

# IN WRITING

Grand Valley Writing Department | Fall 2023 | Vol. 17.2

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Left: Associate Professor Amy Ferdinandt Stolley (photo: Amy Ferdinandt Stolley) Right: Assistant Professor Kylie Jacobsen (photo: Brandon Smith)

## Professor Stolley Named Unit Head

**Brandon Smith**

Starting December 22, 2023, the Grand Valley Writing Department will have a new Unit Head. Amy Ferdinandt Stolley is taking the position following the end of Christopher Toth's eight year term. In addition, Kylie Jacobsen began as the department's very first Assistant Unit Head during Fall 2023.

Jacobsen has been at Grand Valley since 2019. Prior to GVSU, she was Assistant Director of the English department at Texas Tech University while enrolled as a graduate student. According to her, the Assistant Unit Head position came out of a need to support leadership.

"Professor Stolley's taking over at a bit of an unconventional time, and so I'm there to help ease that transition," Jacobsen said, "but also I think being Unit Head is a lot of

work behind closed doors that needs additional support."

A Unit Head serves the Writing Department for a three-year term. Toth initially served two terms, but extended his tenure to accommodate the university during the coronavirus pandemic. Stolley will be the first new Unit Head since 2016.

"I think [Toth] has weathered a lot of storms very gracefully," Jacobsen continued. "It's very difficult to organize a department the size of ours."

Stolley began working at Grand Valley in 2016 as Director of First Year Writing. Coincidentally, her first year was also Toth's first year as Unit Head.

"It takes a long time to learn a

*SEE UNIT HEAD ON PAGE 12*

## CONTRIBUTORS

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# New Writing Department Study Abroad Approved

*Natalie Brooks*



*Victoria Street in Edinburgh (Photo: Chris Toth)*

Up until the COVID-19 pandemic, GVSU's Writing Department took students on a faculty-led study abroad trip to South Africa. During the pandemic, the partner organization in South Africa that assisted with internship placements and housing scaled back their operations, and has not yet fully recovered. This brought about cause for writing professors to find a new adventure for their students. The faculty co-directors, Professor and Writing Department chair Christopher Toth and Affiliate Professor Samantha Dine took charge and scouted the location for the new faculty-led study abroad program: Edinburgh, Scotland. I had the pleasure of speaking with the two of them about the experience.

When looking for possible options, Professors Toth and Dine had three main criteria: business must be conducted in English, it should be fun, interesting, and cost effective for students, and it was in a location

that GVSU did not already have study abroad programs. Ultimately, the options were narrowed and the chosen country was Scotland.

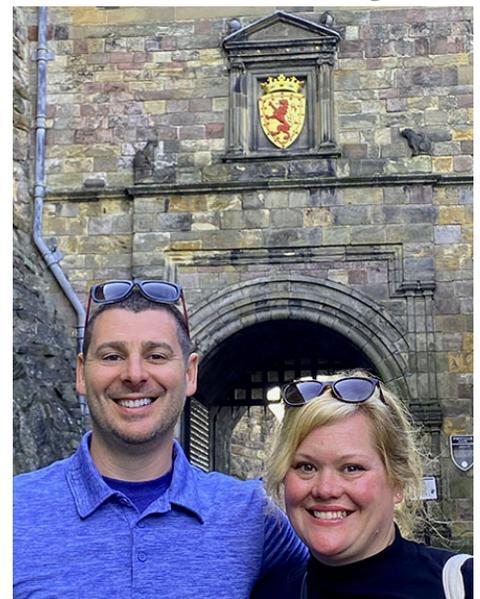
In the summer of 2023, Professors Toth and Dine traveled to Edinburgh to meet with charities who could provide internships for the students and scout potential field trips. They described the city to be gothic, spooky, medieval, and “absolutely beautiful [and] fun” with a lot to do. Professor Toth mentioned that there is an old part of the town that has been preserved for over 1000 years.

The program will run from May 6, 2024 to June 27, 2024. The first chunk, from May 6 until May 30, will take place at GVSU. The time spent at GVSU will involve a once-a-week class lasting 7 hours on every Tuesday in May. The co-directors decided to run the course this way so that students who live elsewhere will only have to commute one day a week, and it will cut down on the out-of-pocket

expenses for students. Students will be enrolled in WRT 380: Professional Writing in International Contexts. Professor Toth says that students will also be “exploring the nonprofit organizations that we’re going to be working for, [and] there’s going to be some Scottish history and culture.”

On May 30 the students will depart for Scotland. Once in Scotland, students will be working at internship placements Monday through Friday. Some internships will be more of a hybrid setting and some will be in office completely; it all depends on the organization that the student is working with. Once arriving in Edinburgh, the co-directors will be giving students a tour so that they can see where they will be working and how to get there. Each student will receive a four-week bus pass. The professors will be on site so if students happen to get lost they have help around the corner.

Outside of the internships, there are eight planned excursions included in the program costs: Edinburgh Hop-on Hop-off Bus Tour, The Royal National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh



*Professor Christopher Toth and Affiliate Professor Samantha Dine (Photo: Chris Toth)*

Castle, The Real Mary King's Close, Holyroodhouse Palace, Stirling Castle, Arthur's Seat, and a day trip to Glasgow. When not in class, at their internship, or on a group excursion students will have time to do some travel on their own, whether that be around town or taking the train to other parts of Scotland or the U.K.

The first three days of the trip will be spent staying in a hostel, but for the rest of the trip the students will be living in suite style dorms at the University of Edinburgh. Professor Dine mentioned that an important thing to remember is that the days are much longer in Scotland than they are here in MI. She said that "the sun doesn't set until 11:30pm and then rises at 4:00am. So if you're a light sleeper, bring a sleeping mask." The professors want to stress that Edinburgh is a safe, lively, stunning city with a lot of really interesting history.

An incredibly important thing that the professors would like interested students to note is that it is vital to make sure that they have an updated

passport as soon as possible. Since COVID, passport processing has been backed up, and it has taken much longer to receive passports in the mail. Students are encouraged to update their passports as soon as possible.

The Writing in Action program fulfills an SWS and GenEd Issues requirement. The courses that it will fulfill are WRT 357: Professional Writing in International Contexts (GenEd Issues and SWS approved) and WRT 490: International Internship.

Professor Toth and Professor Dine are happy to meet one-on-one if a student has any specific questions. Professor Toth can be reached at [tothc@gvsu.edu](mailto:tothc@gvsu.edu). Professor Dine can be reached at [dinesa@gvsu.edu](mailto:dinesa@gvsu.edu). Students can find more information by contacting/visiting the Padnos International Center in Lake Superior Hall on the Allendale Campus.

Applications are due Feb. 1st.

## Thank you, Professor Huey!

The Writing Department would like to thank Professor Amorak Huey for all the work he has done for the staff and students during his time here at GVSU. Huey, who has been a faculty member in the Writing Department for 15 years, began as a professor of English at Bowling Green State University in Fall 2023.

We wish him the best  
of luck for what's  
ahead!



Edinburgh Skyline (Photo: Chris Toth)

# Writing Internships: Learning to Forget

Angelina Firmalan



Left: Carlie Sherwood (photo: Carlie Sherwood)



Right: Ashlyn Miller (photo: Ashlyn Miller)

Transitioning from academic to professional writing is a crucial step for GVSU writing students as they enter the workforce. While GVSU's writing courses build a strong foundation for professional writing skills, internships, which are required for GVSU writing majors, offer firsthand experience of workplace writing. Often, students go into these internships with preconceived expectations of workplace writing developed from writing coursework; however, with the changing professional writing landscape, some students, like Carlie Sherwood and Ashlyn Miller, were encouraged to break from their learned academic practices and styles during their internships.

Over the summer of 2023, Carlie Sherwood interned with The Matthews Group of Michigan, a small real estate company located in Grand Rapids. During her internship, one of Sherwood's responsibilities included writing blog posts, which showcased upcoming events in the area, local businesses, and home and lifestyle-related guides.

When asked to describe her internship experience, Sherwood said, "I expected the internship to be more like my coursework," where she

practiced being concise and pithy, staying away from using verbose and flowery language; however, Sherwood explains that because of the conversational tone of the blog posts, she was asked to be more creative with her writing style. "During the internship, there was a lot of wanting more personality because that was the target audience they were going for." Sherwood mentioned that "it took a second to conform to the genre of what the company wanted because I had to understand how to unlearn some of the things that I was taught in certain courses," which highlights the challenges that came with adapting to her internship.

Similarly, Ashlyn Miller also faced the challenge of unlearning writing styles she had become accustomed to while completing her internship. From May-August 2023, Miller interned at a devotional publication organization, Our Daily Bread Ministries.

Throughout her internship, Miller contributed to their social media department, Reclaim Today. Miller's responsibilities centered around editing social media posts and crafting engaging messages, fostering a sense of companionship towards their audience.

Miller notes that prior to her

internship, most of the writing she encountered in her coursework was creative fiction or academic, research-based writing. She said, "I don't really do a mix of the writing styles," referencing that the main genre while working at her internship was non-fiction, which required research and creative prose. As such, Miller anticipated using an academic tone in the non-fiction content she was producing. Much to her surprise, she said, "I actually wasn't supposed to have an academic voice in my writing. I was supposed to be more casual and use a slang-type voice, which wasn't something I was used to at all." Miller explains that she had to write in a nuanced way that would appeal to young adults, and in doing so she disregarded the academic voice she often practices in her coursework.

The experiences shared by Carlie Sherwood and Ashlyn Miller shed light on the evolving dynamics of professional writing.

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*"...some students were encouraged to break from their learned academic practices and styles..."*

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Additionally, their experiences highlight how certain writing modules impact their understanding of professional writing, emphasizing the significance of variety in coursework. As writing students transition from academic to professional settings, their encounters with diverse writing genres during internships provide valuable insights. Their internship experiences showcase the significance of embracing different writing styles that may necessitate unlearning academic practices.

# The Writing Department Welcomes Graduate Assistant

Anna Pettit



Elise Eurich (photo: Elise Eurich)

“  
... we work with  
real clients to help  
them with various  
communications  
problems... I felt very  
prepared to enter  
graduate school.”

For the first time since its creation, the Writing Department has welcomed in a Graduate Assistant, Elise Eurich. Eurich is currently pursuing a combined Advertising and Public Relations degree and plans to graduate in 2025 with both an undergraduate and graduate degree. While studying in her program, Eurich has been inspired by her professors to achieve her goals both academically and professionally. For anyone considering graduate programs, she has also provided some valuable insight into what her life is like as a graduate student at GVSU.

As a Special Projects Graduate Assistant, Eurich works alongside Senior Affiliate Professor Dauvan Mulally in the Writing Department to complete various projects. These projects include building connections with alumni and community members, developing advising materials for students interested in internships, and increasing the social media presence of the Writing Department. When asked about her experience, Eurich notes, “Every week is different, and I am enjoying my work immensely.”

Eurich began studying at GVSU in 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was

a difficult year to be in college, especially as a first-year student. “My freshman year was during the COVID-19 pandemic, and I definitely struggled due to that,” she recalls. But thanks to the support of GVSU faculty, Eurich has been able to achieve her academic goals. “I have had a wealth of positive experiences with my professors, but a few stick out to me. I am a member of the Frederik Meijer Honors College here, and my professor Gary Greer has definitely inspired me... Additionally, my professor Adrienne Wallace continues to inspire me every day.” Regarding her experience as a GVSU student so far, Eurich states, “I’ve had an amazing experience at GVSU. I love Grand Rapids, and plan on staying here for the foreseeable future.”

Overall, Eurich’s time at GVSU has helped prepare her for her future, wherever she may go. She states, “The Ad & PR program has many classes where we work with real clients to help them with various communication problems. Combined with extensive writing experience and project management, I felt very prepared to enter graduate school.”

Eurich plans on using her combined degree to achieve her career goals. “Short-term, I hope to work for a public relations agency in Grand Rapids post-graduation. I want to work in my industry for a while, before eventually going back to school to pursue my PhD. Long-term, I hope to be a professor! I have been inspired by my amazing professors, and want to help future students the way that they’ve helped me, both professionally and personally.”

The decision of whether or not to pursue a graduate degree can be a daunting one, but luckily, Eurich has some insight on how to make that choice. When asked what advice she would give to interested undergraduate students, she replied, “I would recommend that they work to develop their writing and research skills. In the master’s program here, you work up to a thesis or project of your choosing. This entails a lot of research, which may seem daunting at first; however, research can be something really fun, especially when it’s about something you’re passionate about.”

She adds, “Grad school is all about exploration - embrace and enjoy it!”

Interested in  
writing, reviewing,  
or copyediting for  
InWriting?

Join us at the first  
information meeting  
of the Winter 2023  
semester in January!

# Welcoming New Faculty Members

*Michaela Triemstra, Kallie Crouch, Sofia Pratt, and Stephanie MacKenzie*

## Visiting

### Professor April Williams

*Michaela Triemstra*



*Visiting Professor April Williams  
(photo: April Williams)*

Visiting Professor April Williams is one of the newest additions to the GVSU Writing Department.

After earning her Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Western Michigan University, Williams earned her Master's at Southern New Hampshire University, also in English Literature. She then went on to teach first-year writing at another university. But she has always wanted to teach at a bigger university, so she is excited to be teaching WRT 150: Strategies in Writing at GVSU. She said that the larger community at GVSU attracted her because there is a bigger outreach of students. Williams loves how interactive it is at GVSU, and she said the students are her favorite part of her job.

"I love being able to interact with the students and getting to know each of them as the semester progresses, and watching their work progress as writers as well," Williams said. She has also loved working with students, giving them helpful advice,

and seeing the influence she can have on them. While teaching at GVSU, Williams wants to have an impact on the students and their writing career. "I always think it's important to have that foundation for college-level writing," Williams said. "It's something that students can build on and develop over time."

Being able to teach first-year writing has allowed Williams to help students develop that foundation for college-level writing, so they can continue to grow in their writing. "Don't be afraid to make mistakes," Williams said, "It happens. Learn how to perfect your craft and writing and build your confidence over time."

Williams has always had a passion for writing and literature. She loves books, and has even published one of her own called *More Than Enough*, a Christian faith book. Her greatest passion, though, has been teaching writing to students and watching them grow to have the same passion for writing as she does.

## Visiting

### Professor Sean Ayres

*Kallie Crouch*



*Visiting Professor Sean Ayres  
(photo: Sean Ayres)*

Visiting Professor Sean Ayres may be new to GVSU, but he is not new to the writing scene. "My entire adult life has centered around writing and teaching writing," he says, "and I've been fairly happy during this period of life."

Ayres, a Grand Rapids native, joins the Writing Department amid his PhD work at the University of Cincinnati. "I was very fortunate to be able to work remotely for the rest of my studies, which allowed me to take the job here," he says. The position allows him to work close to home, while also engaging with his passion—writing.

In the WRT 150: Strategies in Writing and WRT 219: Introduction to Creative Writing courses he teaches, Ayres aims to help his students "develop a better sense of rhetorical context and narrative situation for online works." He adds, "I'm interested in having students create new ways of reading work beyond shaking the meaning out of the work." Ayres sees value in students moving beyond meaning to notice writing strategies in the texts they read and trying to replicate those strategies in their projects.

Ayres also knows that sharing writing can be difficult, especially for new writers. "In the creative writing classroom, the work we do often seems to feel immensely private," he explains. He wants to foster a classroom environment where students can feel a sense of joy and belonging when they share their work. For Ayres, this means helping his students see writing as a process and practice. It also means honoring and respecting the anxiety that comes with sharing work and overcoming that anxiety by sharing work frequently.

In addition to guiding students in

This year, GVSU has experienced a huge influx of first-year students, and with that comes an increase in enrollment for first-year writing courses. The Writing Department has become responsible for the largest class to pass through first-year writing, and it would not be possible without the heartfelt work of our Visiting and Affiliate Professors!

developing their craft, Ayres is deeply involved with writing himself—especially poetry. “I mainly write poems,” he says, “and for me, poetry is the attempt to put language to the un-languagable, to put words to the clumsy mind space.”

More than anything, he advises writing students to “keep going. Write a lot, read even more.”

## Visiting Professor Monika Binder

*Sophia Pratt*



*Visiting Professor Monika Binder  
(photo: Kylie Jacobsen)*

Visiting Professor Monika Binder just joined the faculty members of GVSU’s Writing Department this year, but she’s no stranger to the world of writing, English, or teaching.

Binder’s passion for all things English started with taking advanced ELA classes in middle and high school before attending Hope College for her undergraduate, where she majored in secondary English education.

In her first year out of college, she taught middle school English, then moved to Kansas City and taught high school English for three years. During her time there, Binder earned her Master’s in Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum with an emphasis in English Education from the University

of Missouri. After finishing there in the spring, she started here at GVSU this year as a visiting professor teaching first-year writing.

“I like teaching kids that are a bit older,” Binder said, reflecting on the differences between her past jobs and this one. “The level of discussion we’re able to have is of a much higher caliber.” She has relatively small classes and encourages students to use office hours, so she’s enjoyed the opportunities available for one-on-one discussions and providing more detailed feedback.

Binder is also a fan of the writing consultant visitations every week that are embedded in the first-year writing program at GVSU. Binder said she enjoyed working at the writing center during her time at Hope College, but this was something new and unique that GVSU offered. She stated, “Now that I’m seeing it, I wish we would have had it.”

Since this was Binder’s first year teaching at a college, she wasn’t sure what to expect. She expressed that there are many things she doesn’t know, but she’s grateful for the supportive environment and has already found people she can turn to for advice. We can’t wait to see what her future here at GVSU holds!

## Affiliate Professor Elizabeth Kalos-Kaplan

*Stephanie MacKenzie*

It was gray and drizzling the day I met with one of the newest members of the writing department, Dr. Elizabeth Kalos-Kaplan, but the weather didn’t prevent the warm smile that lit up her face when I walked in for the interview. Her door was wide open and perfectly in

harmony with her demeanor.

When asked about how she came to GVSU somewhere so distant as Louisiana, she gushed about the beauty of Michigan, summer, fall, and the lakes. But it wasn’t long before she began talking about what really drew her to GVSU. Almost immediately, she started talking about the Writing Department.

Kalos-Kaplan confided that she was attracted to GVSU’s Writing Department for a variety of reasons before applying. She said, “The Writing Department at GVSU was one of the first independent writing departments, and still stands out in a landscape where many writing programs are subsidiary within English Departments.” For her, this demonstrated how highly GVSU



*Affiliate Professor Elizabeth Kalos-Kaplan  
(photo: Elizabeth Kalos Kaplan)*

valued writing as a discipline in its own right.

Before coming to GVSU, Kalos-Kaplan worked in the English Department at Tulane University and she remarked on some of the differences. “GVSU was obviously

**SEE FACULTY PROFILE ON PAGE 12**

## Who Gets To Be a Writer?

*Brooke Rempalski*

“Write to be who you are. It will bear fruit,” multi-hyphenate writer Estee Zandee said to a room of students gathered for the sole reason of hearing such a promise. As part of the GVSU Writers Series, Zandee visited to speak on her more than ten years of experience as an editor, ghostwriter, agent, and publishing professional.

In her journey through the industry, she has learned how many more pathways are open to young writers than what we may be aware of. The publishing industry has openings for all varieties of aspiring writers, more than just authors, depending heavily on their priorities and skillsets.

For authors aspiring to be published, Zandee encourages them to build a strong platform such as a large social media presence or publishing record. For those who want to work in the publishing industry, Zandee encouraged audience members to take editing jobs that will allow them to progress through internal hiring processes as a path through the industry. “Publishing is a very relational business,” she said. “It’s a lot of smaller worlds in a larger world.” Each person must work in

their own niche while working collaboratively with unknown numbers of people on the same project. A piece of writing never simply begins and ends with the writer. While we tend to regard great, accomplished authors as the only hands in their craft, along the way, they must work with editors, agents, copywriters, sales, and more before hitting the shelf.

In her discussion of different roles in publishing, she noted what she calls the triangle: control, creativity, and stability. While an author might have the most creative say over their work, they might often have to sacrifice the stability of a reliable paycheck. While an editor might have that stability, they have to give up creativity, and so on. The important thing is finding a balance within that triangle that works for the individual. Zandee recommended looking within ourselves for our passion, our skill, and what we want to do sustainably and consistently.

However, the opposite may have to be true at some points in our careers, and she acknowledged that, saying that the easiest entry into a dream job might be from within.

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*“Publishing is a very relational business. It’s a lot of smaller worlds in a larger world.”*

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Publishers often are happy to hire someone they have already established as trustworthy with the work, and it is expected that most people will pivot in their career many times before settling in one place.

Permanence is rarely guaranteed in the industry, and Zandee noted that it is far more important to invest widely than to deep-dive into any one prospect.

One of the only true guarantees is rejection, on which she said to “get back to work and keep going.” The right opportunities will not arise on their own, but with persistence – and a good bit of chance – any one of us can find a spot for ourselves, to be part of the work we all dream of.



Estee Zandee (photo: Kylie Jacobsen)

*fishladder*  
**Submissions  
 of Fiction,  
 Non-fiction,  
 Poetry, and  
 Art are Due  
 by Dec. 16**

# Stay Curious and Courageous: Alumni Allie Oosta Visit

*Joi Mays*

Being a writing major or minor can help people gain a variety of skills for the workforce, but does everyone know these skills' potential? If not, how can someone build the courage to wield them? This is the question that 2011 Writing Department Alumni Allie Oosta came to answer.

Oosta visited GVSU as a CLAS Distinguished Alumni-in-Residence to share her journey from an undergraduate writing student to the current Chief Marketing & Growth Officer at Amazon in her Alumni Talk: "Three Things I Learned from Working at Amazon - The Importance of Writing in the Workplace" on October 26.

The Alumni Talk began with Professor Chris Haven recounting what Oosta was like as a student, stating that, "Allie commanded attention like she was the professor." He painted the scene of her as an undergraduate with highlighters sprawled across her desk, stating that, "she cared more about other's work than her own, and it showed." When Oosta took the front of the room, she immediately agreed and recounted how she was more eager to give others feedback than she was eager to create her own work.

Oosta began the talk by describing her love for creative writing growing up, but not knowing how to apply it as she went to college. She went through her first year of college at another university as a journalism major before coming to GVSU, stating that she was attending as a "break while she figured things out." There, she discovered the Writing Department and decided to stay at GVSU as a Creative Writing Major.

After graduating from GVSU, she moved to Seattle and began working as an intern at Seattle Met Magazine while working at a chocolate shop.

During her internship, she got an opportunity to apply for a seasonal copywriter position at Amazon. During her interview, she said that she felt that two things helped her get hired: having a portfolio of already-published pieces on hand and being honest about her experience level. "I realized that the people working there didn't need me to be an expert. I was surrounded by experts. They just wanted me to learn," Oosta said.

Once she started her position, she wanted to learn whatever she could,

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***"Facing feedback with curiosity and open arms can be the first courageous step to your future."***

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however she could. She observed the people who got compliments and started emulating some of their traits. She learned how to accept feedback on her writing without internalizing it. She learned how to arm herself with data in order to back up her suggestions in meetings. However, from all of the things that she learned, here were her three main takeaways.

Ask as you can and give as much as you can. Oosta recounts this lesson when she spoke for the first time during a weekly meeting. Asking for feedback on her writing made it easier to find out the tone she was writing and for eventually giving feedback to her co-workers.

Follow your own attention span and interests. "The more you like what you're doing, the better you'll be in the long run," she advised. Her passion was learning about the company's structures, why they were efficient, and how they could possibly improve. Getting a position that reflected her interests made her want to do better.

"It's all made up," Oosta said. Oosta reflects on how this realization helped her become more confident with making suggestions and keeping track of systems. She stated that having the knowledge that someone before her made these systems made her feel like her suggestions would not be met with criticism, but with curiosity.

Oosta has credited a lot of people and actions to her position, from her previous boss who hired her at Amazon as a contract worker to her investment in others' voices. However, her most important piece of advice for writing major undergraduates would be to seek and give feedback. "Work is less than a complete entity; things are more fluid," she said. Learning how to craft and receive feedback made her more ready to face the expectations of her workplace and led her to her current position.

Next time you're worried about feedback, remember that facing feedback with curiosity and open arms can be the first courageous step to your future.



Allie Oosta (photo: Kylie Jacobsen)

## Stay Strange: Craft Talk with Jen Julian

Maddie Cesarz and Alora Bowers

This semester the GVSU Writing Department had the honor of welcoming award winning fiction writer Jen Julian to talk with students about the craft of writing and how they can build stories. Julian is currently an Assistant Professor at Young Harris College in Georgia. Her 2018 debut short story collection, *Earthly Delights* and other *Apocalypses* won Press53's Fiction Prize. When introducing Julian, Professor Chris Haven described her aesthetic as “a mix of genre, lyricism, possibility, and indeterminacy that leads to complexity. Her stories don't have a neat ending that tells you where to go but she takes you along on the experience.”

Julian began by asking the audience what their standards and rules for writing fiction are. The crowd of students came up with a variety of answers such as a causal plot, interactions between characters, mystery, and dialogue. She highlighted how we all have different standards for our own writing, and the importance of recognizing what those are for ourselves. She also shared

a new idea: “imagination can be something that you work towards in your writing and become a standard in your craft.”

Julian also shared experiences she had while learning to become a writer. The most notable she mentioned was her instructor's rule for workshops: they were not allowed to write genre fiction. “When he enacted that rule, I got in my head that literary and genre fiction are very distinct from one another. But also that if I wanted to be a writer that people took seriously then I have to write literary fiction, which I equated with realism fiction,” she said.

Despite this, Julian found herself drawn to the speculative, strange, and weird. She then had students read an “Auntland” from K-Ming Chang's *Gods of Want*. It's a short story where the narrator shares all of the weird and fantastical things that their aunts do as a way to convey real-world topics such as family and the immigrant experience. Julian shared that reaching for new structures and absurd situations can help us convey feelings that perhaps aren't

always logical, and said that this was something she had to learn down the road, “When I got in my head that realism is what serious writers are supposed to write, my mind started to bump up against how I can convey a

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*“There is still something really effective that can be achieved by using something speculative.”*

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feeling that isn't logical; if it doesn't fit then what do I do?”

This tension that was created caused Julian to explore new directions in subject matter and structure. She said, “I started to branch out and realize that realism works for a lot of things and taught me a lot of things but I reached a point where I had to start venturing into other avenues.” Now, she finds herself returning to strange and bizarre places to pass on her messages to the reader.

Julian shares her journey as a writer to lift up speculative and genre fiction and the strengths that it can bring. She said, “I had to come back around to the idea that if a story is not using realism, there is still something really effective that can be achieved by using something speculative.” Julian encourages writers to step outside the bounds of realism and allow imagination to become a standard that can contribute a lot for their writing too. Next time you feel stuck with a piece, perhaps try to take the absurd route and see what happens!



“*Imagination can be something that you work towards in your writing and become a standard in your craft.*”

Jen Julian speaking in front of the attendees (photo: Kylie Jacobsen)

# Throwing Out the Map: Poetry Night with Kimiko Hahn

Will Schoendorf



Kimiko Hahn speaking on stage at Wealthy Street Theater (photo: Will Schoendorf)

“  
*Why not have fun with [writing]? Just playing... absolutely playing. It is a pleasure to write something that may be playful.*  
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When stories and inspiration “volunteer themselves” to you, how can you help but write? This is the philosophy of Kimiko Hahn, distinguished professor at Queens College, CUNY and author of over ten poetry books. Hahn recently visited GVSU on October 5 for its annual Poetry Night. Hahn spent the earlier part of the day interacting with students at a Q&A session in Kirkhof Center. This event was followed by a luncheon to discuss the craft and business of writing with a small group of students within both the English and Writing majors. Later that night, students, faculty, and community members alike had the opportunity to learn even more about Hahn and gain powerful insights from her decades of experience through the reading that took place at the Wealthy Street Theater.

As the clock struck 7 o’clock, the chatter and hushed excitement of the theater was replaced with a boisterous welcome for Hahn as she walked on stage. She introduced herself and thanked GVSU for its “gracious support of poetry.” Hahn

opened with a preview of poems from her upcoming book, *The Ghost Forest*, which demonstrates her iconic style and intertextuality. Many of her other works rely on exploring technical and medical language and wordplay. She harkened back to the traditional goal of poetry when explaining her writing process: joyful experimentation. “Why not have fun with [writing]? Just playing... absolutely playing. It is a pleasure to write something that may be playful.”

Throughout all of her works, Hahn plays with text and form as a child learns to play in a “sandbox,” to use her own wording. She can take the simplest and most complex concepts and bridge them together in a way that beckons even the most critical of poetry cynics. Her cleverness, humility, and thoughtfulness combined with non-traditional subject matter, such as physiological and neurological phenomena, creates a juxtaposition that leaves her audience in awe.

This sentiment rang true as she read selected poems from some of her most iconic books, such as *Foreign*

*Bodies* (2020), *Brain Fever* (2014), and *Toxic Flora* (2010). During the moderated discussion that followed the reading, an audience member asked Hahn about the most important lessons she’s learned regarding poetry. Hahn summarized her beliefs in one piece of advice: “Throw the map out.” If you have a piece that you want to write, you know where it needs to go. “So why bother using a map to take you there if you already know yourself?”

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*“Throw the map out,” if you have a piece you need to write, you know where it needs to go...*

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Following the panel, light refreshments were served, provided by the GVSU alumni-owned local cafe, Chartreuse Sisters, with the opportunity to purchase Hahn’s books from the vendor Books and Mortar Bookstore, located in downtown Grand Rapids. Hahn did a book signing and conversed with those who wanted to hear more about her background and writing methodology.

There was a sense of camaraderie in the air; from the loud laughter and smiles that spread throughout the room to the local businesses and organizations who helped create such a memorable night, this event brought individuals of all different ages, education statuses, backgrounds, and interests together for an evening of celebrating and learning from one of the most influential poets of our time.

## UNIT HEAD

*Continued from page 1*

department and learn a program and learn a community,” Stolley said. “I’ve learned a lot in the last eight years, and I feel like I’m in a position to be able to help the department in this way.”

As Stolley takes the reins, Toth will be going on sabbatical throughout the Winter 2024 semester. He will lead the Writing Department’s study abroad trip to Scotland in Spring 2024 before returning to teaching in the fall.

“I think I’ve been steering the ship for so many years. It’s good to pass it off and get a new vision of where the department can go, how it can grow, how it can better support students,” Toth said.

The Unit Head is responsible for handling the department’s budget, creating the faculty schedule, sponsoring and supporting events, connecting with alumni, overseeing the personnel process for faculty, overseeing all of the hires, overseeing all student issues and complaints, and overseeing any sort of faculty issues, in addition to other important jobs.

“I think the department really owes a lot of our organization, the succession planning, to a lot of the work that [Toth] has done,” Jacobsen said. “I think we’re in good hands with Professor Stolley carrying that on and broadening some of those initiatives.”

Toth advocated for the Assistant Unit Head position to ensure his successor would be in a good position to lead the Writing Department. Right now, the Writing Department is large enough to rival GVSU’s Math Department and the Biology Department. According to Toth, both departments have an Assistant Unit Head and some departments even have two.

Now, Professor Stolley is eager to serve the Writing Department as best

as she can. She has been considering changes to the curriculum, but above all, she wants to carry on the example that Toth set.

“One of the things that I appreciate the most about the department is how committed everybody is... to student learning and to each other. I think the Writing Department feels like a real community of colleagues who care about each other. That’s something that I feel privileged to be a part of,” Stolley said. “That’s something that I want to make sure that I protect.”

## FACULTY PROFILES

*Continued from page 7*

exciting for my employment prospects,” she laughed, “They were hiring and are attracting students at a time when many schools are experiencing dwindling populations... Obviously students find value here.” She talked about the “gorgeous campus and buildings” and her excitement to be coming from a research school to a teaching school. “[GVSU] puts a lot of emphasis on teaching and the teachers have a lot of support. The university really values student education.”

First year writing was the first college class Professor Kalos-Kaplan ever taught and it is still her favorite today. She told me “I really like teaching new students, fresh into adulthood and still figuring out who they are. Having the opportunity to give them the tools that they need to be successful in their college career is really special to me.”

“I feel like what I do matters and that’s a nice feeling to have.” By the end of our discussion, my biggest regret was that I wasn’t one of her Writing 150 students myself.

## IN WRITING

Fall 2023

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