when the flame of the American-Iraqi war rose up from the city of Baghdad. The 6 years that she spent under the war zone were full of dark scenes which are still scattered in the back of her head. Through the cracked window of her dusty room, she saw the march of soldiers wearing eyes that matched with the color of their boots, holding all kinds of weapons: Shotgun, musket, mortar, pistol, sniper, rifle, and she knows how terrifying they are when they are shot. She could hear the sound of the daily bombs smashing the windows and reaching through her ear drum, the loud wailing cry of widows yowling their husbands and dead sons, the fitful voices of infant babies crying in hot summer like a Weeping Willow. She could recall all this and hear the echo of her grandmother’s song, whispering into her ears the melody of forgotten ballads to block the melody of hitting rockets and approaching funerals. She saw the fear in her father’s eyes as he was holding her tightly every time the bombs visited the area, fearing the bombs to sweep his daughter away like a storm sweeping the smiles from the shore. She knows how it feels like to spend years hiding in a basement, hearing the sound of guns booming in a distance like a blast of cold air swept through an empty hut. She knows how the streets looked after the explosion, and why the skyscrapers became as short as a stool-chair. She could still see the collision and glass fragments lying on the ground, the broken furniture and torn pages of a holy book standing upside down. She knows the shape of the rocket, big enough to block the vision and the sky above. Its sound was sharp as it was rapidly moving, and before she could hide, it exploded, covering the sky with red round sparks. And She clearly remembers how she used to pretend that a war rocket was just a festival firework.
Her life in her beloved City of Baghdad was endless searching for a concept called safety. She felt like a rotted fruit, or a butterfly without wings, useless! The days were running in an empty circle from home to school, from school to home. In a city where the dead was more populated than the living, there was nothing needed to be done. No electricity, poor water supply and food. What she was doing mostly was observing and devouring books for she believed that although human were granted only one life on earth, through stories she could live thousands. She could travel the world while she was still warming up in her seat. She once was the King of Rome, and Alice in the wonderland, and she had many acquaintances: Jane Eyre, Tom Sawyer, Oliver Twist, Peter Pan, Robin Hood. Under an oil lamp, they played together. Observing and reading were her only ways to kill time. She used to watch her dad how he was carrying the benzene container on his shoulder, spilling it carefully in a small electricity generator to produce some scarce electricity so they could eat dinner under some light. He always smelt like benzene and if a match were set near him, he would have immediately be set on fire.

One day, after six years of war had passed, she was sitting at the edge of the dusty window in a room which once was her own. She was thinking: since when she stopped feeling belonged to her beloved country?! Now her father had sold their house and they were staying in it as temporary guests. She became a guest on her own room! Their luggage was already packed and put beside the front door, very ready to be carried away. Even though the window she was sitting at was so dusty, covered with coal ashes and bullets holes, she still managed to see through it right straight to the alley. The streets in her neighborhood were very narrow covered with mud. The flume and cesspit had been
floated as a result of blowing gelignite, so the streets had been a perfect place for roaches and algae to colonize. Other than that, the neighborhood was such a barren place that once you set a foot on it, you feel you are about to suffocate. From her dusty window, for six years she watched people crossing by, the same expressionless faces, so tired and aimless. The healthy men became like old women. On the mornings they do nothing but sit on the backyard playing domino and skimming through yesterday's newspaper. The years had passed so fast that she could not recall the last time her people had been enjoying a clean street or a new mall or even a park. What had happened changed her city from a palace to stable. “This isn’t a decent life,” she thought, and then she turned her eyes around her room “…and this isn’t a place I would bury myself in.” She said firmly. She felt very sorry that things turned out this pathetic way, for your beloved country to have this dramatic awful change which makes you feel you don’t belong to it anymore. She looked outside the window then around her room again, the room was so empty and cold for she reduced her memories so to fit her 1, 2, 3 traveling bags. She stared at the airplane ticket between her palms for a long time and thought: When she will be settled in that gorgeous city behind the Atlantic Ocean, she would probably be safe “physically,” she murmured. Yes, in that wonderful city behind the Atlantic Ocean, what's the name? Chicago? There might be a decent life for her. A new beginning and nights with no horrific war explosions. Her eyes wandered every inch of her room. So many memories flashed in front of her eyes, a sad memories and happy memories. Inside her empty room, sitting beside the dusty window, once again she felt uneasy.
Where Else We Could Be

by Alaa Wasfie

Like I saw in my dreams
Of seven black kittens
Running through the stream
Then where else they could be?

If your eyes weren't there
Like I saw in the stream,
And the music we made
Had vanished
Disappeared
Then where else they could be?

If my eyes and your eyes
Looked up together and met,
If they were to make friends
We’d perhaps be up for

Escaping from this world.

If I looked through the window
While you are passing by,
If I reached for the weeping willow
With my short arms,
If I screamed and cried,
Would you have stopped?

If you'd like, keep staring
What lies behind my eyes
And your eyes will shine
Through the glass of my shrine
Perhaps that would spare
All the letters
I have never sent.
Trapped Girl

by Alaa Wasfie

The ceilings are tried
Of clinching to the same old walls.
The words have wore out
Inside the ears
And they don't let out feelings.

Inside
A trapped girl
Taught to read and write in such an early age.
She got dusty books on shelves,
Running to catch up words with no feelings
Under the same old ceilings.

They say there will never be
A girl like her again
With a sleeve down to her wrist
And lips never been kissed
A girl
With socks up to her knees
And her resemblance of cheese.

About the author: Alaa Wasfie was born and raised in the Middle East where Western literature was very hard to get your hands on. Now she spends most of her time in Chicago Public Libraries and enjoys peaceful writings in cafés. Alaa is nurturing 32 bookshelves in her room and 24 on goodreads website. She is currently the student editor of City Brink, an English tutor at TRiO, and a member of PTK honor society. Alaa is also the recipient of 2011 American Association Award for Women in Community Colleges.
Artwork by Bernadetta Zawiejska

Oil on canvas
Oil on canvas
About the author: My name is Bernadetta Zawiejska. I was born and raised in Poland. I came to the United States in 2006 after graduating from University in Cracow. Art has been my passion since I was a child. My work ranges from still life and landscapes to portraits. My influences are first and foremost everything I see, feel and experience. My long term goal is to develop my artistic skills through expressing my thoughts in my paintings.
Music to My Ears

by Robert Hughes

I believe in air guitar.

Not my own—my last starring performances were in the late 1950s alone in my bedroom lip-syncing to Ricky Nelson’s “Poor Little Fool” after school each day.

I mean my son Walker’s skills with the instrument. They reassure me at a pretty scary time for our family. I am a recently retired teacher with a perpetually-threatened state pension. Walker is severely autistic and lives in a group home whose funding could vanish overnight. He can’t converse, can’t speak up for himself, can’t support himself. I have to hide a nervous twitch whenever someone asks, “What’s your plan, Bob?” Slow-simmering worry is the family theme lately.

The arithmetic tells the tale: My wife Ellen and I are 63, Walker is 26. When these numbers were 41 and 4, 46 and 9, even 54 and 17, very few people asked us this question. Anybody who knew us knew we were on a mission: the quest for a cure, the quest for improvement. Now that he’s grown up and dependent on the aid of others to get through his day, the quest has sunk to Issue Two behind Issue One: his future.

Walker is worried too. In fact, the defining symptom of his autism is anxiety about what’s coming next, his version of future
shock. In the house, he demands that we write schedules on index cards detailing the next 25 minutes of his life: “First, have spaghetti. Next, do a puzzle. Next, get in the car.”

It’s as though he expects the world any moment to vanish into a horror movie fog if the immediate future isn’t nailed down and committed to. When we return home with him after a drive to a forest preserve, he clutches nine or ten cards of the schedules we’ve written over the last two hours. He stares at them as though the words scribbled by his parents materialize not only the immediate future but the immediate past too.

Now you’d expect a person with this sort of panic to look, well…panicked. But Walker doesn’t. If anything, moment to moment, he looks highly pleased. As a child he would wave his arms in the air in a nervous-looking, habitual move the therapists called “self-stim.”

This habit, however, has morphed into the wonderful artistry of air guitar. With his left hand playing air chords and his right strumming air strings, and his eyes smiling in enjoyment, he vibrates with appreciation of the here and now. He can play while riding in the car, walking down the street, watching TV, teasing his mom. Inaudible music--and perhaps visible stardom—lift him as they trail him through his day.

A life-long country music fan, Walker is certainly playing his favorites. Is he serenading his crush, Taylor Swift? Is he Alan Jackson rocking thousands of worshipers? He doesn't tell us and
we may never know. But we get his message.

His songs remind his family of a simple truth: future shock is real, but it isn’t our whole story, not by a long shot.

About the author: Robert Hughes teaches writing at Truman College and is the author of “Running with Walker: a Memoir.”
Photography by Julie Dockery

“A Family Lived Here”
“Slave Quarters on Ossabaw Island”
“Remnants of Haint Paint”
The City Brink Team would like to thank the president of Harry S Truman College, Dr. Reagan Romali, who generously supported the efforts of faculty and students in creating this inaugural publication of City Brink. She shares the same hope that the magazine will continue to be an established creative platform for our students, faculty, staff and community. Also, we are grateful for the hard work of Professor Christine Aguila, the constant fighter for this magazine’s existence. Thanks must also go to Professor Gail Gordon-Allen, the woman with the open door. We have a deep gratitude for our graphic artist, Emily Belknap, who helped us fix this magazine so it could officially be published. This magazine would never be without them. However, the central focus for the magazine is our students, and this first publication is dedicated to Zaien and Alaa Wasfi, the first student editors of City Brink. We wish them the best in their endeavors, and this first publication will always be a reminder of your work here at Truman College.
Call For Submissions

City Brink is an annual literary magazine that accepts fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and art. Fiction may be in the form of short story, book excerpt, or one-act plays. Personal essays and literary nonfiction are both part of the nonfiction category. We do NOT accept submissions that have been recently published or are about to be published. Remember to identify the genre of your submission in the subject line of your email. This request is for one-time rights in electronic form and hard copy that we will print in small quantities from time to time. The author expressly waives any and all claims for any such damages against Truman College and City Colleges of Chicago. We welcome any unpublished work from both established and new writers. In all cases material submitted must be edited and polished.

This is an annual publication to be made available during the fall of each academic school year (between August and December of each year). The current issue will remain on-line until a new one is made available. There will be no profits made from this publication. Thus, we do not pay cash or in-kind gifts for submissions whether accepted or not accepted for publication.

Guidelines:
Word count is generally up to 2,500 words, but exceptions may be made for longer pieces. Pay special attention to ensure that your manuscript looks exactly how you want it to look before submitting it. If your work is accepted, we will print it the way that it is. Minor changes (perhaps a few words) may be considered, but we will not make major revisions after submission.
SUBMISSION STYLE GUIDE:

1. Manuscripts should be submitted as Word attachments and must be able to be opened using Microsoft Office. Art should be submitted as a JPEG file.

2. Submissions should be single spaced in 12pt Times Roman font only without text embellishments in the body. If the integrity of the piece requires embellishments, be sure to inform us.

3. Genre (poetry, fiction or nonfiction) and word count must be included at the top right side of the page, along with the writer’s name, telephone number and email address. Do not include headers or footers on the manuscript. Remember, we do not accept previously published work.

4. Please include a brief writer’s bio with your submitted piece.

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Email Submissions to: jthusat@ccc.edu OR jdockery1@ccc.edu
Call for Editors

As a student literary magazine, we invite you to consider contributing to City Brink by becoming an editor. If you are interested in becoming an editor for City Brink, please consider the following expectations. You can send an e-mail to either jdockery1@ccc.edu or jthusat@ccc.edu with “Student Editor Applicant” in the subject line.

As a student editor, you will…

- be available to meet at least twice during the semester to discuss the progress of the magazine (though more meetings may be requested).
- meet with students (and student organizations) to solicit submissions and publicize the magazine.
- help create flyers and/or necessary brochures.
- possibly work with us to improve our online presence, including the publication of City Brink on the Internet.
- edit submissions, especially in August and September.

We are uniquely interested in students with computer design skills with ideas for progressing the magazine’s appearance online.