



RELEASE DATE	September 29, 2025	CONTACT NAME	Jessica Winston
PHONE NUMBER	(208) 282-1315	EMAIL	jessicawinston@isu.edu
COLLEGE / UNIT	College of Arts and Letters - Department of English and Philosophy		
MEDIA LIST	Idaho State Journal, Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed, Idaho Ed News, Times Higher Education. The 74: America's Education News Source		PHOTOS / VIDEO No

ISU Announces Winner of 2025 Teaching Literature Book Award

POCATELLO, Idaho – The Idaho State University Department of English and Philosophy has announced “Teaching Literature and Writing in Prisons” as the winner of the 2025 Teaching Literature Book Award.

The Teaching Literature Book Award (TLBA) is a national prize that recognizes the best book on teaching literature at the college level. The award is presented biennially by the faculty in the graduate programs in English at Idaho State University. Nominated books are judged by a committee of external and internal reviewers.

The winning book, “Teaching Literature and Writing in Prisons,” explores why and how literature and writing are taught in U.S. prisons today. With chapters by university faculty, graduate students, and incarcerated students, the book examines theories and practices for teaching in a range of prisons across the United States. The chapters emphasize college-level teaching and make visible how courses in literature and writing can help incarcerated students develop a sense of community, examine the past and present, and imagine a better future. One strength of the book is the focus on practicalities. Contributors are open about constraints on prison teaching, such as explicit limitations on which books can be taught. The chapters demonstrate how literary and writing studies help students to develop critical reading, communication, and interpretative skills, while also fostering new perspectives on their experiences, even as the authors avoid familiar narratives about the transformative power of teaching and learning.

The award jurors felt that the volume was relevant and significant. Jessica Winston, Professor of English and Chair of the Award Committee, says, “an increasing number of university-level faculty are involved in prison teaching.” She continued, “This book helps these instructors with theories and approaches.” In addition, “It provides motivation and advice to anyone who wants to start teaching in a detention center or prison.”

While “Teaching Literature and Writing in Prisons” is a volume on college-level literature pedagogy, one award juror stated, the book “expands awareness of where and why the teaching of literature happens in the U.S. today.” Another juror observed that the



book is useful to educators beyond prison contexts, since “the goals of prison-based literature and writing courses are shared by educators of all kinds.”

The winning volume is edited by Sheila Smith McKoy, CEO and Founder of Smith McKoy & Associates, an academic coaching and consulting company, and Patrick Elliot Alexander, Associate Professor of English and African American Studies at University of Mississippi. Alexander is also Director and Co-Founder of the Prison-to-College Pipeline Program.

The editors expressed their appreciation for this recognition, stating, “The award recognizes what we value and what our volume's contributors value.” They explained, “It affirms a vibrant community of learners and educators whose love for and enrichment of the study of literature and writing are — and have long been — significant.”

The editors further stated, “We deeply appreciate this honor. It underscores the impacts and critical importance of teaching in prisons.” Smith McKoy and Alexander added, the award draws attention to “the abolitionist perspectives and freedom movements that have shaped our culture and have defined our shared work.” They concluded, “We are incredibly grateful.”

The winning book was published in 2023 by the Modern Language Association.

This year’s committee included Rachel Sanger Buurma, Associate Professor of English, Swarthmore College and co-winner of the 2023 Teaching Literature Book Award; Margaret Cantu-Sanchez, Assistant Professor of Latinx/e Literature, St. Mary’s University; and Laura Heffernan, Professor of English, University of North Florida and co-winner of the 2023 Teaching Literature Book Award; Jessica Winston and Susan Goslee, ISU Associate Professor of English, also served on the committee.

More information about the award, including past winners, is available at isu.edu/english.

###

Idaho State University was founded in 1901 and has grown to be one of the most comprehensive institutions in the country. The University is one of only six institutions in the US offering programs from technical certificates through graduate and professional degrees. As the state's designated lead institution in health professions, Idaho State is home to more than 75 percent of Idaho's health degree programs. Idaho State attracts students from around the world to its campus locations in Pocatello, Meridian, Idaho Falls, and Twin Falls. More information about Idaho State University is available at isu.edu/about.



**Idaho State
University**