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NEWS RELEASE

**UWM- School of Continuing Education
Annual Spring Writer's Festival Focuses on Literary Diversity**

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Stewart David Ikeda, author of the award winning novel, *What the Scarecrow Said*, will lead a special workshop focused on "Multicultural Writing" at the 2006 Annual Writers Festival sponsored by the UW-Milwaukee School of Continuing Education on April 28-30, 2006.

This is a hands-on writing session that explores issues that creative writers face in crafting culturally rich, multi-vocal, pertinent characters. While there will be some discussion of issues of multicultural publishing and marketing, the emphasis is on creative issues; exploring characterization, social settings and audience expectations through discussion and exercises. Ikeda is a nationally recognized writer and educator specializing in the areas of multi-cultural works.

Ikeda says he is interested in creating diverse characters and addressing multicultural issues because for writers who seek to represent previously underrepresented communities and characters, it can be twice as challenging to break through readers' preconceptions about unfamiliar character types and relate stories and histories that go against the grain of what we as readers think we "know" and can believe about the world.

He also believes that it is important for the publishing world to embrace writers who pursue topics of diversity because this is the evolution of the art. Contemporary writers often grapple with writing for widely diverse audiences, and they often times encounter issues with representation, authenticity, authority, stereotyping, and the burden of exposition when crafting characters and stories that haven't been widely represented in the past.

Outside of his writing and teaching, Ikeda is noted lecturer on diversity and ethnic culture issues as well as Vice President of IMDiversity Inc., a multi-cultural media publisher, diversity recruitment e-business and online multicultural community. He has made diversity his life work and he says he is interested in new stories and fresh perspectives that capture the cultural kaleidoscope that we are really in today, and will be in the future. In writing and in business Ikeda thinks it is important to reach out to a diverse audience and try to capitalize on the talents of the people you work with.

In August 2005 after Hurricane Katrina caused all of the staff at the New Orleans based IMDiversity to be dispersed, Ikeda continued to keep the business running from his Milwaukee office. He also taken over as acting editor of *The Black Collegian* magazine, after the flood waters of Katrina forced the publisher to shut down temporarily.

Ikeda believes the American public may be more ready to accept and reach out across the lines of diversity than the established culture system accounts for. After Hurricane Katrina, Ikeda, says he observed "in a deeply personal way" how very differently minorities of all classes were treated by officials and represented by mainstream media in the emergency. He goes on to say, "I also experienced first-hand an extraordinary outpouring of generosity, empathy and immediate, selfless action by the country's individuals, organizations, and yes, even corporations during the crisis. It suggests to me that we – as in "We the People" – may be more ready to accept and reach out across our diversity than the amorphous "establishment" is."

The *Multi-Cultural Writing* workshop is one of several seminars and workshops available at the Annual Spring Writers Festival. Other highlights of the festival include workshops on practical tips for getting published, networking with principles in the publishing industry, inspiration to help writers maximize their goals and quality, as well as opportunities to have works in progress reviewed by writing professionals.

The Annual Spring Writers Festival will be held April 28-30 at the UWM-School of Continuing Education, 161 W Wisconsin Ave, in downtown Milwaukee. To learn more contact Anne O'Meara at 227- 3311 or aomeara@uwm.edu.###