

## **David Joy Campus Visit – April 23, 2019**

**Dr. Michele Fazio and Dr. Peter Grimes**

### **Final Report**

David Joy visited the UNCP campus on April 23, 2019. He met with two face-to-face classes taught by Dr. Grimes, Writing Fiction I and Writing Creative Nonfiction I, and gave a reading and Q&A session as part of the *Pembroke Magazine* Issue 51 launch, an issue that includes a review of his latest novel by our colleague and instructor of English, Aaron Cole. Joy's reading was video recorded to share with Dr. Fazio's online Contemporary Literature class, who read part of Joy's second novel during the semester.

In preparation for the face-to-face classes, students were asked to read relevant creative works by Mr. Joy, write an analysis of those readings, and formulate questions regarding craft and other practical writing concerns. The fiction-writing students read the opening chapters of Joy's three novels as well as an essay, "Digging through the Trash," which Joy wrote about his fiction writing's common subject, the people and places of Jackson County, North Carolina. The creative-nonfiction-writing students read that same essay, as well as an essay from Joy's memoir, *Growing Gills*, which recounts his growing up as a fly fisherman. In both class meetings, students directed the time with Joy by volunteering these prepared questions. The result in each class was a casual, low-stakes writing-focused discussion. The students in both classes reported that they found the conversation inspiring and useful. In response to "Digging through the Trash," one student wrote, "Every single experience he had I felt like I'd experienced too. His writing seems to flow so naturally as if he was saying it just in front of me and I really enjoyed the read. I'd loved to read more of his work." Another wrote, "I found this essay to be profound to say the least. The idea society equating class with a person's worth is something that I have seen time and time again over the years. Joy's writing is relatable and makes me reflect on how my own life parallels in some ways." Many students

responded in similar fashion, explaining that they related to the experiences Joy describes and admired different aspects of his craft, such as his vivid use of imagery in creating the landscape of his home.

Later that evening, Joy read from two of his novels in front of an audience composed of faculty, creative writing students, and members of the general public as part of the *Pembroke Magazine* Issue 51 release event. His readings were brief so that Joy could field questions from audience members. Questions ranged from those about process and craft to those about literary interpretation of his work and his feelings about his work's relation to the larger body of Southern and Appalachian literature. As mentioned earlier, the reading was recorded so that Dr. Fazio could share it with her Spring 2019 online students, as well as future classes.

Our assessment of the success of David Joy's visit is based on observation, numerous recorded written and unrecorded oral student responses, as well as our own personal reflections. One student summed up her reaction to the classroom visit and reading as follows: "I enjoyed the reading and the class meeting with author David Joy. I love how real he is with himself and how he doesn't change himself to fit the certain stereotypes. I liked hearing his reasoning behind his stories, it shows his character and his intelligence. Seeing him and interacting with him in person during our past lessons and him reading a couple of his pieces, it was good for me because I picture him as someone who writes these dark suspenseful stories but the stories have a bigger message behind them." Students in Dr. Fazio's online classes enjoyed reading his realistic story about North Carolina's working poor. Their writing assignments reflected how well they identified with the working-class themes his narrative delves into, particularly class oppression and human suffering. One student wrote, "the beauty of Joy's writing is in its sympathetic approach."

Joy's visit and video recording will have a long-lasting impact on future coursework, especially how contemporary literature is taught online. Having working writers visit campus is enlightening to students in terms of seeing what path writing might take beyond the classroom as

part of a successful career. His visit also provided students (both online and face-to-face) with a deeper understanding of literary analysis, the writing process, and what it means to be an emerging artist.