It was an email of just a few lines, but it spoke volumes of good news to Doug Unger. One of the founders of UNLV’s master of fine arts in creative writing program, Unger was serving as interim English department chair last summer when he received an unexpected email from a fact checker at The Atlantic Monthly. The email asked him to confirm information for an upcoming Atlantic article recognizing UNLV’s graduate-level creative writing programs as among the best in the nation.

“It was wonderful news,” says Unger. “To have this publication—one of the most sophisticated magazines in the literary world—acknowledge our creative writing programs was truly confirmation of our success.”

The article, titled “Where Great Writers Are Made,” appeared in August and named UNLV’s master of fine arts (MFA) program in creative writing as one of the five most innovative in the country and the doctoral program as one of the overall best of its kind.

The article praised the UNLV master of fine arts program for its emphasis on global literature and its unique partnership with the Peace Corps, which encourages students to spend two years abroad with the Corps as part of their programs. They
also must translate a major work of literature.

The Peace Corps partnership was established as a part of its Ph.D. program in 2001. (The English doctorate was one of UNLV’s nine distinctive programs in the country in 1997. It includes emphases in both prose and poetry.) The fellowships also serve as an important recruitment tool for the English department, enabling faculty to attract the best students. This, in turn, makes UNLV competitive with the finest institutions across the country.

Accolades such as those found in the Atlantic also boost recruitment, Keelan and Unger agree. They note that applications to the MFA program have quadrupled since the article’s publication, and they hope for more as the accolades continue to roll in. Unger recently received word that Poets & Writers, a respected trade magazine, listed UNLV’s MFA program as one of nine distinctive programs in the country in its Nov./Dec. issue.

To Unger, this is yet another form of affirmation indicating that the program has arrived, bringing with it recognition and pride for the whole institution. "What we are seeing is that literary studies at UNLV are beginning to take a place on the national stage," he says. "And we couldn’t be more delighted about it."