Established in 2001, Collision Literary Magazine is a student-run literary magazine that features the work of undergraduate students not just from the University of Pittsburgh, but from all over the world. Our publication is made possible by the funding of the University Honors College.

We accept POETRY, NONFICTION, FICTION, and VISUAL ART.
Dear readers,

This zine has been created through a collaboration of Collision Literary Magazine and Community and Students for Academic Workers (CSAW) in hopes to raise the voices of undergraduate students who have jobs. Student workers are often burdened with debt, financial worries and the stress of being a student. That is why we wanted to create a platform for students who might have fewer chances or opportunities to submit their work.

CSAW is a coalition of undergraduate and community organizations as well as individuals who support academic workers. This is because working in academia or being an academic and working is a different experience than other types of work. With organizations such as United Students Against Sweatshops, we are able to push for things such as better working conditions within the university. Every position—whether it is a food service worker or an undergraduate teaching assistant—is important to maintaining the university.

Labor topics such as the JANUS Supreme Court Decision and increasing the minimum wage have increased the dialogue around workers'
issues. That is why we felt providing a creative outlet for workers, especially undergraduates, is important.

I would like to thank all the people who provided submissions for this as well as everyone involved in the creation and editing process.

Best,
CSAW

“That is why we felt providing a creative outlet for workers, especially undergraduates, is important.”
Dear readers,

Thank you for picking up this little creation. This is Collision’s second year of publishing a zine, and it is our second year of departing from the typical constraints of our annual magazine. Last year’s zine was full of in-staff mango hijinks manifested into stories, poems, doodles, and prompts, but this year we opted for a different approach: increase constraints on submissions in the hopes of lowering constraints for a selected group of people. In this zine, you will find work solely from undergraduate student workers.

The people who dominate writing and publishing spheres are those who have the time to dedicate to the craft and profession, and those who can bear the pittances they receive along the way. For student workers, the stress of work, class assignments and preparation, and finances eats up not only time but energy, which can also make it difficult to create, to edit, and to submit. To give student workers a specific platform where their art and writing can be celebrated and shared, and to help push back against homogeneity in writing and art, we partnered with the Community and Students for Academic Workers to promote and create this zine.

Many thanks are due for the creation of
this collection. First and foremost, they go to CSAW, who reached out to us about a project that focuses on student workers. Not only are student workers an underrepresented group, but they are often overlooked, and we are honored to share their work with you in these pages. We thank each and every person who submitted, and we hope that their art and writing find many homes in the future.

Additionally, we would like to thank the University of Pittsburgh Honors College for their continued support of our projects and mission, and the University Printing Services for printing the zine.

And finally, thank you, reader, for leafing through this small volume. We hope you enjoy!

Yours,
Kim Rooney

“We thank each and every person who submitted, and we hope that their art and writing find many homes in the future.”
CHECK US OUT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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https://twitter.com/CollisionLitMag

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https://www.instagram.com/CollisionLitMag
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**Cover Art** by Collision Staff

Thank you Kim Rooney, Hannah Woodruff, Isabelle Ouyang and Gracie Brickner for the doodles—keep an eye out for them throughout the zine!
Note from Design & Layout Team:
Interspersed throughout the pages of this zine are facts about working conditions in Pennsylvania, courtesy of CSAW. We hope these will inform and supplement the creative work in our zine this year!
Fact #1:
The federal *minimum wage* and Pennsylvania state *minimum wage* is $7.25/hr, or $15,080 a year.
GOLDFINCH

Grace Hoag
University of Northern Colorado
UNC Galleries
PERSONAL CAPITALISM MANIFESTO

Young Grguras
University of Pittsburgh
Pittserves

What makes a body good
What makes a body bad
Which are you
How will you sustain that?

Do everything you can to
Suppress
Reject
Believe
Hold on

Keep engaged
til you’re enough

Keep working
til you have enough

Are you happy

Are you alive

I’m breathing

37.5 hours later
I’m still here

I’m still here
Fact #2:
According to the MIT living wage calculator, a *living wage* in Pennsylvania would be $10.32/hr (MIT).
WHAT IF SHOES FOR HANDS?

Kate Koenig
University of Pittsburgh
T-Mobile
WHAT IF SHOES FOR HANDS?

Kate Koenig
University of Pittsburgh
T-Mobile
WHAT IF SHOES FOR HANDS?

Kate Koenig
University of Pittsburgh
T-Mobile
Fact #3: In the last 15 years, in-state tuition at Pitt has increased by 89% (Union of Pitt Faculty).
Fact #4:
Current costs of tuition at Pitt are $18,130 for in-state students $31,102 and out-of-state students.

You would have to work at least 48 hours a week for a full year to pay in-state tuition at $7.25/hr.
ODE TO THE FIRST FALLEN LEAF

Sarah Terrazano
Brandeis University
Library Information & Borrowing Desk

I’m sorry you’re not touching the sky, still reaching for it like Adam’s outstretched finger, but instead here on the sidewalk outside the student center. Fall will always have a halo of backpacks and pencil shavings, summer closed in a textbook’s thud. Whirl of first classes and new routine, still-green grass, and wondering how’d another year peel away, reach the pit already? And now you. A crunch underfoot. I almost hear the cry—Just a little sap and stick me back on the bough—A thin wind blows across campus. Don’t look at me like that. You didn’t notice but I too was plucked from a branch this morning and sent swirling down, arms wild, fingers stretched toward the last layer of sky—
Morning, eyes halved
    like grapefruits, sky coaxes
up the sun like a bubble
    to the water’s surface.

Pink blossoms float down
    to coat the sidewalk, packed
into the cracks like ants.
    If you never went to sleep,

is it still a different day? Wanting
    so much of the sun I stare

until my vision speckles,
    little pupils rising and setting in flares,

like rocks skipped
    across the water. I wait

until the light turns green
    and scream over the engines.
Fact #5:
Using government census data, ABODO found that 52% of college students are working at least 27 weeks per year.
Flies flew in lazy circles around the front porch. Despite the setting sun, the air still hung with the same heavy heat that it had seemed unable to shake through the entirety of the summer. Even beneath the shade of the apples trees I could feel the cool slivers of sweat as they wormed their way down my spine, collecting in a pool at the small of my back, dimpled there like great salty lakes. I turned the page of my book, ruffling the burnt grass beneath me that poked into the soft skin around my belly. The tolling of church bells echoed in my ears, paired with the insistent buzzing bugs, carried on the back of the hot breeze. It would be hotter in the church, with my collar buttoned uncomfortably under my chin. I wanted nowhere near the women in their big hats and ornate fans. They would smell too—of sweat and floral perfume and cinnamon Altoids. The sun magnified through the rainbow panes of the stained-glass windows would bake them while they prayed, toasting their already leathery skin. I wondered, beneath my tree, if God might answer their prayers and grant us more relief than the hot shadows we basked in, or the too-short summer’s nights. It felt as if the Earth hadn’t breathed in weeks. AC units had short-circuited, the reservoirs
I had slept most of the day, too hot for much else, until my mother had woken me earlier this morning.

"Come to church," she had said. "We need all the voices we can get."

"I can pray from here," I had assured her, rolling over onto the stone floor, trying to soak up the coolness it held within its sediment. She would go on alone.

Back in the garden, and with my mother gone, the stench of drunk apples decaying in the heat was my only companion as the day sunk into night. The sun would go, but the light would stay, a glow from the horizon, emanating from where I knew the church lay beyond the hills. The air would smell now of smoke instead of fruit, a familiar smell, like camping out as a child, and my stomach called out for the processed sugar of marshmallow and chocolate. The hour would come and go, unsigned by the tolling of the church bells, though the glow of fire-light still hung in the night sky, guiding me as I turned my eyes over the last words of my book and pressed the thing closed. The portrait on the front was bone-white, bleached by my long day in the sun. I retreated to the house, placed myself in front of the only electrical fan that remained that had yet to short, and waited for my mother to return. I must've waited too long, for I feel asleep before the fan. Mother had gone to play cards with the other woman, yes, that was it, or else stayed behind to pray. Or perhaps it had been too dark to walk back on her own—people were desperate now, and you never knew what lurked in the shadows of the wheat stalks between here and there. Though I would
expected the firelight in the distance might’ve granted her safe passage.

As I slept the fan blew my sweat-drenched hair up and off of my golden skin and I dreamt of a man on a lake. There was no boat beneath his feet, and he seemed as if at any moment, he might let himself drown. No, my dream corrected itself, there was a boat, floating just off to the side, closer to shore. It was on fire, burning like a funeral pyre—a burial at sea. I watched as they both sank into the waves and jealousy of the cool swell rose in my chest and I yearned for nothing more than my mother to wake me from my sleep, an icy glass of water in her hand.

“Goodnight,” she would say, then sidle up next to me before the fan, both of us praying silently to ourselves, that tomorrow might bring with it the breeze of cooler days to come.
Fact #6:
36% of students nationwide face food insecurity (Wisconsin Hope Lab Still Hungry and Homeless in College Report 2018).
Fact #7:

1 in 10 of Feeding America’s food bank clients are students (Hunger in America 2014).
BAPTISM

Rachele Cromer
Oklahoma State University
Oklahoma State University Museum of Art
WADING

Rachele Cromer
Oklahoma State University
Oklahoma State University Museum of Art
Fact #8: In its survey of 3,500 college students, ADOBO found that more students are bearing the burden of paying for their education on their own...
...Only 11% of students said they weren’t responsible for any of their college costs, and 24.4% of students said they were fully responsible for covering all of their own college costs.
Chocochavo, indigena, indio, shushut.

One of the sweetest moments of my life I don’t remember. I can only look back at it through a picture I have colored into my memory. In the photograph my dad stands under a stream of the water in the bathroom of our first home. In the back, there’s the window that looks out to a maze of terraced roofs. All concrete-gray, colored with drying clothes waving to the wind. The window, in the picture, darkened by the night. The usually innocent-looking view becomes a black hole sucking the old green tiles in the walls. My dad stands under the intermittent water with a smile so toothy you can tell he has an inverted jaw. Even now, thousands of miles away from the picture, I can see he loves me no matter how disheartening the contrast of our skins. It makes the jokes about the “milk man” hurt. It makes the statements that I do not belong credible. I was born with a skin as white as the heart of the yucca. Go on...Google it. Inside the rough brown skin, the meat of the yucca is white. My grandma couldn’t compare my whiteness to the snow cause she had never seen it. I am not snow-white, but yucca-white. I never really liked yucca, and now I wonder if the
reason why is that deep inside me I knew eating myself was sick.

People think it is curious I chose to be a writer. Being a writer is not what most children in Guatemala dream about. No arts and all medicine, those are my old friends. It is a rather bold move to make art your livelihood, not because you would end up in a crappy apartment in New York City eating Ramen, but because you would enter the worst group there is: the extreme-poverty percentage, the living-on-a-dollar miserable. I, of course, am extremely privileged with a pretty face, a whiteness that opens doors, and a father that pays for my school, my car, and my food at the adult age of twenty-three. I often think about my privilege, and I feel as if I’m being suffocated. The privilege hurts the back of my neck with the weight of the dreams of sixteen million people. I stand with one foot on the dirt floors of the laminated houses in the slums of the Zona 3 landfill and with the other foot on a shiny publishing house in New York.

The painful awareness of my privilege started one day during social studies class. Miss Jóse (short for Josephina), and “La Chepa” for the rather cheeky students (not me), walked from one side of the room to the other. She was teaching the same story we heard every year in the same class. The unfortunate-but-necessary Spanish colonization. Our feelings towards the Spanish colonies were a winner example of “sticking it to the big man.” As we hated the Spaniards and their bloody colonization to which without we wouldn’t be sitting in that classroom. La Chepa was teaching the “class system”
something we Guatemalans know a lot about. She said that class back then was based on the color of their skins. *La Chepa* looked in the eyes of each one of the thirty students in the room. She often joked, but her V-shaped brows said she was not. She said the lighter your skin, the higher the class. Some of my classmates started looking around the room. Until the always brazen kid, whose name I can’t remember, asked the question we were all thinking about. Who, in that day, would be in the top of the pyramid? My name was thrown second, as there was only one other person whiter than me (her forest eyes beat my chocolate gaze). The picture of my dad and me came to my mind. I was at best a mestiza. Because of the color of the skin of my father I wouldn’t be in the top of the pyramid, I would be in the bottom only better than the natives. A half-caste. *La Chepa* had a point though, in our world it didn’t matter whose blood runs through our veins. What only matters is if whether or not people can see the blue veins through the pale skin. And my veins? They popped out of my skin blue and green just like *La Chepa*’s eyes whenever she got mad. The discussion winded down when they realized someone had to be in the bottom with the natives and slaves. *La Chepa* with her darker skin and black hair would probably lead the group and nobody would dare say anything bad about her. *La Chepa* believed that we, in the middle class, could fight and do something for the bleak reality of our country. *La Chepa* that cared so much more than any other teacher to educate us with facts and reality. *La Chepa* who lost her brother to the war and the revolution. *La Chepa* who talked about Stalin, Fidel
Castro, and Rios Montt with more angry passion than my mother ever talked about my father (and my mother would throw at my father sharper daggers than the American pride). La Chepa who made me understand that class by skin color was wrong because she looked as far as she could get from me but deserved to be queen.

I never felt comfortable in my own skin. There was always something that would remind me how different I looked. Tall and white. There was always something that reminded me my placed as the odd one out. People would always say with shiny-round eyes:

“You look so pale,”
“You need some color,”
“You need to eat more.”

The first time I felt unsafe in the color of my skin, I was nine years old. I walked along the curvy and old road leading to the town of Santiago from my grandparents’ house Las Pilas. I walked alone in between two groups of my family. People walked along the sharp cut of the mountain and the narrow street that followed the curves and whims of the mountain. A two-way street in a one-way space. The speed of the cars poking my arm as they passed intimately close. The red giant buses screamed for the people to move from the street and closer to the drop of the cliff. I was distracted by the lake down the cliff and the volcano in the other side. The mass of earth and lava protruded off the ground in such a grandiose way always distracted me. The street was busy with people coming and going. The women with their colorful huipiles. Embroidered blouses and skirts that took days to be made by hand so they looked like they belonged
to Atitlan. The older women went all the way and wore the long skinny fabric wrapped around their head in a red halo. It was a loud afternoon. The conversations floated in the air, completely confused. A mix of Spanish, Tz’utujil, and English. We were all a mix of the twenty-four races that made the country. It was festival time, although I do not remember which one. The people were out celebrating another mélange of Mayan and European customs that made the spectacle a popular touristic attraction. A saint would be carried on the back of the faithful, or a wooden image would be asked to dance by the heathens. Whatever it was, it was cause for celebration and alcohol to forget life. Ahead of me, I glimpsed a bolo, a man so drunk beyond his consciousness, he was dangerous. My body tensed as it always did when walking by such a character. He stumbled, red-eye looking at the ground. I said a silent prayer that he would not see me, but he looked up and the recognition in his eyes was obvious. The bolo threw himself at me. His whole weight crushed me down, and I screamed. I thought I was done. The man was so drunk he couldn’t keep up with his attack, and so with my nine-year-old strength, I pushed him away from me. As soon as I was free, I ran ahead where a group of my family gossiped. I found my big sister’s arm, and I sobbed, stunned. The family around me stopped long enough to ask what was wrong, but words did not come out of my mouth. They got worried, until the group that was behind us got caught up and explained that a bolo had just attacked me. Nobody was worried despite my distress once my aunt laughed and said that the man had picked himself up and said to them
“canché canché” in approval or maybe as an excuse. The color of my skin was the only reason he needed to charge against a nine-year-old. My family took this as a credible explanation, and they nodded as in saying, “That’s fair. She IS so white.” We arrived to a cousin’s house, and I refused to leave the safety of the building once everyone was ready to keep walking to the town.

Guatemala, with its sunny skies and exploding Pacayas\(^1\). The perfect combination of mirror-like pools in the middle of the jungle of Cobán and decaying hospitals with droughts of penicillin. The city is divided by zones. There are some zones to be avoided like Zona 18, there are some zones that makes me feel miserable—Zona 3. Then there are upper-class zones like Zona 15, Zona 16, etc. Beyond the rich zones there is a pristine city, with white walls that do not tell time. A modern rendition of traditional European cities. The security, I believe, being the main attraction. The grounds covered by private security (the only one that works). I wish you could see it. The fairy lights hanging from one building to the other can make you feel like you are in an entire different country, and the roads of polished rocks make you think of grand old times at the Plaza Española. This place, Cayala, is a heaven for rich people. Cayala reminds me of this magazine cover scandal a couple of months ago. Look featured a beautiful white woman in the cover. In the background of this picture, an indigenous women is working, selling colorful belts and necklaces.

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1 Pacaya is one of the most active volcanoes in Guatemala
This picture created a real commotion on Facebook. Friends and family shared their disgust. “Racism,” “cultural appropriation,” “disrespectful.” Words get thrown around in Facebook all the time. The indignation found a nest in the hollow words of Facebook posts. Friends I never thought of as “political” shared videos about the dead girls in Hogar Seguro. The tragedy goes viral and my American friends ask me because they saw something about it trending on Twitter. The fire in Hogar Seguro opened a can of worms that got people talking for ten minutes. Girls labeled as problematic living in terrible conditions. Forgotten girls who never had a chance. I think society is problematic. I wish they had escaped to the States to have a shot at life. For them, anything is better than growing up in the streets of Guatemala.

I had an interesting conversation with my cousin a couple of weeks ago. He is graduating from Columbia in a couple of months. If anyone that I know has made it “in the real world,” it is him. He told me there is a holiday back in Santiago where the women of town spend money and time making Pulique. A dish that takes a lot of work to prepare and the indigenous women make it to give it to ladino families. My grandmother in return gives them hot chocolate and volcancitos, a traditional type of sweet bread. My grandparents are retired teachers. They spent all of their youth teaching indigenous children about language, mathematics, and history. Up to the age of fifteen, my dad lived in Santiago with the rest of his siblings. He often tells stories about having grandpa as a principal and his infamous wrath. I also remember his stories about
jumping into the lake after basketball practice. Life in an indigenous town was comfortable but limiting. My dad had to move closer to the city to get a better education. My grandparents refused to let go of that lake, and so my childhood was a mix of big city life and remote small town.

Santiago was hard to get to. Four hours on an abysmal road that surrenders to the will of nature. But at the end of the road, waiting, the glassy lake with no end, the mountain dancing like giants, and the dust everywhere. My grandma spoke Tz’utujil to the men and women that came over, and then she spoke to us in Spanish. We spent the afternoons playing soccer in a dirt field. When it was time to eat, a woman in her traditional gown made fresh tortillas from the corn she grinded earlier on the day. The woman in the colorful huipil, always the same face in my memories, she is part of the scenery. An item that is always there and never changes. She never ate at the table. She never spoke to us. Except for the time she said I was going to be rich because I was tall.

My cousin, Samy, said once while we were talking about the George Washington Bridge, that doctors cure the body, but poets and writers cure the heart. He is studying to be a doctor, and I, to be a writer. Even after he said that Guatemala was dying because of the lack of letters, I wonder how am I supposed to cure anyone with words.

A few years ago, I spent a couple of days helping relief efforts for the victims of a landslide outside of Santiago. After days of unending rain, the roads were finally opened,
so my dad rushed home to make sure my grandparents were safe. My grandma took me to a church building where hundreds of people were relocated after two small villages were erased by the side of the mountain. We spend all day playing with kids who had nothing left. We walked said erased towns, Panabaj and Sanchaj, an afternoon while rescuers worked on unburying people. My grandpa Abuelito Nito, resident musician and architect aficionado, wrote a song about the lamentation in the Santiagueños’ heart.

“Ay, ay, ay mi publico de Atitlan”
“Unas lluvias fuertes”
“Heavy rain”
“Dierontanta muerte”
“Gave so much death”
“A mi pueblecito de Atitlan.”
“To my little town of Atitlan.”

My abuelo dragged me and a couple of cousins to the radio station and made us sing live. We messed up really bad, and he was angry.

I often think about the smell of burnt corn and sun lotion. Those are the smells of my Guatemala. I often think about the girls in Hogar Seguro, “Safe Home.” If they had only left north like many other children. They would’ve had a 50 percent chance at opportunity. I think about the immigrants from my country having a chance at life, and how we fail every second to provide opportunity in our own land. I think about the terrible words we call them. “Chocochavo,” “indigena,” “indio,” “shushut.” Why do we chose to be blind? Why aren’t they enough to deserve respect from us? We don’t call names to those immigrants who made it thanks to uncle
Sam. In the contrary, we enlarge ourselves when we hear a Latino is successful at whatever endeavor they have chosen.

My animosity against the United States is rooted in the fact that in the states people have a chance. Back home, opportunity is the same man handing 2 cents to the children cleaning windshields with murky water. As I write these words, I think of those families who own my country and keep it in a golden chain. We know who you are. Stop marrying each other to keep business in the family.

Soles raw by walking,
I travel barefoot from the mountains to the light.
Where dreams go to die.
Dig for riches in the land,
find traces of what was.
I sit looking a play,
my hand full of paper.
My throat raw because trash burning for my neighbor.
The castle reaches the sky. A million children banging the door trying to hide.

Offended sky spiting nails.
The culture that mocks ignorance is tar running through my veins. I look at myself in the mirror. My pale skin shows the running black goo. I scratch until I bleed, but the tar is not going anywhere. I hid my black veins with a pale powder. People smile at me, but they don’t know how my guilt turns into poison. My grandparents were born in a Mayan town. They came from half-white families, so they got a chance at the race. My father is smart, so when it was his time, he carried me on his shoulders and took me as far as he could. His height is a pass
to the future. And although his are feet tired and bleeding, he walks next to me, picking me up whenever I trip down.
Blessed, responsible, change.
Fact #9:
The student debt in the United States is estimated at $1.4 trillion.
COQUINA

Jonathan Phelps
Kennesaw State University
Writing Assistant and Tutor, KSU Writing Center
HIGHWAY FORTY-ONE

Jonathan Phelps
Kennesaw State University
Writing Assistant and Tutor, KSU Writing Center
Reader, this space is for you...