

# In Writing

Grand Valley Writing Department | Fall 2014 | Vol 8.2

## In This Issue

Visiting Writers	2-3
MWCA	4
Sikkema's <i>January Found</i>	5
New WRT Faculty	6-7
Successful Alum	8
<i>Black Sheep</i> Internships	9
Alumni News	11
Internship Abroad	12

## Contributors

Stephanie Banta  
Claire Fisher  
Andrea Klapp  
Kelsey May  
Rachel McLaughlin  
Shardae Rudel  
Krysta Rydecki  
Rose White



*WRT 354 Students, Christina Usher and Kayla Pollard, Working on a Team Project*

## New WRT Course Explores Global Writing Practices

### Krysta Rydecki

The world is constantly changing. Advances in information technology have significantly changed the way people interact and communicate. The ability to connect with people around the world has opened endless opportunities for professionals and students alike. But with this almost unlimited access to the world comes new challenges. Professionals and students need to know how to effectively communicate with people from different countries and cultures. To ensure that students learn the skills necessary to be successful in academics and the workplace, the GVSU Writing Department is offering a new course, WRT 354: Writing in the Global Context.

Under the guidance and expertise of

Professor Laurence José, WRT 354 exposes students to writing practices across cultural and national borders and gives them experience writing for audiences who are linguistically and culturally diverse. Students will learn about theories of culture and language, become knowledgeable of best writing practices, and create documents for culturally diverse audiences.

"In this class, students will learn that everything they say is connected to culture," said José. "This class is about questioning your assumptions and being more aware of your own biases."

José's culturally and linguistically diverse background greatly influenced her love for languages, culture, and communication. She

*See WRT 354 on page 10*

# Lacy Johnson on the 'Truthiness' of Creative Nonfiction

**Stephanie Banta**

On September 18th, artist and writer Lacy M. Johnson kicked off the 2014/15 GVSU Writer's Series with a craft talk and reading focused on the art of writing creative nonfiction. Author of *Trespasses: A Memoir* (2012) and *The Other Side* (2014), Johnson is currently the Director of Academic Initiatives at the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts at the University of Houston as well as an acting professor in interdisciplinary arts. Her work appears in *Tin House*, *The Racial Imaginary*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *Sentence*, *Fourth Genre*, *Literature: The Human Experience*, *TriQuarterly Online*, *Memoir Journal*, *Gulf Coast*, and elsewhere.

Speaking in the Kirkhof Center to a room full of students and faculty, Johnson stuck to a nontraditional opening for her craft talk with a clip from a 2005 taping of Stephen Colbert's *The Colbert Report*. In the clip, Colbert introduces the word *truthiness*, defining it as the state when a person just feels that something is true, even if that is not actually the case.

With that in mind, Johnson posed one seemingly simple question to the audience: What constitutes the truth in creative nonfiction? After a few moments

of perplexed silence, Johnson went on to explain how in creative nonfiction there is no one answer for what constitutes the truth and that the line between taking creative liberties and writing fiction is often murky at best. However, she also stated that for something to be considered true, it needs to possess three qualities; it "needs to have authenticity, veracity, and mimesis."

---

**For something to be considered true, it needs to possess three qualities; it "needs to have authenticity, veracity, and mimesis," said Johnson.**

---

To demonstrate this point, Johnson asked the audience to write the answers to three questions with the stipulation that one answer had to be a lie: 1) What activity do they spend the most amount of time doing? 2) What is something surprising that happened while they were doing said activity? 3) What major topic have they been thinking about lately?

Johnson had students share what they

wrote, asking the audience to determine which stories were fiction and which were nonfiction. Of the three stories shared, only one was determined by the audience to be complete fiction.

Johnson then shared how she dealt with the truth in her memoirs *Trespasses: A Memoir* and *The Other Side*, especially when writing dialogue. In her case, Johnson explained she preferred to italicize dialogue to indicate that it is not verbatim but rather her retelling of what was once said. The craft talk ended with a Q&A session.

Later in the evening, Johnson read to an attentive audience at the Cook-DeWitt Center. Selecting excerpts from *Trespasses: A Memoir* and *The Other Side*, Johnson read about the slow and simple days spent growing up in a rural Midwestern town to the high-tension moments of her escape from her ex-boyfriend turned kidnapper.

Following the reading, Johnson conducted a Q&A session in which she answered questions of a more personal nature including the state of her relationship with her parents, what her process was for writing both of her memoirs, and even the many different tattoos she has. After the Q&A session, Johnson met with attendees and autographed copies of *The Other Side*, which were available for purchase at the event.

## Standing Room Only at the Fall Arts Celebration Annual Poetry Night

**Kelsey May**

The 2nd floor event room in the L.V. Eberhard Center was packed with students, faculty, and local poetry enthusiasts. Poetry Night has garnered quite the reputation over the past decade. Many community members attend annually and are always impressed with the highly esteemed poets GVSU's Fall Arts Celebra-

tion brings to campus. Rarely does poetry enjoy such a first-class treatment, and no poets were more deserving than Mark Doty and Dorianne Laux.

After an introduction from the Writing Department's Full Professor Patricia Clark, Laux took the stage—and with it, the attention and devotion of the audience. She read from *The Book of Men* and *Facts About the Moon*, an Oregon Book Award winner. Laux mesmerized listeners with her mastery

of language and ability to wring emotion from the simplest of images: the "high-high boots" of Cher, the "lunar strength" of the moon. Leave it to Laux to take an 'established' social norm and spin it into cotton candy, devouring it with the poetic appetite novices can only long for.

Laux discussed the craft of her poetry,

*See POETS on page 3*

# An Evening with Monica Robinson and *Bright Shards of Someplace Else*

Stephanie Banta

On a rainy evening in October, students and faculty members filled the Alumni House to hear one of GVSU's own present in the second Visiting Writers Series event of the 2014/15 season. Affiliate Writing Professor Monica Robinson was the focus of the evening. She read from her recently published collection of short stories *Bright Shards of Someplace Else* and entertained questions from the audience on everything from the craft of writing short fiction to which writers most influence her style (if you were wondering, one is Nathaniel Hawthorn).

The 2013 recipient of the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction for her debut collection *Bright Shards of Someplace Else*, Robinson holds an MFA in Poetry from Western Michigan University and has published fiction and poetry in *Georgia Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Conduit*, and *Exquisite Corpse*, among others. Robinson is also the author of a hybrid poetry chapbook, *A Catalogue of Rare Movements*, and has had her plays and screenplays read in Chicago and New York.

Robinson began the night with a reading of "The Country Woman." Filled with colorful images and intricately crafted lines

of prose, the story is centered on the actions of an eccentric older woman—the country woman—who expresses whatever those around her lack, forcing them to recognize their faults and either improve or hide from them.

As the evening continued, Robinson read another short story from *Bright Shards of Someplace Else*, "Line of Questioning."

---

**"Like poetry, short stories require a distinct shape," said Robinson, "and revisions need to be made per line rather than paragraph or chapter."**

---

Contrary to the almost cheerful language of "The Country Woman," "Line of Questioning" expressed a darker side to Robinson's fiction as the audience follows a poetry professor who finds himself caught in the middle of a murder investigation of one of his former students.

Following the reading, Robinson conducted a Q&A which focused mainly on the production and content of *Bright Shards of Someplace Else*, how she developed

her unique style of writing, and how she believes it is best to tackle writing short fiction. When asked how she found herself writing short fiction, Robinson explained how the transition from writing poetry to short fiction was not that drastic of a change. "Like poetry, short stories require a distinct shape," said Robinson, "and revisions need to be made per line rather than paragraph or chapter."

Robinson went on to explain that in the development of *Bright Shards of Someplace Else*, the lines of prose were reworked many times over and that most of the humor and intricacies of the short stories were added later in the writing process once the "scaffolding" was set.

Robinson advised the audience to not be afraid to let their imagination run wild when writing fiction. Expanding on this, Robinson explained that when writing fiction, she likes to develop stories where several aspects of it are out-of-joint and "present them as if they were real and then make everything else in the story extremely realistic so the reader doesn't question it."

The night came to an end with Robinson chatting with students and faculty members and signing copies of her book, which is available now at the University Bookstore.

## POETS continued from page 2

explaining that she once wrote a series of twenty-six poems, each focusing on one letter of the alphabet. She read one of these from *The Book of Men*. Every line ended with an "f."

Laux also discussed her characterization in poetry, describing her inspiration for a poem about seeing a man wearing his military uniform in an airport. The encounter evolved into her poem "Staff Sgt. Metz," and her relationship with this character has led her to check media reports for mention of his name as one of the victims of the ongoing wars in the Middle East. That a writer can enjoy such deep compassion for a

stranger demonstrates the power of poetry in our everyday lives.

Next to harvest the attention of the audience like overripe fruit was Doty. He read several poems titled "Deep Lane," as well as works from his anthology *Fire to Fire: New and Selected Poems*. His words wove beautiful scenes of character and decision and loss. From the barber shop of an amiable city slicker to a rural cemetery where his dog ran amok to an intimate living room scene shared with his devoted but dying partner, Doty revealed human emotion to be multifaceted, complicated, and enduring.

Doty explained that he has been influenced by his surroundings. The neighbor-

hoods in San Francisco, where he lived for years with his partner, Wally Roberts, shaped an entire book of his poetry, *My Alexandria*. Doty also explained how the possibilities for poems discussing another location—the road Deep Lane—has caused him to write poem after poem about this one place.

Both poets helped the audience gain insight into the human experience with every poem they read. Afterward, Laux and Doty signed copies of their books during the reception.

If you missed the big event or couldn't find a seat, you can access Laux's poetry online at [doriannelaux.com](http://doriannelaux.com) and Doty's work at [markdoty.org](http://markdoty.org).



# Let It Flow at the Michigan Writing Centers Association Conference



*Anna White Presenting on Citation Practices for Consultants and Students*

## Rose White

On October 25, twenty members of the Frederik Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors (FMCWMA) huddled together in the hazy darkness of a fall Saturday morning. One-third of FMCWMA's staff made a trek toward Lansing Community College (LCC) for the annual *Michigan Writing Centers Association Conference* (MWCA). Every year, consultants attend this conference to either present or develop their knowledge of peer tutoring. This year, the consultants came away with new ideas to implement for peer tutoring, potential topics for upcoming conferences, and a collection of golden thumb trophies.

Celebrating its 20th anniversary, the 2014 conference was the biggest MWCA event to date with 215 people attending from 15 schools. The conference and writing centers across Michigan continue to grow. LCC's Writing Center director, Jill Reglin, noted, "Writing is such an integral part of both

academic and professional institutions, and writing centers are largely accepted as essential to student success." University and college writing centers have gained status, but they are also starting to be established on high school campuses such as Mattawan High School, who also attended MWCA.

To help spread the pedagogy of peer tutoring, eight GVSU students shared their knowledge, research, and experiences at MWCA. These students were Sarah Armand, Katie Conigliaro, Melanie Rabine, Matthew Whinnen, Anna White, Lindsey Wolpert, and Nathan Holtrey who worked with research consultant Jackie Vega. They presented on a range of topics such as citation practices, creating linguistic diversity in writing centers, and the necessity of communication with collaborative services, like writing and research centers.

This diversity was a part of 46 presentations at the conference. Like most years, Reglin noted that she was encouraged again to see the "wide variety of topics and issues being addressed." Each year,

students and faculty highlight topics that further the practice of writing centers as well as topics that introduce new ideas. This year, in particular, Matthew Whinnen's presentation on time privilege was one that left many contemplating. He talked about how some students, based on their lives, are more adept at writing because they have more time to devote to it. He encouraged consultants to focus on accomplishing different tasks depending on the life of the student.

Whinnen's presentation, in addition to one by Ana Guay from the University of Michigan on the difference between being nondirective and neutral, sparked thought among FMCMA consultants. Nathan Holtrey said, "[Guay's] presentation led to a full-on discussion about the ethics of writing centers." From this dialogue and other presentations at the conference, the consultants began to foresee new topics of research that could advance peer tutoring.

Although the consultants came away with invaluable ideas and concepts, they also returned home with golden thumbs. At MWCA, there was a meme contest, in which the FMCWMA came away victorious by snagging first and second place. First place was by a collection of GVSU students who designed a meme with Elsa from *Frozen* saying, "Does it flow?" Katie Torkelson created the second place winner, which had the Can I Get Your Number photo with text reading "Can I read your paper?"

Overall, the conference benefited the attending students by expanding their understanding of peer tutoring. Regardless of discipline, Holtrey commented, "anyone who has the chance to go to a conference should."

**Writing Major Scholarship Applications Due March 1**  
**<http://www.gvsu.edu/writing/writing-scholarships-87.htm>**

# Discovering More Than January in Sikkema's *January Found*

Andrea Klapp

Adjunct Writing Professor Michael Sikkema questions the condition of the earth and mankind in his new book of poems *January Found*. Politics, the environment, humanism, capitalism, and love are all addressed in Sikkema's poetic commentary. "The child puts / the commercial hum / into his first / sentence and his fist / back into his mouth". Sikkema's poems reveal a fresh truth about the society we inhabit.

There is an almost musical quality to the way the words are composed. Sikkema's poems present the world with sharp intelligence and ingenuity. "Certain ammunition / blossoms into all / the wrong questions... make this / burial a garden plot". Lyrical stanzas promote a tone of melancholy and hope, while biting notes of sarcasm stand out as one-liners: "unicorn on the cob".

One of the book's underlying meanings, Sikkema stated, "is about how we conceptualize the earth, how we can even conceptualize who we are as a species, and how we separate ourselves from the other creatures that are here." Interest generated from Sikkema's poems can be attributed to an audience who contemplates the complexity of nature, humanism, capitalism, and love: "we're on both ends of the pitchfork / each morning every street / we all noticed the sky at once". Even readers who don't consider themselves serious thinkers can appreciate the way Sikkema makes his word choices seem effortless.

Sikkema noted that *January Found* strays beyond poem conventions like those of Wendell Berry or other poets following similar literary tradition. "I have little interest in complete sentences, but I do believe in making semantic meaning, so I'm just using other structures to try and do that." *January Found* delves into experimental territory.

In the back of *January Found*, there is a "Notes" section, and Sikkema explained its purpose. "It's a joke. Some of them are actual things, while some of them are completely fabricated. The notes are really

a poem all on its own, and maybe a handful of people have the inside knowledge to understand what's going on there."

However, even though few people have this literary know-how, Sikkema is not worried about alienating his readers with the inclusion of the "Notes" section. "The point to me," he said, "was never to get as many readers as possible, but to create work I trusted and to share it with the world."

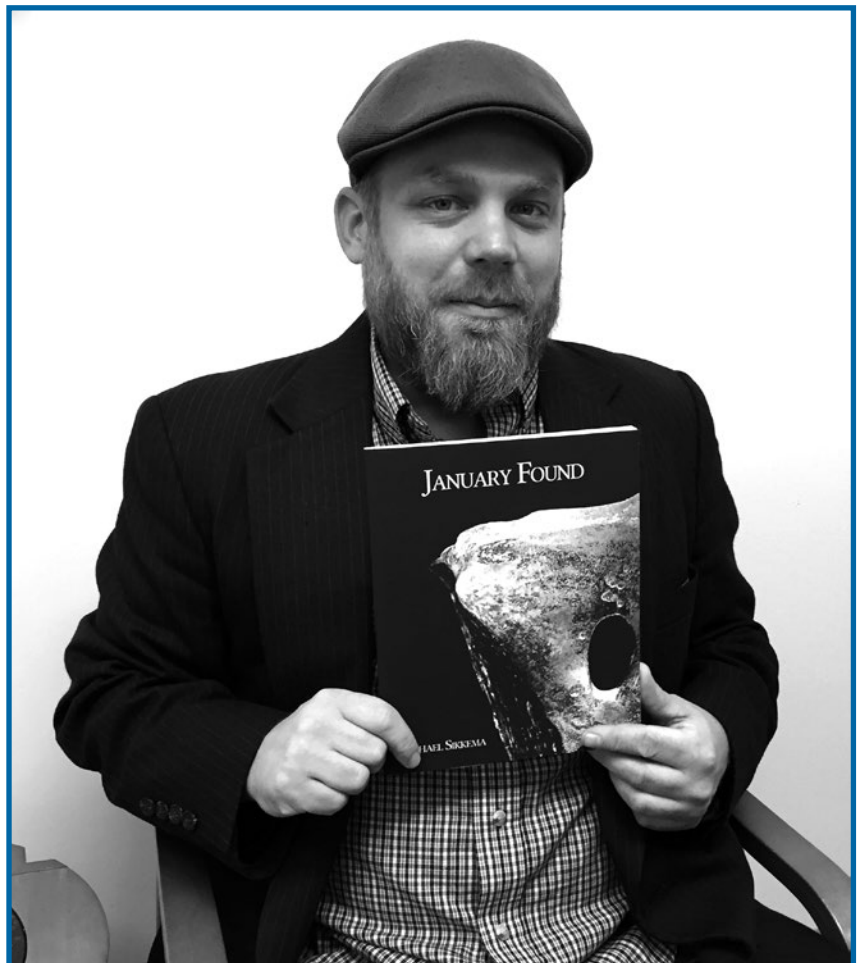
He also shared valuable insight into his creative writing process. "I have zero interest in pinning down the meaning of something when it is much more beautiful to see it darting out in divergent directions." Sikkema's statement reinforces what he stated earlier in the interview—his inspiration comes from the world around him.

The "Notes" section also stemmed from Sikkema's interest in the origin of stories.

"I'm always looking for those inter-textual rhymes between this book and that book." The creation of the "Notes" section was also due to Sikkema's fascination in how literary inspirations permeate the work of other writers.

When asked what he wants readers to take away after reading *January Found*, Sikkema responded, "A sense of questioning, a sense of urgency, and hopefully a desire to read and write more on their own."

Readers interested in Sikkema's book, *January Found*, can buy it online from the publisher Blaze VOX. Sikkema also encourages people to stop by his office to purchase a copy of his book and to meet the author. Even if poetry isn't what you typically read, give *January Found* the chance to amaze you.



Michael Sikkema Displaying His Collection of Poetry

# WRITING DEPARTMENT WELCOMES

## Beth Peterson



*Kelsey May*

**E**ver had a professor nonchalantly confess they've fallen 40 feet while climbing a glacier? How about a professor who chats up bears during summer vacation? Meet Assistant Professor Beth Peterson, one of the Writing Department's newest faculty members. She will be teaching Intermediate and Advanced Creative Nonfiction workshops as well as Introduction to Creative Writing. Peterson is just as busy as her students, balancing her courses with two writing projects and settling into her new home.

Peterson, a Chicago native, is new to Michigan after living in Missouri for the past five years. She is currently working on two book projects, proof for any writing student that business does not trump productivity.

With former teaching experience at Crown College, the University of Wyoming, and the University of Missouri, Peterson came to GVSU so she could be in the Midwest and near her Chicago-based relatives. The GVSU Writing Department is unique, she says, because it puts "professional and creative [writing] together" whereas most other colleges separate the two. Writers have to be flexible and able to balance all types of writing they may encounter once they leave GVSU.

## W. Todd Kaneko

*Rachel McLaughlin*

**I**n his eighth year of teaching at GVSU, Professor W. Todd Kaneko has moved from an affiliate to tenure-track faculty position.

In addition to teaching introductory creative writing courses, with this new position, Kaneko will now be teaching courses more specialized to writing majors

at the 300 and 400 levels. With this new position, Kaneko will be teaching creative nonfiction, fiction, and/or poetry workshops at both intermediate and advanced levels.

"Teaching always has its rewards but working with students interested in what I'm interested in makes all the difference," said Kaneko.

Kaneko prefers teaching upper-level writing courses as he gets to go "really

in-depth" with the coursework as he teaches his students, such as in Intermediate Poetry (WRT 320), a course he's looking forward to teaching next semester.

Kaneko will be working closely with students as he mentors them in the writing major. "I knew what the classes were like, and what the students are like, and I got to see these things in my old position [as an affiliate member] but now I get to help impact them," he said. "I think I can help more as a tenure-track member than in my other [affiliate] position, and that's

## Zsuzsanna Palmer



*Krysta Rydecki*

**Z**suzsanna Palmer was browsing job postings online when she came across GVSU's ad for a visiting professor. "I was getting closer to finishing my dissertation and sometimes looked in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* just to see what's around," said Palmer. "When I saw the ad, I thought, 'this could be me.'"

Palmer, who is from Hungary, had an early interest in culture and the humanities. After high school, she lived in Germany for a year and became proficient in speaking and writing the language. She then began her college career at Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest with majors in Hungarian and German. Before she

completed her degrees, she found her way to the U.S. via GVSU as an international student. She transferred her credits and earned a Bachelor's degree in German from GVSU while completing her Master's thesis in Hungarian Language and Literature.

After she earned her degrees, Palmer got a job in Grand Rapids working for a German-American company that sold woodworking machinery.

"I worked in their parts and logistics department and also as a liaison between the company in Germany and the company in Grand Rapids," said Palmer.

While working for the company, Palmer became interested in workplace writing and intercultural communication. "I saw that certain exchanges went very well, and then at other times, there was conflict because of either culture or language. I saw opportunities where such conflicts and



# THREE NEW FACULTY MEMBERS

Peterson specializes in lyric essays, a form of writing that splices the beauty and imagery of poetry with the facts and assertions of nonfiction. Her essay, “Glaciology,” published in *River Teeth*, exemplifies her style—an “essay fused with poetry” that details the thrill and wonder of ice climbing, a practice that might be seeing its last days unless our climate reverses its chaotic, rapid temperature spike. The piece begins: “It’s quiet on the glacier—and not the good kind of quiet. It’s the long quiet—the quiet that splits you open, leaves you flayed.”

For eight summers, Peterson lived next to Jostedalbreen, a disappearing glacier in Norway. This particular glacier is the world’s fastest disappearing glacier, receding 200 meters in the last ten years. Peterson first

visited Norway to help friends remodel an old house. She stuck around, becoming a wilderness guide for student trips.

As part of her work in the lyric essay, Peterson’s writing involves using structure to mirror and inform the piece’s content. “If I’m writing about disappearances, how can I reflect that sense of disappearance?” When she was living in Wyoming, her writing used sparse descriptions and structural gaps to match her landscape.

Immersion research is another favorite method of Peterson’s. For her MFA thesis project, she followed the activities of a group of people who believed they could resurrect the dead. So what did she do for research? Tagged along with them to morgues, cemeteries, funeral homes,

conferences, and eventually fit right in with the crowd.

Whatever subject she’s working on, she reads a lot. “Go as deeply into your subject as you can,” she advises other creative nonfiction students. Her research entails devouring as much raw literary material as she can. For example, she has a sizable stack of books solely on cairns (man-made trail markings made of piles of stones). Over winter break, she’ll be conducting more cairns research at natural history museums while traveling in Scotland and England.

Have questions about publishing, kayaking, or conducting copious amounts of research? Introduce yourself to Peterson and hold your breath. The icy grip of her narratives and experiences are astounding.

important to me.”

Starting in 2015, Kaneko will be a new faculty advisor for students in the writing major, allowing him to work with students to choose the best classes and path for them to take at GVSU to graduate.

“GVSU is a great place to work, and it’s been a great place to be. I’m really happy to be working here because of the faculty and students,” said Kaneko.

Along with mentoring students at GVSU, Kaneko will serve on a collection of college and university committees to be more

involved with not only the Writing Department but also with GVSU as a whole. As of now, Kaneko is a member of the Advisory Board for the Grand Rapids Poet Laureate committee, an Associate Editor of *DMQ Review*, and a contributing editor for *Waxwing*.

In early November 2014, Kaneko’s self-written and self-illustrated book of poems *Dead Wrestler Elegies*, which he completed in less than three years, was released. Needless to say, Kaneko has a lot to keep him busy in the few next years.



misunderstandings could be avoided.”

Palmer decided to pursue her interest in professional communication. She earned a Master’s Degree in English from Central Michigan University, and now she is finishing her PhD in English with an emphasis on Writing, Discourse, Technology and Media Studies from Old Dominion University. She has taught courses at Davenport University and Ferris State University and recently finished drafting her 296-page dissertation.

For her dissertation, she incorporated her interest in cross-cultural communication into her research. “My research always focuses on how to make teaching more effective. Since intercultural communication is my main area of interest, I thought the best way to teach students about this may be to actually have them work with people from other countries,” said Palmer.

Palmer connected students from her professional writing class in the U.S. with students in a business English class in Hungary. She asked them to create blogs about themselves and then to read and comment on each other’s.

“I introduced my students to the theory of cosmopolitanism, which is a way of looking at intercultural relations and trying to emphasize commonalities starting with what they shared rather than starting with the differences, which is usually what happens,” said Palmer.

Palmer examined 50 blogs and more than 200 comments to see how the American and Hungarian students were representing themselves to each other. Students were better able to connect when they discussed identities other than their national identities. “In reality, people have many identities and a national identity is just one of them,”

said Palmer. “[There are] other identities that could create a connection which would enable them to overcome differences.”

Palmer has incorporated her experience and expertise in intercultural communication into her Business Communication courses at GVSU. For one assignment, student teams created a brochure aimed at attracting international students interested in attending GVSU. Each team worked with an international student at a partner university in Hungary. “Students will know what it is like to work with people from other countries and over the internet, because in today’s workplace, it’s going to happen, and they are going to work with people from a distance,” said Palmer.

Next semester Palmer will continue teaching Business Communication along with Introduction to Professional Writing.

# Hinman Uses Her Writing Skills on Social Media to Impact the Community



*Hinman Hard at Work on a Project for the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan*

## Claire Fisher

**H**unched over her desk working on her Introduction to Creative Writing homework freshman year, Amy Hinman realized that she wanted to be a writing major. Terror gripped her as the uncertainty of future job prospects set in. Having graduated in Winter 2014 with degrees in Writing and Spanish, Hinman now works as a Grant Writer and Social Media Specialist at the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan, a non-profit organization that provides services and programs to the Latino communities in the area.

The Hispanic Center's mission is to serve, educate, and advocate for the Latino community with a variety of issues. This can range from youth programming encouraging education to cooking classes to festivals celebrating Hispanic heritage.

"[The Hispanic Center] is a really great community of people that care, so it doesn't always feel like work; it feels like helping out," Hinman said.

Part of Hinman's job is to manage the Hispanic Center's presence on social media.

This involves using Facebook and Twitter to distribute information. In addition to highlighting events and programs held by the Hispanic Center, Hinman posts information that community members will find pertinent and helpful.

"Our Facebook and Twitter kind of act as a human extension of what we do," Hinman said. "We can say that we care about domestic violence, but by supplementing that information with articles or blog posts, it kind of adds a human element and fleshes out who we are and what we do."

As a social media specialist, Hinman has learned a lot about how to use social media effectively. To keep people engaged in her social media posts, Hinman ensures that they have a consistent personality and a message to share.

"It's really important to give people real information and not just give them fluff that makes them feel good or feel bad for a couple of minutes," Hinman said.

Through her time working with social media, Hinman has found a new respect and appreciation for social media and the impact it can have on the surrounding community.

"I've learned that there is real power in social media even though I used to say 'ahh social media, it's knocking out the pillars of the writing world.' I think it can do good, and so instead of complaining about the good it doesn't do, we should be proactive in sharing things that matter," Hinman said.

Social media is particularly important to the Hispanic Center because it allows them to reach community members who may not have access to computers to inform them of the programs and services offered. Facebook and Twitter allow the community to learn about these programs using their smartphones. In sharing things that matter to the Latino community, Hinman has used social media to bring to light issues affecting the community.

"I would say the most rewarding thing is knowing that by writing a post, I'm fostering conversation," Hinman said. "I'm giving people something to think about that could very honestly have an impact on the real world."

Hinman has found that her time at GVSU prepared her well for her job at the Hispanic Center by giving knowledge in a variety of subjects. In her class, Writing for the Web, Hinman learned how to adjust her writing style to fit the expectations of audiences reading on websites and social media. Classes like this gave Hinman the tools to succeed in her job at the Hispanic Center, even though she never imagined herself following this career path.

"Particularly under the new [Writing Department] curriculum, I was more prepared to do anything and everything that [the Hispanic Center] asked me to do, so that flexibility was very important," Hinman said.

Hinman encourages writing students to use this versatility to make the most of career opportunities. Despite her preference for creative nonfiction writing, Hinman took Grant Writing to expand her writing horizons.

"I think that it's really important to remember to be flexible in your writing,"

*See HINMAN on page 11*



# A Reflection on Our Internship at *The Black Sheep* Publication

*Claire Fisher &  
Rachel McLaughlin*

**H**olding staff meetings, screening job applicants, and editing articles about places to eat on campus are just a few job duties during our internship at *The Black Sheep*, a satirical campus newspaper.

*The Black Sheep* was founded in Chicago by our corporate supervisor, Brendan Bonham, and a few of his classmates at the University of Illinois. Since its beginning in 2009, *The Black Sheep* has been implemented at approximately 30 universities across the nation.

We work with a staff of 15 to publish eight issues a semester in print and online. Each week, we lead a meeting where we facilitate discussions to brainstorm ideas for upcoming issues and monitor the staff's progress on the paper. We guide the staff to produce a publication relevant and humorous for GVSU students.

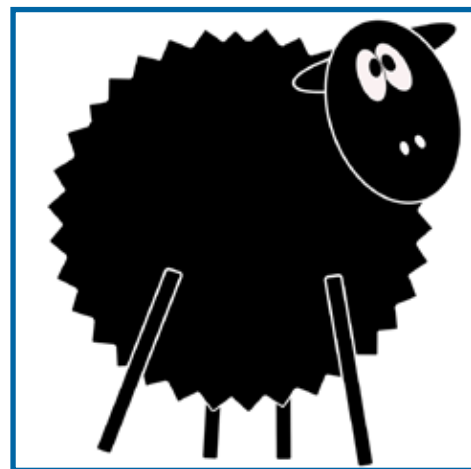
Communication is the biggest part of our internship, not only between ourselves, but with our supervisor and with the rest of the staff. Articles are submitted and returned through email and our primary contact with our campus director is through email and a weekly phone call.

For corporate to check in with us, we are in charge of running a private Facebook group, specifically for *The Black Sheep GV*. Because we only physically meet with the staff once a week, using Facebook, and sometimes texting, allows us a better way to collaborate and talk with each other about ideas and articles. We found that without effective means of communication, we wouldn't be able to put forth a successful issue every other week.

Working on *The Black Sheep* has provided us with real-life management, communication, and people skills we know will carry on after college into a career. Throughout the semester, we grew as writers and editors, improved our leadership skills, and applied our knowledge in a work environment.



*Fisher and McLaughlin Holding Issues of The Black Sheep in a Pasture of Sheep*



*The Black Sheep's Official Logo*

## Claire

I started working for *The Black Sheep* in Fall 2013 as a staff writer when the publication was just starting. While writing for *The Black Sheep*, my writing improved markedly, and I was able to work with some funny people. After that first semester, the original campus manager stepped down. Wanting to be more involved in *The Black Sheep*, I interviewed for the campus manager position and was hired.

As campus manager, I oversee the content, marketing, promotions, and distribution for *The Black Sheep* at GVSU. My job is to make sure that we have a staff that can assemble and promote our publication. In practice, this means making sure that the editorial manager, social media manager, distribution manager, and writers know what is expected and have everything they need to meet each deadline.

Along with managing *The Black Sheep* team, I interview and hire students to work on *The Black Sheep*. This experience has given me the opportunity to sit on the other side of an interview and learn a lot about what employers look for in job candidates. It's also given me the chance to build a team of people whom I respect and thoroughly enjoy working with.

Working at *The Black Sheep* has allowed me to gain experience with responsibility and leadership. I eagerly await the moment I get to read the final paper each week.

## Rachel

I originally applied to *The Black Sheep* as a staff writer and, though hired as a writer, Brendan, our campus director encouraged me to apply for editorial because of my knowledge and ability. Though I still occasionally write articles, I am primarily the editorial manager.

It's my responsibility to ensure each writer has an article idea (of their choosing) for the issue and knows how they're going to successfully put their idea into action. I also set and enforce the deadlines for when articles and photo ideas have to be submitted.

After receiving first drafts, I edit their writing not only for grammar but for content. I provide feedback to the authors on what is and isn't working so they can rewrite those sections for their final draft. I work closely with the writers on an almost daily basis to get their pieces ready for publication. I also work with Claire and Brendan to oversee that the final product is accurate in terms of layout, photo, grammar, and content.

In addition, I assist Claire in the hiring process for our staff by reading and providing my comments on sample writings by applicants.

I definitely put a lot more work into my position than I had originally anticipated, but I really enjoy every minute of it.



*Professor José Offers Advice to Megan Leo on Her WRT 354 Project*

### *WRT 354 continued from page 1*

grew up in Alsace, a region in France near the German border, and was exposed to the languages of Alsatian, German, and French. She earned advanced degrees in linguistics and professional communication and her dissertation was titled “Technical Communication in the Global Context.” As a professional, she publishes her research in journals dedicated to linguistics and technical communication.

Current courses such as Introduction to Professional Writing (WRT 200) and Business Communication (WRT 350) both incorporate elements of cross-cultural communication, but WRT 354 is the only course completely dedicated to this emphasis.

“The impetus for us to develop this class was that GVSU revised its General Education curriculum and one of the topics for the new Issues courses is Globalization,” said José. “This is a topic that is prominent in many disciplines and [the Writing Department thought to] develop a class that helps students learn strategies for addressing people from different cultures.”

José developed the course from scratch and then proposed it to the general education curriculum. “This course is directly connected to my scholarship and it’s always something I’ve wanted to do,” said José. “And the students are excited!”

WRT 354 serves an elective in the writing major; it is also designated SWS course and part of the General Education program under the Issues category.

“I originally signed up for this course because I really wanted to expand my knowledge on how to write to a vast audience that I wouldn’t normally be faced with,” said Christina Usler. “I think this class is a great addition to the writing curriculum and that it’s a testament to the Writing Department’s awareness of all the different genres of writing.”

For the first assignment, students examined the genre of the essay. “We

---

**“We looked at our own cultural identities and our identities as writers to see what kinds of biases we had and what we do culturally without thinking about it,” said Sarah Smith.**

---

looked at our own cultural identities and our identities as writers to see what kinds of biases we had and what we do culturally without thinking about it,” said Sarah Smith. “Through introspection we realized that what we do and how we do it is culturally embedded. With this new awareness, we can change the things we are doing.”

For example, in the U.S., essays are formed around a thesis statement. However, in cultures such as Japan and China, the way an argument is made is completely

different. “At one point you really have to question everything you are doing,” said José. “We have to be more conscious about everything we do because we assume that it is universal, when it really isn’t.”

For the second assignment, students prepared résumés for both American and international audiences. “A lot of things I included on my international résumé were things that I wouldn’t think to include on my American résumé,” said Smith. “On international résumés you include things like a picture of yourself, your gender, and more personal things like interests and hobbies.”

Additional assignments include a report examining the role technology plays in cross-cultural communication and revising a professional document for a global audience.

When students graduate and enter the job market, cross-cultural communication skills will be an invaluable asset. “Given the reality of today’s workplace, the ability to communicate across cultures is a must,” said José. According to a study by the Rand Corporation and the National Association of Colleges and Employers, hiring managers have listed cross-cultural communication competency as one of the top skills for applicants.

“I would like to work for an international nonprofit, so I figured this would be a good course to take because writing internationally is so different than writing for an American audience,” said Smith. “Even if I don’t end up in a different country, it’s still helpful because everything is online now and you can’t control who your audiences are, so you could be communicating cross-culturally without realizing it.”

Even if students do not think they will be communicating with people from different cultures in their future jobs, this class can still be beneficial. “Learning to communicate globally makes you a better writer,” said Jose. “It teaches you to think outside of the box, to focus on the audience, what style does, what format does, and what content does more so than if you have a more limited audience. Writing in the Global Context is almost like a magnifying glass—you cannot deny anymore that everything is rhetorical, that there is no right or wrong. It all depends.”

*See WRT 354 on page 11*

## WRT 354 continued from page 10

WRT 354 forces students to take a closer look at the world around them along with the ways they interact with it. By continuing to ask questions, students become reflexive, more effective writers. They will become better communicators, which will be helpful no matter what degree they are seeking or what profession they choose.

“Professor José is really great at getting students to think at a deeper level about society and culture and how language shapes so many of the things we write and think about,” said Usler. “I am very happy with this course.”

## HINMAN continued from page 8

Hinman said. “There’s a [genre] that you’re drawn to and you’re really good at, but be open to learning new things. I didn’t wake up in the morning like ‘I want to be a grant writer.’ I never thought that would be where I found myself, but I like it.”

This willingness and drive to learn has helped Hinman be successful in her job at the Hispanic Center. Therefore, in addition to being adaptable, Hinman advises that students go outside of their comfort zones to become experienced in many areas.

“Don’t limit yourself. Don’t put yourself in a box,” Hinman said. “By knowing how to do a lot of things, you become not only a useful employee but a well-rounded writer. You never know what could be useful; it’s really important to invest in things that might not be super interesting to you so that you can continue doing what you consider interesting.”

# Alumni News

## 2001

**Erin (McGrane) Busscher** works at Grand Rapids Community College as the Transfer & Articulation Coordinator. Her professional writing includes webpage design and management, policy writing, report writing, endless e-mails, and mass communication via e-mails and letters.

## 2002

**Alissia J (Riling) Lingaur** earned her MFA in fiction from Bowling Green State University in 2004. She has published stories in the *Crab Orchard Review* and *The Villa* online, as well as taught composition, developmental writing, and creative writing at community colleges in Metro-Detroit. She now works as an adjunct instructor at Northwestern Michigan College in the Communications Department, teaching developmental English and advising the student-run magazine. She self-published her novel, *The Trainstop*, available on Kindle, Amazon, and in local bookstores.

## 2003

**Abby Heugel** is the managing editor for two national trade publications by day and a humor blogger (<http://abbyhasissues.com>) at night. She has self-published two humor collections and has been part of three best-selling humor anthologies.

## 2007

**Katie Jean Shinkle** is a PhD candidate in creative writing at the University of Denver, where she serves as incoming Associate Editor of *Denver Quarterly*. Her first novel, *Our Prayers After the Fire*, is due out in 2014 from Blue Square Press.

## 2010

**Jessica DeWent** works as a Copywriter for Meijer.com at their headquarters in Walker. She loves what she does and feels great about using her writing degree at work every day.

**Stephanie Gamble** has been working for JR Automation Technologies as a Technical Writer since April 2012. This past spring, she had the opportunity to attend a technical writing conference in Portland, OR called *Write the Docs*.

**Robyn Gordon** is a Lead Technical Writer at JR Automation Technologies, where she helps maintain consistency across seven writers at three different buildings, determines the direction of new writing projects, and coordinates the company’s quarterly newsletter. Outside of departmental responsibilities, she helps run the fundraising committee and plans company-wide events.

**Susan Kieda** works full-time as the Advertising and Communications Coordinator for GVSU. She writes copy for communications materials, proofreads various university publications, and reviews artwork submitted by outside vendors containing logos or trademarks of the university. Susan is also pursuing her M.A. in English at GVSU part-time.

## 2012

**Krysta (Thelen) Koenigsnecht** works full-time as a bridal consultant as well as social media assistant for Becker’s Bridal in Fowler, MI. She published an article in *FAITH Magazine* in the Aug/Sept 2013 issue. She also started her own blog and is currently working on self-publishing a children’s book, *My Daily Rosary*, a religious book for young kids.

## InWriting

Faculty Advisor: Christopher Toth

Copy Editors: Stephanie Banta, Claire Fisher, Andrea Klapp, Kelsey May, Shardae Rudel, Krysta Rydecki

Photo Contributions: Laurence José (1), Patrick Johnson (4), Christopher Toth (5), Christopher Toth (6), Caitlin Horrocks (7), Claire Fisher (8), Julie Nichols (9), Stephanie Krings (10), Katie Nolan (12)

Printers: Custom Printers, Inc.



# Reflections on a Summer Internship in London, England

*Shardae Rudel*

**M**y first few days in London, I didn't know what to expect. Mostly, I was just jet lagged but it was also my first time out of the country. Everything was so different—so busy. The streets were narrower, the buildings were older, and the taxi driver taking me from the airport to my new apartment was driving on the wrong side of the road; it's an unsettling experience as you might imagine.

I first began my search for an international internship after hearing about a friend's experience in Dublin, Ireland. I started planning my own trip in the summer of 2013, a solid year before eventually leaving. In my research, I found a few companies that offered students help with securing internships abroad. Sending queries to two or three when school started back up, I did not wait long before I received a phone call from a company called Global Experiences. They offered personalized internships in various locations, including London, as well as one-on-one help with the visa process and interview strategies. It was a perfect fit. I spent the next few months sorting class credit transfers and finances. Before I knew it, I bought a round-trip ticket to London for June 2014.

Global Experiences set me up as a PR/Marketing intern for a woman who managed two businesses: her own and her father's. The office was a few miles from central London—just a twenty-minute tube ride from my student-living apartment in Clerkenwell, located in London's Burrow of Islington. My boss worked primarily on her own, but she also had a little help from another intern from France, who was still learning how to speak English. Because of their language gap, I ended up being my boss's main source of communication across the web.

During my time at the office, I juggled the marketing responsibilities of the two companies my boss managed. For her father's medical distribution company, I wrote press releases, managed social

media, and designed promotional fliers. My boss also owned her own business, a wedding and event planning company, where I helped update the website with product descriptions, photos, and blog posts. I worked at a leisurely pace; my boss constantly checked on me and made sure I wasn't bored or overwhelmed. Apparently, this is a common practice in an English workplace—something I learned during an orientation Global Experiences provided during my first weekend in the country.

My major project during the internship was helping my boss launch a blog for her company. While already having most social media platforms covered, she also wanted a separate website to document individual weddings and events she planned. Unfortunately, we started it about a week before I was set to leave, so I couldn't see the finished product. I did, however, have a hand in helping her design it and setting the tone of the site's content. Contrary to what many people assumed when I told them I was interning in London, the internship itself was unpaid. My boss kindly covered my public transportation fares (which add up more quickly than you'd think), but other than that I had to rely on loans and fundraising to cover most of the travel costs. International internship grants and scholarships didn't quite exist yet.

At the risk of sounding cliché, I do find that my scope as a person and writer was



*Rudel Touring London While on Break from Her Internship*

forever changed, and I can't really put a price on that. On top of being absorbed into the workplace, I was also fully immersed in a different culture. I had the opportunity to explore London after work as well as travel around England and Europe on the weekends. I spent time in places I thought I would never see, such as Scotland and Paris, and forged lifelong friendships with people from all stretches of the globe.

For more information on international internships, visit Padnos International Center or contact the Writing Department internship coordinator, Dauvan Mullaly.