

NOMINATION COVER SHEET
2009 Virginia Outstanding Faculty Awards

1. <u>NAME</u>	
Full: David Charles Wojahn Preferred First Name: David	
2. <u>INSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION</u> Institution: Virginia Commonwealth University Rank/Position Title: Professor of English Year Rank/Title Attained: 1995 Years at Institution: 6 Campus Email Address: dcwojahn@vcu.edu Campus Phone: 828-4462 Campus Mailing Address: Box 842005 Richmond, VA 23284-2005 Campus Communications Contact: -Name: Dr. Laura Moriarty -E-mail: ljmoriar@vcu.edu	3. <u>PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION</u> Academic Discipline: English Specialization/Field: Creative Writing, Poetry Type of Terminal Degree: MFA Year Awarded: 1981 Awarding Institution: University of Arizona
4. <u>PERSONAL INFORMATION</u> Home Phone: Home Mailing Address:	

Please check only one box:

- RESEARCH/DOCTORAL INSTITUTION NOMINEE:
- MASTERS/COMPREHENSIVE/BACCALAUREATE INSTITUTION NOMINEE:
- TWO-YEAR INSTITUTION NOMINEE:
- RISING STAR NOMINEE:
- TEACHING WITH TECHNOLOGY NOMINEE:

Table of Contents

Cover Sheet	1
Mission Statement	2
Summary of Accomplishments	3
Personal Statement	9
Abbreviated Curriculum Vitae	11
Letters of Support (Excerpted).....	13
Additional Documentation.....	16

President or Chief Academic Officer

Signature: _____

Printed Name: Eugene P. Trani, President, Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University Mission Statement

Adopted as part of VCU 2020

The University provides a fertile and stimulating environment for achieving excellence in learning, teaching, scholarship, research, clinical practice, creative expression and in public service. Essential to the life of the University is a faculty actively engaged in scholarship and creative exploration — activities that increase knowledge and understanding of the world and inspire and enrich teaching.

The University is dedicated to excellence in instruction in an atmosphere of free inquiry and scholarship so that its students may realize their full potential as informed, productive citizens with a lifelong commitment learning and service.

The University serves the local, state, national and international communities with excellence through its scholarly activities, its diverse educational programs and its public service activities. The University also contributes its intellectual and creative expertise in the development of innovative approaches to meet the changing needs of our society.

Summary of Accomplishments

David Wojahn is an outstanding poet, a committed teacher, and a tremendous part of the intellectual and creative life of Virginia Commonwealth University. In the past year, David Wojahn has been remarkably productive and nationally recognized for his work. He was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry for his seventh collection of poems, *Interrogation Palace*. He was the sole finalist in the competition to receive the 2007 Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize given by the Academy of American Poets. And he was the recipient of the 2007 O.B. Hardison Award from the Folger Shakespeare Library. This list of achievements, impressive in and of itself, crowns an illustrious career that has been marked by recognition from institutions such as the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the American Academy of Poets, and Yale University Press. Yet the accolades David Wojahn has received for his poetry do not capture the full range of his contribution to his students and to the community at large. David Wojahn is a dedicated and innovative teacher who works closely with his students, recognizes their academic and professional needs, and conceives and implements significant curricular change. Additionally, as the director of the Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at Virginia Commonwealth University he has been instrumental in making fundamental innovations to the program. Through his teaching, through his extensive essays and reviews, and through his presence in the classroom and the community, David Wojahn, as Maura Stanton, Professor of English, Indiana University notes, is a poet who does “not live in an ivory tower but in the everyday world.”

Teaching

For scholars working within a purely academic field, teaching is primarily introducing students to the discipline, fostering their engagement with it, and mentoring students in traditional ways. For a poet, teaching has a unique and significant added dimension. The nature of the student-teacher relationship involves not only sharing a knowledge of the field, but also bestowing on the student the ability to develop their awareness of the field, giving them permission to define themselves through their art, helping them find whatever it is that will release that creative power within them. The poet-teacher helps students develop their craft as poets, and develop the perseverance for something they will pursue for a lifetime.

- Former student Nicholas Reading (Instructor, University College/Virginia Commonwealth University, VCU MFA 2007) describes how David “always embraces one’s aesthetic choices and strives to make your poem more successful, more you. The extreme value in this approach is that it instills in the student confidence - no small thing for any artist. Even more, this confidence is developed without any of the favoritism or excessive compliments which many times disrupt a community of writers. The workshops are not only healthy in this regard, but they also mirror the readership and response one would receive in the literary community, outside of the academia.”

By any quantitative measure David Wojahn is an excellent teacher. Since he began teaching at Virginia Commonwealth University, his teaching evaluations have always been outstanding: 4.6 or above (often 5.0) on a 5.0 scale. The anonymous evaluation forms consistently elicit student comments such as: “a gifted and brilliant teacher,” “a calm, collected professor who lectures with purpose and insight,” an “impressive teacher with the ability to lead his class into effective, career-defining discussions and re-evaluations,” “generous with (his) knowledge and experience” and “a living legend.” One student succinctly wrote “the best writing workshop I’ve ever taken (or can imagine taking).”

Yet, given the unique nature of the teacher-student relationship in a creative field, numbers reveal only a limited amount. The legacy of teaching is also revealed through the subsequent success of students who have benefited from the time, intellectual energy, mentoring, and nurturing provided. The success of David Wojahn's students speaks loudly to this aspect of his mentoring and teaching. His students have gone on to win a number of awards and have themselves published well. Collectively, David's former students have published more than 75 books, and have won six National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, two Yale Younger Poet prizes, three Stegner Fellowships from Stanford, a National Poetry Series competition, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Many of them have gone on to teaching careers themselves, at places which include University of Michigan, Indiana University, Arizona State, Old Miss, Brandeis, Pittsburgh, West Virginia, The University of Central Florida, UNC Chapel Hill, UNC Wilmington, American University, the University of South Dakota, the University of Texas-Austin, Vermont College, Central Washington University, The University of Southern Maine, Mary Baldwin College, John Carroll University, and Bucknell.

One of his former students, Anna Journey, (VCU MFA 2007, currently pursuing a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Houston), characterizes David's involvement with students, and attributes her success to

- "David's unwavering dedication, brilliance, and stellar mentorship during my studies at VCU." She praises not only his "inspirational" teaching and creative work, but also "his genuine concern for the welfare of his students." She details how, as Director of Creative Writing at VCU, David piloted a week-long seminar called, "Life After the MFA," in which he garnered examples of curriculum vitae from the creative writing faculty, provided examples of cover letters for future job interviews in academia, introduced alternatives to academic pursuits, and included information regarding doctoral programs. "This seminar inspired me to attend Yaddo [one of the premier artist colonies in the US], where I completed my thesis in a cabin on the edge of the upstate New York woods."

Similarly, Nicholas Reading, (Instructor, University College/Virginia Common Wealth University, VCU MFA 2007) credits David's mentorship and teaching with his success:

- "Personally, I have no doubt that I would not have achieved the publication and success that I have had without working with David...David's professional manner illustrated to me that as much as David would read and re-read drafts (that poor, patient man) the decisions and direction in which I would take my work was entirely up to me. For him to trust me in those decisions, and to trust me to make mistakes and learn from them, is the intangible influence he has had."
- William Olsen (Professor Western Michigan University, editor, New Issues Press) observes, David Wojahn "has mentored as many nationally recognized young poets as anyone in his generation."
- Maura Stanton (Professor of English, Indiana University) describes David Wojahn as "a brilliant poet, and perhaps the most extraordinary teacher of poetry that I've ever met."

In the letter of nomination written for David Wojahn's successful nomination as Virginia Commonwealth University's Distinguished Scholar, the chair of the Department of English, Dr. Terry Oggel, observed "David Wojahn is someone who takes his teaching very seriously and fully integrates it with his creative process." He continued:

When he came to VCU's Department of English in 2003, he was already a prominent and much sought-after writer with a long list of achievements and awards. His breakthrough first book of poetry, *Icehouse Lights* (1982), won a Younger Poets' Award from Yale University Press (1981), and two years later (1984) the book won the William Carlos Williams Book Award from the Poetry Society of America. At almost the same time that it became public that Wojahn was coming to VCU, it was also announced that the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation had awarded him a Guggenheim Fellowship in Poetry to complete his most recent collection of poems, *Interrogation Palace: New and Selected Poems 1982-2004*. Upon its appearance in 2006, that volume was reviewed in the top-tier literary journals, including *Poetry*, the foremost poetry journal in the country. In *Poetry*, Peter Campion, invoking the iconic 20th century American poet Robert Lowell, wrote, "Wojahn is one of the few American poets since Lowell who has believably joined private and public life...." This has become a hallmark of Wojahn's work—enriching individual experience by giving it greater public and at times even mythic dimension—and this dominating characteristic is seen in its fullest and most mature form in *Interrogation Palace*. No wonder, then, that the volume was named Finalist for both the 2007 Pulitzer and the 2007 Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize, and it was declared the winner of the 2006 O. B. Hardison Poetry Prize awarded by the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.

Between *Icehouse Lights* and *Interrogation Palace* lies a career as a distinguished poet as well as a dedicated teacher of undergraduate and graduate students. As department chair I am particularly cognizant that in regard to his teaching and service, David Wojahn is unlike many other nationally acclaimed "stars." He is grounded; like his poetry, he is admirably "real." Hence, the national notice his poetry has received is not used to reduce his commitment as a teacher but rather to embellish it.

David Wojahn is a poet-scholar who generously shares his knowledge to mentor and teach those students with whom he comes in contact.

Discovery

David Wojahn is one of the most respected and prolific contemporary poets writing today; he is what William Olsen, (Professor, Western Michigan University and Vermont College, Editor New Issues Press), describes as "one of the leading poets of his generation."

- Wojahn has published seven collections of poems and a book of criticism, and edited four additional books of poems.
- His most recent collection of poems, *Interrogation Palace*, was a finalist for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry. Each year several hundred published books of poetry are nominated by presses for the award; to be selected as a finalist means David Wojahn's book was one of the three collections which the poetry jurors recommended to the Pulitzer Board, which then made the final selection. To be a finalist is very high honor indeed.
- He has published more than three hundred poems essays, and reviews in journals and anthologies

- David Wojahn was the sole finalist for the 2007 Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize given by the Academy of American Poets.

David has garnered this kind of recognition for his work since his first book of poetry, *Icehouse Lights* (Yale University Press, 1982), which received the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award, the oldest and many would say the best-regarded first book award; other past winners include Adrienne Rich, John Ashberry, and Muriel Rukeyser. That book also won the Poetry Society of America's William Carlos Williams Award for the outstanding university or small press-issued collection of the previous two years. David has also been the recipient of a 2003, Writing Fellowship in Poetry, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, as well as numerous other awards and fellowships including the Amy Lowell Traveling Poetry Scholarship and two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts.

While David is a renowned poet, he is also highly respected as a critic; few poet-critics today write as frequently and as knowledgably about contemporary poetry. His colleagues at universities around the country describe his accomplishments in superlative terms.

- Mark Jarman (Centennial Professor of English, Vanderbilt University) writes that David Wojahn is an "essential part...of the contemporary poetry scene, an intelligent and generous critic as well as poet whose work always matters" and who has written "numerous essays" about "poetry and about teaching poetry." "David Wojahn's poetry is some of the most exciting being written today."
- "His body of work," writes William Olsen has emerged as one of perhaps the three or four most crucial and most mature of his generation His awards and publications are exceptional: considered as a whole they emphasize just how broad an audience his work has found. He is rightly regarded at once as the most discerning and the most generous poet-critic of his generation."
- Jean Valentine (Emeritus Writing Faculty, Sarah Lawrence College) asserts that Wojahn's "witty and thoughtful considerations of the poetry of our time (and so, necessarily, of the times before ours) have made him...the only U.S. poet-critic of our era who is in the same intellectual and moral zone as the revered Randal Jarrell."
- "No one knows more about contemporary poetry, in both England and America, than David Wojahn," write Maura Stanton (Professor, Indiana University).

Over the past few years, he has also given more than fifty readings and lectures around the country at institutions such as the University of Chicago, the Academy of American Poets, and Breadloaf Writer's Conference. Few poets writing today are as well-known and well-regarded as David Wojahn.

Knowledge Integration

Unlike many poets of his generation, David Wojahn is not only a poet. He is a renowned teacher.

David Wojahn seamlessly weaves his teaching and creative work and has been nationally recognized for his contribution to the teaching of creative writing with the 2007 O.B. Hardison Award from the Folger Shakespeare Library. This prize is given in memory of former Folger Shakespeare Library Director O.B. Hardison, Jr., who founded the Folger Poetry Series in 1970.

The Hardison Prize honors a poet whose art and teaching demonstrate great imagination and daring. The Hardison's recognition of both the winner's writing and teaching is unique, and highly regarded.

Michael Collier (Professor of English, University of Maryland, College Park, and Director of Bread Loaf Writer's Conference, Middlebury College) describes the Hardison Prize as:

one of the most coveted of poetry's annual prizes. It honors not only a poet's artistic achievement, but his achievement as a teacher as well. It is fitting that David Wojahn is this year's recipient because it recognizes his distinguished career as a teacher. Wojahn's many years associated with some of the best creative writing programs in the country...attest to his commitment to the life and profession of teaching. Wojahn's influence as a teacher and poetry have been so pervasive that it has helped to shape a generation of aspiring and accomplished writers.

Additionally, as director of the MFA in Creative Writing, David made some fundamental changes to the program that has improved the quality of the experience for the students. He has developed two new, very important graduate and undergraduate courses ("Form and Theory of Fiction" and "Form and Theory of Poetry"). These courses are designed to cultivate in his students the same simultaneous ability to be a poet and a critic—the unusual combination that defines David Wojahn. He is also a strong advocate for his students' teaching opportunities, creating the opportunity for VCU graduate students to teach creative writing classes, helping them refine their teaching skills and making them more competitive in securing teaching positions of their own.

His association with some of the most highly rated MFA programs in the country—he was director of the top-ranked MFA program at Indiana University before assuming that position at Virginia Commonwealth University—is a mark both of the credibility he brings to a program, but also his passionate engagement with the teaching of poets and poetry.

Service

David has served his students, his University and his professional community in numerous ways. Clearly his service as Director of the MFA program at VCU—and prior to that, the MFA program at Indiana University—speaks to his commitment to teaching and to training poets. He has also been a long-standing member of the Faculty Advisory Committee, MFA in Writing Program, Vermont College, 2003-07, an unique low-residency MFA program in which David has had an integral role. David is a colleague who understands the importance of giving back. In addition to the Directors' positions he's held, he has also served on numerous hiring committees over the years, a gesture that helps profoundly shape the nature of a department.

- David Wojahn has also used his knowledge and skill as a poet-critic to be an external tenure reviewer for colleagues in the field (Southern Illinois University, Creighton University, Old Dominion University, University of Central Florida).
- His knowledge as a professor and program administrator has been used in service as an external reviewer of MFA programs (Vanderbilt University) and Departments of English (University of Virginia).

- His skills and insight as a poet have contributed to the judging of various poetry competitions. For example, he was the Final Judge in Liam Rector Book Prize Competition, Longwood University, 2007, and a judge for Virginia nominations for “Poetry Outloud” Competition, National Endowment for the Arts, 2006.
- Finally, he has used his knowledge to contribute to the evaluation and publication of the work of other poets: he is on the Advisory Board for the literary quarterly, *Hunger Mountain* (2003-present) as well as serving as a Contributing Editor to *Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses*, (2003-present).

As summarized by Dr. Oggel, chair of the Department of English, David Wojahn’s “national recognition as a poet has not overridden his diligence as a department citizen in his service to his university and to the profession. In this too, he is exemplary, as his *curriculum vitae*. For three years, he has headed the department’s nationally ranked Master of Fine Arts in Writing program, and he has extended his regular three-year term for two more years, to the applause of both students and faculty. He has given fully—and “generously,” to use the term of a department colleague—to the university and the profession, and the pattern shows that he has been doing so for his entire career.”

Conclusion

David Wojahn is the consummate poet-critic-teacher:

- An individual who has been nationally recognized for his creative work through his status as a finalist for the Pulitzer and the 2007 Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize given by the Academy of American Poets.
- A gifted teacher of poetry recognized by the 2007 O.B. Hardison Award from the Folger Shakespeare Library, an award honoring a writing and teaching
- A dedicated program administrator who has been associated with the leading MFA programs in the country
- The 2008 recipient of Virginia Commonwealth University’s Distinguished Scholar Award

David Baker (Professor English and Thomas B. Fordham Chair of Poetry, Denison University; Poetry Editor, *The Kenyon Review*) captures the wealth of David’s talents when he characterizes him as “a vibrant, influential, generous teacher and advisor” and a writer whose poetry is “among the most powerful and important in our current era.”

David Wojahn, Personal Statement

Years ago, when I was a graduate student, I accompanied a fellow MFA candidate to the Department of Motor Vehicles, where he was going to renew his driver's license. Those were more innocent days: not only would your social security number be displayed below your photograph on the license, but there was also a line which listed your occupation—on the application form, my friend wrote "lyric poet.." We dutifully waited while his license was prepared and laminated, and when he received it, he discovered that someone behind the DMV desk had been moonlighting as a literary critic. My friend's occupation was listed as "none."

For thirty years, I have labored in an art that the world cares little about, and taught my students to practice an endeavor that will almost surely never lead them to any sort of material success. Blockbuster novels sell millions of copies; books of poetry, even those issued by commercial and university presses, tend to at best sell a few thousand. And yet writing poetry, challenging as it sometimes can be, has been a source of continuous delight for me, and I have also had the great good fortune to be able to help others write poetry and to become better readers of it—that too has been a delight.

Perhaps the very fact of poetry's insignificance in the world's eyes is one of the sources of this delight: when you write poetry, you are not apt to be serving mammon or the state, and in a madly consumerist culture such as ours, where the individual threatens to be subsumed into a demographic, and where government seems unable or unwilling to address injustice, poetry can make a deeply resonant oppositional statement—simply by asserting the importance of a rich inner life. In his magisterial long poem, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower, the great American poet William Carlos Williams writes that, "It is difficult /to get the news from poems/ yet men die miserably every day/ for lack/ of what is found there." College students enroll in introductory creative writing classes for many reasons, few of them sophisticated or altruistic. Yet I also believe that many of them come to poetry because it confronts those voids, those holes in our lives, which Williams tells us we must seek to heal. This is why I write poetry as well.

These are, I know, high-minded and intangible things to be addressing. And just because you can claim a career as a poet doesn't mean you are doing much better than your students are in realizing such goals. As a practitioner of a mysterious and sometimes sullen art, you are a learner too, a "perpetual beginner," as the poet Theodore Roethke put it.

Given this situation, how can a teacher and writer of poetry ever gauge his/her own progress and rate of success, let alone that of his/her students? My colleagues in literature and other fields always want to know how I go about grading my students' work. They are right to ask this question, but they are often disappointed when I tell them that I teach in a discipline where quantifiable standards do not exist except in the most rudimentary fashion. Yet you *can* teach your students to identify a good poem, to also identify a bad poem, and perhaps to make the distinction between what is poetry and what is *not* poetry--a distinction which even some teachers of literature can fail to recognize. More importantly, you can help students to admire and even to love certain poems—not always an easy task in an era where poetry is little appreciated, and its value to the culture has come under question, sometimes rightly.

But not always rightly. In the spring of 2007, during the week after the slayings at Virginia Tech, a student in my advanced poetry workshop asked a sorrowful but legitimate question: what can poetry do to offer us solace in the wake of events so horrific and senseless? In the following class I offered by way of an answer a poem by the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert, who fought in the anti-Nazi underground during World War II. Herbert begins with the chilling account of the Nazis' execution of five partisans. Heroes though these men may be, they do not die heroically. At the close of the poem's second section, we see them "lie on the ground/ covered up to their eyes with shadow/the platoon walks away/ their button straps/ and steel helmets/ are more alive/ than those lying beside the wall."

Herbert then uses the final section of the poem to both elegize the slain men, and to justify the art of poetry, even in the face of such cold and ferocious inhumanity: "I did not learn this today/I learned it the day before yesterday/so why have I been writing/unimportant poems about flowers/what did the five talk of/the night before their execution/ of prophetic dreams/ of an escapade in a brothel/ of automobile parts/ of a sea voyage/ of how when he had spades/he ought not to have opened/of how vodka is best/after wine you get a headache/ of girls/or fruit/of life/thus one can use in poetry/ names of Greek shepherds/ one can attempt to catch the color of morning sky/ write of love/ and also/ once again/ in dead earnest/offer to the betrayed world/a rose."

Initially, the class discussion focused upon the poem's themes. Is Herbert justified in telling us that poetry will not only help us live in this "betrayed world," but that its primary task is to *praise* that world? And it was to my students' credit rather than mine that we did not long get preoccupied with glass-half-full vs. glass-half-empty arguments, but very soon began to address the formal issues at stake in Herbert's poem: how was he able to bestow such grave importance on things such as car parts and hangovers? And how, on the other hand, was he able to so boldly reinvigorate those abstractions which we are usually told have little place in poetry? Why did he seek to jettison punctuation from his poem? Their answers to these questions did not come on that day, but in the weeks to follow: thanks to their encounter with the Herbert poem, students who had been writing poems in long prosy lines had decided to write with short ones. Several began to remove punctuation from their new poems, and to write multi-sectioned which again made ample use of Herbert's example. Some of these experiments worked, while others did not. The point is that they came to better understand their own creative processes thanks to having read "Five Men." My student's initial question was being answered, and would continue to be answered, through their future poems.

And, of course, encounters such as this one help me to better comprehend my own reasons for writing poetry. Over the years I have taught poetry writing and literature in many settings ranging from large lecture classes of some 300 students to small seminars of no more than a dozen. And yet all of these classes have all left their stamp on my own creative methods, shaping my poetry's intentions, development, and sense of its audience. W. H. Auden once wrote that "more poets fail from a lack of character than from a lack of talent," and as a teacher of poetry and literature I want to above all help foster the building of character in my students. I suspect that Auden would define character as the ability to persevere, to be dogged enough to grow as a poet through an ever-deepening understanding of the craft of writing, and--as that understanding evolves--to make the best use of the tradition, for credible poets are always impassioned readers of literature. I have no illusions about thinking that very many of my students, even those pursuing graduate degrees, will become poets of distinction, but I can say with some confidence that the majority of them have become better and more impassioned readers of literature thanks to their efforts. And that, in turn, has helped them to enrich their lives. Above the desk in my office I have pinned a passage from an essay on teaching, written by the Irish poet and Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney. It's the best short statement about the teaching of poetry writing that I know of, and over the years it has guided me in many ways:

What I tend to say at the beginning of a term to my students in poetry workshops is this: I am going to be involved with your capacities as writers, but your destinies as writers are your own business—after all, you will be receiving grades at the end of the term, so let that be a reminder of our relationship, which is, strictly speaking, pedagogical. But even as I say this, as much for my own protection as for theirs, I recognize that once a special connection is established with a student by way of my respect for his or her potential or achievement—or vice versa—then one of us has affected, however fleetingly, the other's sense of a destiny in poetry. And this may turn out to be something very positive indeed.

DAVID WOJAHN - Abbreviated Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

MFA, University of Arizona, 1981 (Creative Writing/English)
BA, University of Minnesota, 1977 (English)

ACADEMIC POSITIONS

2003-present, Professor of English, Virginia Commonwealth University
1995-2002, Professor of English; 1985-95, Associate Professor, Indiana University
1998-99, Pearl Sherry Visiting Professor of English, University of Chicago
1997, Coal Royalty Visiting Professor of English, University of Alabama
1983-present, Field Faculty, MFA in Writing Program, Vermont College
1985, Visiting Associate Professor of English, University of Houston
1982-84, Assistant Professor of English, University of Arkansas at Little Rock
1981-82, Instructor of English, University of New Orleans

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS (Selected)

2008, University Distinguished Scholarship Award, Virginia Commonwealth University
2007, Named Finalist, Pulitzer Prize in Poetry for *Interrogation Palace: New and Selected Poems*
2007, O.B. Hardison Award, Folger Shakespeare Library
2003, Writing Fellowship in Poetry, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation
1999, 1991 Illinois Arts Council Fellowships in Poetry
1994, 1981, Creative Writing Fellowships in Poetry, National Endowment for the Arts
1991, George Kent Memorial Prize, *Poetry* magazine
1987-88, Amy Lowell Traveling Poetry Scholarship
1988, Society of Midland Authors Book Award for *Glassworks*
1984, William Carlos Williams Book Award for *Icehouse Lights*, Poetry Society of America
1983, 1980, Writing Fellowships in Poetry, Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown
1981, Yale Series of Younger Poets Award, Yale University Press

BOOKS (excluding edited volumes)

Interrogation Palace: New and Selected Poems, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006 (poems)
Spirit Cabinet, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002 (poems)
Strange Good Fortune: Essays on Contemporary Poetry, University of Arkansas Press, 2001 (criticism)
The Falling Hour, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997 (poems)
Late Empire, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994 (poems)
Mystery Train, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990 (poems)
Glassworks, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987 (poems)
Icehouse Lights, Yale University Press, 1982 (poems, foreword by Richard Hugo)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Approximately three hundred poems, essays, and reviews in journals and anthologies, including: *The American Poetry Review*, *The American Scholar*, *Antioch Review*, *Best American Poetry*, *The Breadloaf Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, *Chicago Review*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Crazyhorse*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Field*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Georgia Review*, *Iowa Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Missouri Review*, *The New Criterion*, *New England Review*, *The New*

York Times Book Review, The New Yorker, North American Review, Notre Dame Review, Ohio Review, Oxford American, Paris Review, The Penguin Book of the Sonnet, The Pittsburgh Anthology of American Poetry, Poetry, Poetry East, Poetry Northwest, Poets of the New Century, Poetry 180, Ploughshares, Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses, Quarterly West, Shenandoah, Southern Review, Triquarterly, Verse, Virginia Quarterly Review, Writers' Chronicle, The Yale Younger Poets Anthology, Yale Review.

INVITED READINGS AND LECTURES (Selected)

Academy of American Poets, Poetry Society of America, University of Virginia, University of Michigan, University of Chicago, University of Illinois, The University of Connecticut, The University of Alabama, Virginia Tech University, Southern Methodist University, The University of Houston, University of Maryland, Oklahoma State University, University of Kentucky, University of Arizona, Arizona State University, The University of Wisconsin, Indiana University, Syracuse University, Denison University, Tulane University, The New School for Social Research, The College of Charleston, Colby College, The University of Redlands, Rhodes College, The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, The Breadloaf Writers' Conference, Indiana Writer's Conference, The Port Townsend Writers' Conference, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, National Public Radio's "Anthem."

TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE (Virginia Commonwealth University)

Director of Creative Writing Program, English Dept., 2005-present
Head of Senior Poet Search Committee, English Dept, 2006, 2007
Member, Creative Non-Fiction Search Committee, English Dept., 2007
Executive Committee, English Dept., 2005-present
Head of Tenure and Promotion Committee, English Dept., 2006
Member, NEH Lecture Committee ("Creating and Consuming in the Digital Age")
College of Arts and Sciences, 2006
Member, Creative Writing Committee, English Dept., 2003-present
Member, MFA Admissions Committee, English Dept. 2003-present
Designed new graduate courses ("Form and Theory of Poetry," "Form and Theory Of Fiction,"), English Dept., 2005
Advisory Board, *Blackbird* (online literary journal), English Dept. 2003-present
Director of 26 MFA theses, 2003-2007; reader for 10 MFA theses, 2003-present

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE (Since 2003)

Outside Tenure Reviewer, University of Virginia, 2008
External Reviewer, Creative Writing Program, Ohio University, 2007
Outside Tenure Reviewer, Dept. of English, Southern Illinois University, 2007
Final Judge, Liam Rector Book Prize Competition, Longwood University, 2007
Member of External Review Committee, Dept. of English, University of Virginia, 2006
Judge for Virginia nominations for "Poetry Outloud" Competition, National Endowment for the Arts, 2006
External Reviewer, MFA in English Program, Vanderbilt University, 2005
Outside Tenure Reviewer, Dept. of English, Creighton University, 2005
Outside Tenure Reviewer, Dept. of English, Old Dominion University, 2005
Judge, Academy of American Poets Prize, University of Maryland, 2005
Outside Tenure Reviewer, Dept. of English, University of Central Florida, 2004
Faculty Advisory Committee, MFA in Writing Program, Vermont College, 2003-07
Advisory Board, *Hunger Mountain* (literary quarterly), 2003-present
Contributing Editor, *Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses*, 2003-present.

Excerpts from Letters of Support for David Wojahn

Dr. Eugene Trani, President, Virginia Commonwealth University: David Wojahn has distinguished himself as one of the premier poets of his generation, as evidenced by his recent recognition as a finalist for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry. Yet David Wojahn is not only a poet, but a skilled teacher and critic of poetry. His contribution to the University, as marked by his recent award from the University for Distinguished Scholar of 2008, enriches our institution and inspires our students. We are fortunate to have him leading our nationally ranked MFA program in Creative Writing and teaching our graduates and undergraduates.

Dr. Stephen D. Gottfredson, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, VCU: David Wojahn is that rare combination of gifted teacher, renowned scholar and poet, and skilled administrator. He has a record of accomplishment rarely found. His position as one of the finalists for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry, a significant accomplishment in its own right, is complemented by the recognition he's received from the Folger Shakespeare Library with the Hardison Poetry Prize for 2006, a prize rewarding those poets who seamlessly combine their teaching and creative efforts. That prize captures the essence of Wojahn's gift and of his contribution to VCU, which has also recognized him this year as the University's Distinguished Scholar.

Dr. Fred Hawkrigde, Interim Dean, College of Humanities & Sciences: David Wojahn is one of the outstanding faculty members of the College of Humanities and Sciences at Virginia Commonwealth University. In the past few years, he has been the recipient of the VCU Distinguished Scholar Award (2008), he was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry (2007), a finalist in the Academy of American Poets Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize (2007), and the recipient of the Hardison Poetry Prize for 2006, awarded by the Folger Shakespeare Library to a poet who fully integrates of his poetry and his teaching. These honors mark not only a year of extraordinary achievement, but a career of tremendous accomplishment. David, as letters from poets and critics around the country attest, is one of the premier poets in this country. Moreover, he is a poet who has committed himself to sharing his spirit of inquiry, his knowledge, and his gift with students and the community at large. Under his care and guidance, the MFA program at Virginia Commonwealth University continues to grown in stature and its ascent reflects his dedication to both his students and to the true integration of his work as a poet, critic, and teacher.

Mark Jarman, Centennial Professor of English, Vanderbilt University: David Wojahn's poetry is some of the most exciting being written today....David Wojahn, who has just published his very welcome new and selected poems, is the best read American poet since Randall Jarrell, and, like Randall Jerrell has made reading the subject of his poetry with a persuasiveness that suggests there is no other subject....One reads Wojahn aware, painfully aware, of having fallen short, both politically and in terms of erudition, but as a result wanting to do and be better. The experience of a poem by David Wojahn is, in old-fashioned terms, edifying....Wojahn has long been a valuable part of the contemporary poetry scene, an intelligent and generous critic as well as a poetry whose work always matters; his poetry is never self-indulgent or frivolous or swaddled in experimental fakery. Not only is he a valuable part of the scene, but as I think of the numerous essays he has written about poetry and about teaching poetry, along with the tremendous growth occurring in his own work, I consider him an essential part....As the most recent recipient of the O. B. Hardison Award, he demonstrates once again that I am not alone in my high opinion of him as a poet and teacher.

Maura Stanton, Professor of English, Indiana University: I've always thought David Wojahn was a brilliant poet, and perhaps the most extraordinary teacher of poetry that I've ever met....critic Kevin Stein includes David Wojahn as one of a diverse group of important poets who focus "on the intersection of private and public history in their lives and art." These are

poets who do not live in an ivory tower but in the everyday world....Over the years, David Wojahn has proved himself to be one of the most innovative formal poets writing today, and also one of the most wide-ranging. ...The whole world is his subject, and the past is always terrifyingly alive in the present. His own insightful book of criticism, *Strange Good Fortune*, underscores his passionate engagement with the techniques and ambitions of contemporary poetry. No one knows more about contemporary poetry, in both England and America, than David Wojahn....David Wojahn has the kind of national recognition and respect that bring honor and visibility to the Creative Writing Program at Virginia Commonwealth University. He's won a number of awards and prizes, such as the Guggenheim Fellowship, and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Yale Younger Series Award...but beyond that he's simply, and truly, a major poet.

Michael Collier, Professor of English, University of Maryland, College Park, and Director of Bread Loaf Writer's Conference, Middlebury College: Winning the Yale Younger Poet's Prize at the age of 28 marked David Wojahn as one of the most promising poets of his generation, a promise that he has made good on several times over, for now, almost thirty years later, his reputation as one of America's most significant poets is secure....In recognition of his work, Wojahn has received numerous prestigious national prizes including fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts. The awards he's garnered are equally impressive: the Amy Lowell Traveling Scholarship, the William Carlos Williams and Celia B. Wagner awards from the Poetry Society of America, and three Pushcart Prizes for individual poems...Wojahn is universally admired not only for his brilliant poetry and his inspired teaching but for the dignified and humble way he comports himself. He is someone who by the quiet force of his character brings distinction to everyone he meets and everything he does. As a result, the institutions that have been fortunate to have associations with him have all had creative writing programs that prospered.

Jean Valentine, Professor (retired), Sarah Lawrence College: David Wojahn's large contribution to poetry criticism, collected up to the year 2000 in *Strange Good Fortune* (2001) is informative, hip, wise, and highly readable—and not just to poets! His breadth of knowledge, in and outside of poetry, is astonishing; and his witty and thoughtful considerations of poetry of our time (and so, necessarily, of the times before ours) have made him, I think, the only U.S. poet-critic of our era who is in the same intellectual and moral zone as the revered Randall Jarrell...I have also had the occasion to work as a close colleague of David Wojahn's, on the faculty of Vermont College's low residency MFA Program in Writing, for the last two years, and so I can vouch for his painstaking and caring presence as a teacher of both craft and substance.

David Baker, Thomas B. Fordham Chair of Poetry, Denison University; Poetry Editor, The Kenyon Review: Wojahn must surely be one of the most distinguished and high-achieving members of VCU's faculty and one of the state's premier artists. ...I am particularly impressed with Wojahn's far-ranging interests in the collective experience and cultural politics. Too seldom in contemporary poetry do I find myself learning anything, and yet here I find myself instructed about the historical and global as well as the current and local. As to David Wojahn's standing: His periodical publications are strong and impressive. He has seen his work printed in virtually every major journal. For decades his work has appeared regularly in major literary anthologies and textbooks, and his list of accumulated awards is breath-taking: from his first book to his most recent. David Wojahn is one of America's most visionary and unrelenting of contemporary poets.

William Olsen, Professor Western Michigan University, editor, *New Issues Press*: I have known David professionally and as a fellow writer of poetry for twenty-five years now, and I have yet to meet anyone of my generation more devoted to poetry. He has mentored as many nationally recognized young poets as anyone in his generation. He is about the most tenured and probably the most important member of the MFA Program of Vermont College, one of the

two oldest and best such programs in the country. His grace and vision in his experience as an educator and creative program director translates into concrete terms. I think for David it all begins in the classroom: in serious, spirited discourse about poetry—an activity in which David has very few peers; in acute, un-programmatic editorship; and in nurturing a belief in individual talent as well as a love of the living tradition. He sees the workshop and teaching for the splendid opportunity it offers to writers to find fit apprenticeship as well as artistic company. He is serious about teaching; he knows it for the privilege that is it; and his is outstanding in all its aspects. David also is clearly one of the leading poets of his generation, and his body of work has emerged as one of perhaps the three or four most crucial and most mature of his generation. His awards and publications are exceptional: considered as a whole they emphasize just how broad an audience his work has found. He is rightly regarded at once as the most discerning and the most generous poet-critic of his generation...He is easily the most interested and influential user of received forms of his generation, in no small part because he knows the tradition as well as anyone and knows how to make it new....These is no poet, no poet-teacher, and no poet-critic of his generation I could recommend more highly than David.

Anna Journey, VCU MFA 2007; PhD student in Creative Writing, University of Houston: I know David well, having been a student in three of his graduate poetry workshops, and consider his teaching and his creative work to be of the finest quality. David also provided me invaluable advice regarding my thesis, for which he served on a committee last spring at Virginia Commonwealth University. In class, David refers as easily to the work of Bob Dylan as he does to that of Cavafy, Ovid, Shakespeare, and Plath. I can affirm with confidence that he is the most erudite and broadly read person I know. David is generous with his time, often meeting with me in his office to give me personal instruction. As a direct result of David's guidance and support, I've reached new levels in my professional career as a poet. I've published in such journals as *The American Poetry Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *FIELD*, and am currently pursuing my Ph.D. in Creative Writing and Literature at the University of Houston, the top doctoral program for creative writers....While the ethos of the American poetry workshop at large has grown increasingly polite (and, therefore, vague and frustrating), David always offers direct, challenging advice balanced with respect and clarity. During workshop, David delivers criticism with impressive professionalism, caring, and good humor. His critical feedback is always detailed, helpful, and has prompted me to take risks that I might have otherwise shied away from in my poetry.

Nicholas Reading VCU MFA 2007; Instructor, University College, VCU: What is valuable about David's teaching in the poetry workshops is his ability to put aside his own aesthetic tastes in order to accurately assess any given student's work. That is, instead of coming to a student's work and providing comments and suggestions to make the poem more Wojahnian, he always embraces one's aesthetic choices and strives to make your poem more successful, more you. Personally, I have no doubt that I would not have achieved the publication and success that I have had without working with David....being a gifted reader has always been a blessing as he has, on many occasions, made an astute comment regarding a poem that no one in the room, let alone the author, had ever considered.

Kathryn Davis, Richmond Director, Young Audiences of Virginia; MFA VCU 2005.: I feel so fortunate to have had David Wojahn as my thesis director and teacher. Of course he's brilliant, and the knowledge and insights he imparts about poetry and individual poets make any opportunity to take a class from him or work with him on your own writing an especially rich experience. He's extremely organized, has always read your work when you meet with him, and is ready to give you both the big picture of where your work is headed and detailed critiques of individual poems. But what really sets him apart is his generosity. He makes every student that he works with feel special and that they have his undivided attention. He's quick to lend you something from his personal library if he thinks a certain poet will speak to you.

Additional Documentation for David Wojahn

Quantitative Summary of Accomplishments for David Wojahn

Teaching/Knowledge Integration

- Recipient of the Virginia Commonwealth University Award of Excellence for Scholarship
- Recipient of the 2007 O.B. Hardison Award from the Folger Shakespeare Library, an award honoring a writing and teaching.
- Works extensively with graduate students, directing dozens of theses over the last few years
- Played a key role in the low-residency MFA in Writing Program of Vermont College, regularly teaching two graduate workshops there (with at least 12 students a section).
- Directs the MFA program at Virginia Commonwealth University, where he has developed new curriculum to enhance experience for students.

Discovery/Knowledge Integration

- Since 1977, David Wojahn has received more than 27 awards or fellowships
- In 2007, David was a Finalist, Pulitzer Prize in Poetry for *Interrogation Palace: New and Selected Poems*
- He was the sole finalist in the competition to receive the 2007 Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize given by the Academy of American Poets.
- He has also received fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Yale Series of Younger Poets Award, and the National Endowment for the Arts.
- He has authored or edited thirteen books.
- He has published more than 300 poems in journals such as the *Yale Review*, the *Paris Review*, the *Kenyon Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*.
- More than 100 of his poems have been published in anthologies.
- He has published more than fifty essays.
- He has written more than a hundred reviews of contemporary collections of poetry.
- His seven collections of poetry have been reviewed in venues such as *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *Publisher's Weekly*, and *Poetry*.
- He has read his poetry or lectured at more than fifty universities.
- His first book of poetry, *Icehouse Lights* (Yale University Press, 1982) received the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award, the oldest and many would say the best-regarded first book award; other winners include Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery, and Muriel Rukeyser. That book also won the Poetry Society of America's William Carlos Williams Award for the outstanding university or small press-issued collection of the previous two years.
- After publishing his first book with Yale, David Wojahn's six subsequent collections of poetry have been published by University of Pittsburgh Press, generally considered one of the two or three best university presses for poetry.

Service

- David Wojahn is the Director of the MFA program in Creative Writing at Virginia Commonwealth University
- Prior to coming to Virginia Commonwealth University in January 2003, David Wojahn was Director of the MFA program in Creative Writing at Indiana University

- Outside Tenure Reviewer, Dept. of English, Southern Illinois University, 2007
- Final Judge, Liam Rector Book Prize Competition, Longwood University, 2007
- Member of External Review Committee, Dept. of English, University of Virginia, 2006
- Judge for Virginia nominations for “Poetry Outloud” Competition, National Endowment for the Arts, 2006
- External Reviewer, MFA in English Program, Vanderbilt University, 2005
- Outside Tenure Reviewer, Dept. of English, Creighton University, 2005
- Outside Tenure Reviewer, Dept. of English, Old Dominion University, 2005
- Judge, Academy of American Poets Prize, University of Maryland, 2005
- Outside Tenure Reviewer, Dept. of English, University of Central Florida, 2004
- Faculty Advisory Committee, MFA in Writing Program, Vermont College, 2003-07
- Advisory Board, *Hunger Mountain* (literary quarterly), 2003-present
- Contributing Editor, *Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses*, 2003-present