



2023 Alumni Professional Achievement Award Dr. Len Lawson '02

The Alumni Professional Achievement Award recognizes significant contributions alumni have made to their fields while exemplifying high moral and professional ethics.

Dr. Len Lawson '02 is being honored with the 2023 Alumni Professional Achievement Award for his outstanding accomplishments in teaching and writing and advocating for poetry.

A 2002 graduate of Winthrop University, Dr. Lawson holds a Bachelor of Science in business Administration with a management option. He earned a Master of Arts in English from National University in 2007, a Ph.D. in English literature and criticism from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2021, and a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing from Queens University of Charlotte in 2023.

As someone who loves language, Dr. Lawson has employed the art of poetry and writing in a variety of ways to serve his community. He has released two full-length poetry collections that center on redefining perceptions of race, class, and community: *Negro Asylum for the Lunatic Insane* (Main Street Rag, 2023) and *Chime* (Get Fresh Books, 2019).

Much of this work also explores the concept of Afrofuturism, which combines science-fiction, technology, and fantasy to explore the African-American experience. While Afrofuturism is not a new concept, his work has expanded the genre and brought more dialogue, discussion, and academic research into the subject matter. He has conducted extensive research in the field and curated a poetry anthology on the topic entitled *The Future of Black: Afrofuturism, Black Comics, and Superhero Poetry* (Blair Press, 2021).

In addition to his Afrofuturism work, he is also a strong advocate for providing larger platforms for poets of color. He partnered with Muddy Ford Press to create the Lizella Augusta Jenkins Moorer Prize, which aims to publish poetry chapbooks by South Carolina poets of color. This literary prize is the first of its kind in South Carolina, creating more opportunities for Black and brown poets in the state.

The dedication to this work is also evidenced through his recent dissertation *The Afro-Palmetto Poets: Dimensions of Place and Poetry Aesthetic in the Works of African American South Carolina Poets* and co-editing the poetry anthology *Hand in Hand: Poets Respond to Race* (Muddy Ford Press, 2017).

Dr. Lawson received the 2016 Jasper Project Artist of the Year Award in Literary Arts, the inaugural 2018 North Carolina Poetry Society Susan Laughter Meyers Fellowship in Poetry, the 2020 SC Academy of Authors Carrie McCrary Nickens Fellowship, and the 2022 Fresh Voices in the Humanities Award from the South Carolina Humanities Council.



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He has received poetry fellowships from Tin House Summer Workshop, Palm Beach Poetry Festival, Callaloo Barbados, Vermont Studio Center and Virginia Center for the Creative Arts among others. His poetry appears in African American Review, Callaloo, Ninth Letter, Poetry Northwest, Verse Daily, and has been translated internationally.

Dr. Lawson is currently an assistant professor of English at Newberry College, where he initiated and is chair of the Black Faculty Caucus. He is also a program coordinator for the college's inaugural African American Studies program. In the community, Dr. Lawson currently serves as vice president of the Poetry Society of South Carolina and formerly on the Boards of Directors for The Jasper Project and South Carolina Writers Association. He is also a member of the South Carolina Humanities Speakers Bureau.

He lives in Irmo with his wife, Sakethia.