



San José State
UNIVERSITY

A campus of The California State University

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SS-S07-7

At its meeting of May 14, 2007, the Academic Senate passed the following Sense of the Senate Resolution presented by Senator Thames for the Executive Committee.

**SENSE OF THE SENATE RESOLUTION
CREATION OF ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF
SJSU'S LEGACY OF POETRY**

- Whereas, Meaningful campus traditions help welcome and bond students and employees to a campus; a sense of belonging – student connections to the institution and to peers, creates “relationships that, in turn, are associated with persistence and satisfaction;”¹
- Whereas, Traditions can be identified in SJSU’s 150-year history;
- Whereas, SJSU has a long and rich legacy of poetry created by students, faculty, alumni and campus guests that highlight the creative work of SJSU today as well as decades past;
- Whereas, Edwin Markham, an 1872 graduate of the California State Normal School, became one of SJSU’s most famous alums through the many poems he wrote including “The Man With the Hoe” and “Outwitted” (which is on a plaque on the west side of Tower Hall),
- Whereas, Mr. Markham was born on April 23, 1852; be it
- Resolved, That every April 23 (or an appropriate day near it as determined by the planners) be designated *SJSU Legacy of Poetry Day* with appropriate events and activities that recognize and honor the poets of the SJSU community, past and present; and be it further
- Resolved, That planning and carrying out of appropriate activities for *SJSU Legacy of Poetry Day* be organized by the Campus Reading Program in cooperation with the Office of the President, the University Library, and the Department of English & Comparative Literature including appropriate student organization(s) as identified by that department.

Approved: May 7, 2007

Vote: 12-1-0

¹ National Survey of Student Engagement, “Promoting Student Success – Making Place Matter to Student Success,” by Kathleen Manning and George D. Kuh; available at <http://webdb.iu.edu/Nsse/?view=deep/briefs>. Kuh, et al, *Student Success in College*, 2005, Jossey-Bass, p. 119.

Present: Lessow-Hurley, Thames, McClory, Van Selst, Kaufman, Bros, Veregge, Kassing, Phillips, Najjar, Sigler, Hebert, Meldal

Absent: Gutierrez, Lee

Financial Impact: Nominal. Costs to be covered by groups listed in the resolution with the possibility of the planners seeking additional funds in any year by way of the standard university practices for doing so or seeking assistance from other groups as appropriate.

Workload: Substantial work was performed in 2006/2007 by members of the Campus Reading Program, Department of English & Comparative Literature, SJSU Special Collections, and University Advancement, to research and disseminate information on SJSU's *Legacy of Poetry*. A website was created about several of the poets in the legacy (http://www.sjsu.edu/reading/SJSU_Poets.htm), articles were written for SJSU's *Reed* magazine and *Washington Square*, and several events were held in April 2007. This information and experience will reduce the time needed for planning and carrying out future events. In addition, in 2007, students created a new student organization – the Poets and Writers Coalition. This group held an event on April 21, 2007 which involved over 20 poets who are alums, students and faculty of SJSU, reciting their works. This group plans to pursue activities that promote the work of current SJSU student poets and that honors and continues to build SJSU's *Legacy of Poetry*.

Rationale: San José State's legacy of poetry started in the 19th century as students studied works of great poets and began to publish their own creative works in *The Acorn* (1867), the *Normal Index* (1885), *The Quill* (1925), and others. Literary societies existed from at least the 1870s and around the start of the 20th century included the Browning Society with about 60 members meeting weekly to study the works of Robert Browning and to build community on campus. Students also interacted with famous poets including Joaquin Miller, Charles Keeler, Herbert Bashford, George Sterling, Ina Coolbrith and alum Edwin Markham through trips by literary clubs, honorary memberships in student clubs, campus visits, and contributions of poems to student literary journals. Since at least the 1920s, students have participated in campus poetry contests.

In 1899, Dr. Henry Meade Bland joined the English Department to teach creative writing. He remained until his death in 1931. He helped students develop a love of poetry and encouraged them to write. He helped students form literary societies including Browning and the Short Story Club, he helped the students create a professional quality literary journal launched in 1925 as *The Quill* (which continues to this day as *Reed*), introduced students to famous poets, and worked with Senator James D. Phelan to enable students to participate in public readings at Phelan's Villa Montalvo Estate and to obtain funding for literary awards for students. Dr. Bland, who wrote hundreds of poems, became California's second Poet Laureate in 1929.

Dr. Bland was born on April 21, 1863. There is a plaque on Tower Hall (near the one for Markham) with Dr. Bland's poem about the Tower.

While Edwin Markham graduated in 1872, after he gained literary fame in 1899 with his poem "The Man With the Hoe" and moved to New York, he remained connected to the campus, most likely due to his friendship with Dr. Bland and his love of California where he lived and taught school for many years. His involvement

included delivering lectures on campus in 1915 and 1933, judging the student poetry contest in 1928, and submitting some of his poems for inclusion in student literary journals. The campus held assemblies to honor Mr. Markham on his 70th and 80th birthdays. Dr. Bland worked to have Mr. Markham's home on 8th Street near campus preserved. The home is currently at San José History Park, serving as headquarters of Poetry Center San José and a plaque remains at the original site (near the AS Child Development Center).

In addition to Mr. Markham, other famous alumni poets include Sandra McPherson and Lorna Dee Cervantes. In addition to Dr. Bland, faculty past and present include several published poets. In addition, in recent times, famous poets have frequented the campus through both the Center for Literary Arts and the Lurie Professorship including Carolyn Kizer, Al Young, Ishmael Reed, Adrienne Rich, Gary Soto, Mary Oliver and Billy Collins. Mr. Young, current California Poet Laureate, penned a poem in 2007 commemorating SJSU's Legacy of Poetry and 150th anniversary ("Ways and Ways to San Jose").

April is National Poetry Month as designated by the Academy of American Poets and throughout the U.S., libraries, bookstores, schools and other groups host a variety of events for reading, writing and studying poetry. [<http://www.poets.org/>]

Similar to the April 2007 *Legacy of Poetry* celebration, future celebrations could include public reading of poems of SJSU poets past and present, highlighting of different poets and events in the legacy, and provision of information to the campus community about the poets and activities that created the legacy. Events should include at least one that allows for participation by students and employees, such as a public reading of poetry.