CityLit Project In Residence at the University of Baltimore

Literary Arts Nonprofit Partners with UB’s School of Communications Design

BALTIMORE, MD—CityLit Project and the University of Baltimore announce a strategic alignment whereby the six-year-old literary arts organization will be in residence at UB’s School of Communications Design. CityLit retains its independence as a nonprofit while further raising awareness of the School of Communications Design throughout the general community.

“We have been exploring ways to facilitate the organization’s rapid expansion and pave the way for future growth,” said Gregg Wilhelm, CityLit Project’s executive director. “Several of our programs already involved literary artists on UB’s faculty. The quality of students and technology resources at UB are excellent. So it made sense to explore the advantages of an alliance between us.”

While the arrangement affords CityLit access to classroom and event space, Wilhelm said that the organization will maintain important collaborations with other organizations, such as Enoch Pratt Free Library, that have been critical to its success.

The in-residency idea emerged last fall when Wilhelm and then board chair Adrianna Amari approached Jonathan Shorr, executive director and division chair of the School of Communications Design, with a proposal that addressed aspects of both entities’ strategic plans. CityLit’s need for infrastructure to support the organization and advance its mission intersected with UB’s vision of greater community engagement and regional stewardship.

“CityLit has for years been Baltimore’s most visible advocate for the importance of literature and its local practitioners,” said Dr. Shorr. “We’re thrilled to have CityLit in residence, to have a living laboratory in which our students can work on a regular basis with event planning and publishing projects and also help CityLit continue moving their—and our—excitement about writing and literature into the community.”

Through the university’s collaboration with CityLit Project, UB students will help youth and adults throughout the Baltimore metropolitan area develop a greater appreciation for literature as readers and also as writers. Through helping to organize and participate in CityLit events, students will come to understand various roles of literature not only in the classroom, but in the “real” world. By working with area school children and teachers, they will develop a greater sense of civic awareness and social responsibility. Finally, by working side by side with CityLit’s professionals, UB students will have opportunities to develop and hone their own job skills, from arts administration and project management, to writing and publishing.

The CityLit-UB partnership further enhances campus and community life by delivering cultural programs, service learning outreach to various populations, and the basis of a new model for institutional-nonprofit-community symbiosis, while providing an environment conducive to the growth of an organization so that it can have greater impact.

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“CityLit finds a home in the heart of Baltimore’s cultural district, and UB gains a further stake in the cultural community,” Wilhelm summarized. “We are ecstatic to be in an environment that values scholarship as well as the value of applying that scholarship toward the benefit of the community. Creating meaningful ways to achieve those benefits through the literary arts is where CityLit and UB meet.”

CityLit Project was founded in 2004 to nurture the culture of literature in the Baltimore metropolitan region. Its signature event—CityLit Festival in partnership with Enoch Pratt Free Library—won “Best of Baltimore” honors from Baltimore magazine in 2005 and 2009. The magazine called the festival “a can’t miss event on the city’s cultural scene.” City Sages—the first title under its CityLit Press imprint—earned “Best of Baltimore” accolades in 2010. The nonprofit organization’s public funding comes from the Maryland State Arts Council and the Baltimore Office of Promotion and The Arts, and it recently obtained its first federal support from the National Endowment for the Arts. Last year, the Baltimore Community Foundation provided generous support for the relaunch of www.citylitproject.org.

The School of Communications Design, a division of the University of Baltimore’s Yale Gordon College of Arts and Sciences, offers undergraduate degrees in English and Corporate Communication, a unique master’s degree in Publications Design, a Master of Fine Arts degree in Integrated Design, and a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing and Publishing Arts. The latter degree program was named one of nine distinctive MFA programs in the United States by Poets & Writers magazine. Its faculty produce a range of scholarly and creative works, including articles, academic and commercial books, stories and poems, scholarly and literary journals, advertising, corporate identity, films, videos, and websites. Students and alumni work in major design, publishing, and communications concerns in the Baltimore-Washington area and across the country.

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