

In Writing

Winter 2010 - Vol 4.1 - Grand Valley Writing Department

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Writing Department Pilots New Courses

Susie Skowronek

Writing majors have a few options in the current writing program—professional or creative writing as well as concentration options.

However, in a few years, the opportunities will be enhanced as the Writing Department revolutionizes its program

into modules. The modular format allows for more flexibility than the current linear track system

The new modular system proposes 42 credits broken into 12 from the core, 18 from the modules, 6 from writing electives or advisor-approved courses, and 6 from capstone courses. (See below)

“This is an opportunity for students to customize all 42 writing credits of their writing major,” said Professor Dan Royer,

**All Writing majors will need 42 credits
 12 from the core + 18 from the modules + 6 from WRT Electives or
 Cognate + 6 from the capstones.**

Core Requirements (12 credits)
 WRT 200 Introduction to Professional Writing
 WRT 210 Writing with Style
 WRT 219 Introduction to Creative Writing
 WRT251 Document Production and Design

Modules

Take two courses from three of the following modules:

Poetry Workshops

WRT 320 Int. Poetry Workshop
 WRT 420 Adv. Poetry Workshop

Fiction Workshops

WRT 330 Int. Fiction Workshop
 WRT 430 Adv. Fiction Workshop

Drama Workshops

WRT 340 Int. Drama
 WRT 440 Adv. Drama

Nonfiction Workshops

WRT 360 Int. Creative Nonfiction
 WRT 460 Adv. Creative N-Fiction

Writing for the Web

WRT 351 Writing for the Web
 WRT 451 Adv. Writing for Web

Magazine Writing

WRT 365 Int. Magazine Writing
 WRT 465 Adv. Magazine Writing

Reading as Writers

WRT 311 Reading for Technique
 WRT 312 Authors in Depth

Responding to Writers

WRT 307 Consulting with Writers
 WRT 308 Working with MS

Writing with Technologies

WRT 353 Adv. Document Design
 WRT 455 Multimodal Composing

Cognate Electives

Advisor Approved Course
 Advisor Approved Course

Writing Electives

Any WRT Course
 Any WRT Course

OR

Capstones

WRT 490 Internship
 WRT 495 Genre and Writing

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Writing Department Chair. “We can offer more writing-related content.”

In many ways, the proposed system diverges from the current standards of the writing program because students complete modules rather than following a track. Students will complete two courses in any three modules of their choice.

The proposed modules (with tentative titles and course names) include Poetry Workshops, Drama Workshops, Fiction Workshops and Nonfiction Workshops, Writing for the Web, Magazine Writing, Reading as Writers, Responding to Writers, and Writing with Technologies.

With an increase in the number of writing students – from 50 in 2001 to 224 in 2010—and a steady increase of faculty, the department can not only support new courses, but also adopt a new program.

The Writing Department has already worked on its new curriculum for two years. For each new course the department

“It’s not just a matter of hatching an idea and making it happen. It takes time,” said Royer.

introduces, a professor must complete a master syllabus. It is discussed by department faculty before entered into an online system. The syllabus, then, passes through several more reviewing processes before officially entering the course catalogue.

If any review board decides the course requires revision, the syllabus will rebound to its original writer to make the necessary changes.

Since the Writing Department will introduce nine new courses and the process required to propose a new curriculum is a bit cumbersome, the proposed writing curriculum will not be ready for next fall, and might not be ready for several years.

“It’s not just a matter of hatching an idea and making it happen. It takes time,” said Royer.

To ease the transition into the proposed program, the Writing Department will pilot several new courses in the 2010/2011 school year. These special topics courses will all be classified as WRT 380; they include Advanced Document Design, Authors in Depth, and Consulting with Writers in the fall semester, and Intermediate Magazine Writing in the winter.

Consulting with Writers

Associate Professor Ellen Schendel will pilot a course that teaches writing consultation techniques. Going further in depth than WRT 306, Seminar for New Tutors, the new Consulting with Writers will expand response and critique techniques to classrooms and workplaces.

Schendel will teach students consulting, responding, collaborating and ghostwriting in various contexts. Material will be drawn from scholarship and best practices in composition, writing centers, workplace writing, and creative writing.

“When writing majors hit the workplace, their colleagues will see them as ‘go to’ people on writing projects,” said Schendel. “Writing majors should be prepared to give effective feedback, as well as know how to write collaboratively or as a ghostwriter.”

Authors in Depth

Associate Professor Chris Haven will pilot Authors in Depth, a course that will examine two authors: Margaret Atwood and John Updike. The course will look at aesthetic, technical, and marketing choices made by the authors or for the authors throughout their careers.

The course will allow students to analyze literature as would-be masters of the craft and learn the techniques of other writers.

“The study of literature is always valuable,” Haven said. “But this course will focus on inside out rather than outside in.”

As a multi-genre class—covering fiction, nonfiction and poetry—the course can substitute for any of the “studies in” requirements in the creative writing track.

Students must have completed WRT 210 and WRT 219 as prerequisites to this course.

Advanced Document Design

Advanced Document Design will expand on basic principles of aesthetics and research in visual rhetoric and cognitive psychology learned in Document Production and Design. The course will also examine cross-cultural iconography and the quantitative display of information.

Led by Assistant Professor Christopher Toth, students will use programs such as Adobe InDesign, Adobe Illustrator, and Microsoft Excel. Projects will offer practical applications with management issues, and a final project will take students through the entire publication process.

“This new course will introduce additional concepts of visual rhetoric which there isn’t enough time for in WRT 251,” said Toth. “The course will also offer students space to enhance design concepts learned in the intro course,” said Toth.

Students must take WRT 200 and WRT 251 to be eligible to take this course.

Intermediate Magazine Writing

In Winter 2011, Assistant Professor Austin Bunn will pilot Intermediate Magazine Writing. The course will teach common forms of magazine nonfiction and long-form journalism.

“Magazine writing is topical and combines the best of journalism with literary writing,” said Bunn. “This course will emphasize both topicality and stylized writing.”

Bunn stated that the course is highly applicable because many students read magazines and might apply for jobs in the magazine business.

Students will follow the process of a magazine writer: the pitch, idea development, news gathering, article writing, and replication of page layouts. Through writing assignments, students will closely study magazines such as *Time*, *The New Yorker*, and *Harper’s*. The anchor magazine will act as the course textbook, and readings will come from both the subscription magazine and other periodicals.

Department Welcomes New Faculty

*Aiman Mueller &
Dan Michniewicz*

After saying goodbye at the end of Summer 2009 to Professor Carol Kountz who retired to Boston, Massachusetts, the Writing Department welcomed two new tenure-track assistant professors—Christopher Toth and Sean Prentiss—one new visiting professor—Amy McInnis—and three affiliate professors—Todd Kaneko, Susan Laidlaw, and Monica Robinson.

Christopher Toth

When it was time for Christopher Toth to write his dissertation for his doctorate of Philosophy in Rhetoric and Professional Communication at Iowa State University, he could not settle on a topic.

Then Toth saw a recall notice for the exact toy train his nephew had just received as a present. It hit him like a ton



of bricks: he would write his dissertation on the genre of the toy safety recall notice.

Now as an Assistant Professor of Writing, Toth is hard at work turning “Child’s Play: Investigating the Genre of Toy Safety Recall Notices” into a series of articles and presenting his research at various conferences. He says he wishes to eventually work with the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which issues toy recall notices in conjunction with the faulty toy’s manufacturer, to help make the notices more effective. He believes this will eventually help to save children’s lives.

Before his doctoral studies, Toth earned a Master of Arts in English specializing in Creative Writing from Iowa State. During this time, environmental writer Debra Marquart influenced and shaped his understanding of writing.

His writing has appeared in *Business Communication Quarterly* and the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, and he also actively contributes to the textbook, *Business and Administrative Communication*, and its ancillary materials.

Sean Prentiss

Revise, revise, revise, goes the mantra of Assistant Professor Sean Prentiss. The words are ingrained in the minds of his students. Indeed, Prentiss has done some revising himself. Venturing into around forty types of jobs, he started his education and career in business by getting a BA from Western State in Colorado, followed up by a stint with the Peace Corps processing micro-loans in Kingston, Jamaica.

Back in the States, he worked seasonally in the Northwest Youth Corps for many years, continually climbing in leadership while also performing back-breaking conservation work. Though as strong as his experiences—once backpacking five hundred miles—Prentiss still needed a sustainable long-range career.

Prentiss has always loved to read, and



he has filled over forty personal journals, cataloging his journeys. A friend begged him to get an MFA; he did, at Idaho University. Prentiss’s long, varied journey comes through in his teaching of creative and sports writing. He preaches working hard, making it clear to students that success in writing means logging hours composing and revising. Devoted as a writer himself, he has built a writing cabin in the mountains of Colorado and predominantly publishes lyrical essays often applying poetic format rules to prose. His work has appeared in *Pacific Review*, *Nimrod*, *Ascent* and many others.

Amy McInnis

Poet and Visiting Professor, Amy McInnis teaches creative and core writing courses. She has always had an innate love for writing and finds “the action of it uncovers truth.” However, while McInnis enjoyed authors like Beverly Cleary and Judy Bloom in her youth, she did not imagine writing as more than a personal hobby. In quiet Escanaba, MI, writing was something to do. To the contrary, a high school teacher promoted writing as an active, powerful engagement.

At Western Michigan University, Herb Scott saw McInnis onto the next step. While completing her MFA and working with Scott as Assistant Editor at New Issues Press, Scott saw something special in McInnis’s poetry and helped build her confidence and direction as a writer.

The works of Sharon Olds, Wallace Stevens and others further confirm to McInnis the purpose and validity of her own work, so much of which revolves around the “emotions reflected in our environments” and the way they color how we see things. She is currently working on her second book. Her first, *Cut River*, which won the Holland Prize, is a body of poems that address the loss of her father



and the reality that each moment is unique and irretrievable.

Apart from discovering herself as a writer, teaching has revealed to McInnis that while writing came naturally to her, it is also a teachable skill.

Faculty Fridays: A No Student Zone

Janelle Wing

If you walked by the Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors and saw faculty and staff pounding away on laptops, you've probably witnessed Faculty Fridays at its finest.

The idea of Faculty Fridays sprang from the need for a writing sanctuary, especially for professors that were trying to complete dissertations or other publishable works. Every other Friday during the academic year, from noon to 5pm, the Writing Center become that safe haven.

Associate Professor Ellen Schendel, Director of the Writing Center, created the event so faculty could schedule time every month to write. "It's space and having a couple of people on hand if you want feedback," said Schendel.

Faculty Fridays are sponsored entirely by the Writing Center, and as Schendel said, "It's a natural evolution of how to be

a writing-centered place for the campus." Over the years, the Writing Center has grown as a resource, and now helps more than just students. Faculty Fridays was the next logical step.

Schendel found a correlation between faculty who use the Writing Center and the students who come in for assistance.

Professors who experience the Writing Center firsthand are more likely to suggest their students go there for help as well.

An important aspect of Faculty Fridays is the community. By putting faculty members together to work on writing, they feel more motivated. Rather than being stuck in their office in front of a computer, faculty members work alongside others

toward a common goal. Faculty members that attend the sessions feel support from the other people in the room because they are all in the same position.

During Faculty Fridays, the Writing Center is closed to students. Faculty members can write in a quiet and comfortable space, or discuss their work

with Schendel and other peers. Faculty members are free to come and go throughout the day.

In the future, the Writing Center hopes to sponsor something similar for students on campus. While it would need more structure than the current Faculty

Fridays, it would be yet another way in which the Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors fulfills its mission.

"It's a natural evolution of how to be a writing-centered place for the campus," said Schendel.

Setting the Bar High at MWCAC

Kiera Wilson

Writing consultants attended the Michigan Writing Center Association Conference held at Oakland University on October 17, 2009. Along with GVSU's Writing Center Director, Associate Professor Ellen Schendel, Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors (FMCWMA) consultants and staff piled into a van to not only network with other university writing centers, but also to learn and exchange ideas.

Michelle Sanchez, a graduate consultant said, "I wanted to attend the conference because I'm interested in learning how other writing centers function and what practices work best at other universities."

Consultants from across Michigan gathered to discuss issues that include working with English as Second Language students, negotiating various tutoring roles, combating plagiarism, and tutoring

non-traditional students.

Schendel said, "Attending a conference like this gives consultants a chance to learn about the field of writing center scholarship, and to learn from their colleagues at other Michigan institutions. It's a great professional development opportunity."

Many of GVSU's consultants such as Erin Allen, Zelia Fossett, and Samantha Howard presented their research. Howard discussed her summer research on what writers need in a space conducive to writing. Her research offered attendees insight into how writing centers can function as a place of writing as opposed to a place where writing is workshopped then completed elsewhere. Fossett and Allen presented on ways consultants can maximize their efforts in 30 minutes. At the end of the semester, writing centers see an influx of students. Lengthy waiting lists make knowing how to limit one-on-one sessions to 30 minutes vital.

Schendel held a panel discussion on the

Writing Center's genre guide project, which collaborated with various fields to create guides that consultants use with students when writing discipline-specific assignments.

"Writing centers can do more to involve faculty in the work they do," stated Schendel. "In this project, we created the guides so that faculty expertise in discipline-specific writing could be part of our tutor training and consultations with students." She plans to continue expanding the genre guides beyond the present fifteen already written.

GVSU sent eager, well-rounded undergraduates to continue their professional development. When consultants returned, they brought a feeling of accomplishment because the FMCWMA continues to provide an exceptional service to the GVSU community that other universities admire.

Breaking Boundaries: Art and Theater at the GRAM

Seth DeHaan

When you walk into an art museum, there are a few items you might expect to see. Paintings would make sense; a sculpture or two wouldn't be out of place. What about an older couple fast asleep in a bed? As a small crowd gathers around them, staring in confusion, they wake and stare back, apparently just as confused as their audience. The start of a Twilight Zone episode?

No. It's theater.

An attempt to bring art and theater together, actually, as part of the Grand Rapids Art Museum's (GRAM) 100th anniversary celebration, taking throughout the year. For their centennial, the GRAM is devoting each month to a different medium; February was designated as the month for theater. Organized by Assistant Professor Austin Bunn, and Malinda Peterson of MP Talent, the event included short plays, panels, and involvement from local playwrights.

Events at the GRAM occurred on February Friday nights and offered attendees a new perspective on the art of theater each week. The first week showcased short plays and essays written to celebrate the new Calder Jewelry exhibition, and the next was centered on performances written by local playwrights to complement favorite pieces of artwork in the GRAM, previously selected by guests. These plays, like the example above called *Green Relief*, "took away the boundaries between performance and reality," said Bunn. "You get to see the art come alive."

Other highlights included excerpts of plays written by area playwrights, including Bunn and Stephanie Sandberg, Associate Professor at Calvin College, and a panel discussion with a few local directors about the state of theater in the Grand Rapids community.

This entanglement of art and theater "was all about changing the relationships people have with the art," said Bunn.

The GRAM has no stage, is not designed as a venue for theater, so the integration of performance came as a surprise to guests.

"It's unexpected theater in an indeterminate space," said Bunn, and that confusion of limits allowed guests not just to look at art, but to participate.

By involving the strong, art-appreciating audience the museum has cultivated over the years, Bunn and company engaged attendees on a new and exciting level. "It was a great opportunity for two cultures to come together," said Bunn, "mixing the art establishment with edgy writers."

The GRAM's centennial celebration offers anyone in the area an easy way to become more civically engaged, emphasizing the organization's goal of community involvement. Writing majors should keep tabs on the museum throughout the year, as April at the GRAM is devoted to poetry and August to film. The events are a great way to learn about writing outside of a university environment, and a solid introduction to the Grand Rapids art scene.



writing majors, have co-coordinated this year's series, which included various theme readings and monthly poetry slams. SRS hosted regular poetry readings for the time this year; the response has been overwhelmingly positive. A home venue was established at Area 51, which not only attracted a crowd of regulars, but also piqued the interest of students dining nearby.

"We've seen the audience grow with every event," said Fluegel, "and we have such great talent that comes from all over the university."

The SRS also hosted a "Creepshow" reading in the fall, which featured stories ranging from out-of-body experiences to, of course, zombies. The lights dimmed and eerie sounds echoed from the speakers while the readers told their tales seated, creepily, in an armchair. Ambiance is a top priority for the SRS' events, and they aim to create environments that are not only comfortable for the readers, but fun for the audience as well.

Assistant Professor Austin Bunn became the faculty advisor for the organization this year and helped bring new energy and direction, which was losing momentum after the departure of the previous advisor. "Becoming faculty advisor of the SRS, I have instituted a new policy—no boring readings," said Bunn. "We're trying to do this by using themes, contests, and rehearsals."

In regards to the future of SRS, Fluegel said, "I hope that SRS continues because it is a great venue for student writers. I would love to see it gain more recognition outside the writing department."

Fiction, creative non-fiction, drama and poetry pieces are welcomed by the SRS staff. If you are interested in submitting pieces for next year's events or wanting to participate, send an email to srsgvsu@gmail.com.

SRS on the Rise

*Amber Bogins &
Alexandra Fluegel*

If you've seen flyers boasting of pterodactyls and broke down cars while walking through Lake Ontario Hall, you've heard of the Student Reading Series. The student-run organization, commonly known as "SRS," allows students the opportunity to give their work life beyond the page, sharing their talent with their peers while at the same time polishing their public reading skills.

Matt Weaver and Alexandra Fluegel,

True Conflict of a Part-Time Indian

Jessica Levine

Sherman Alexie was born with water on the brain. Or, maybe, he's just got brain grease: oil that makes the lobes go soggy like McDonald's french fries after they've been in the fryer too long.

This is how the Spokane Indian (Indian, not Native—he insists) author of *War Dances* (2009), *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* (2007) and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993) began his Great Lakes History Conference talk at the GVSU L.V. Eberhard Center on November 13. He began with a self-effacing stab at his at-birth medical condition, hydrocephalus. Why? Because Alexie wanted to prove he's a man of contradictions.

He isn't even supposed to be alive, let alone be a brilliant poet. A kid from the Spokane Indian Reservation in Wellpinit, Washington, a kid reflexively expected to go nowhere, surely was not supposed to be an educated and successful darling of

the mainstream culture. Alexie is when he shouldn't be, and that's made the man conflicted.

He explained how writing and reading—he read *The Grapes of Wrath* at the age of three, per his alcoholic parents' encouraging—became his saving grace on the reservation. Alexie recognized this early-learned drive to do something meaningful with his life inspired his artistic success. So, Alexie called the audience to action.

"Follow your tangents," he said. "Observe and write everything down."

From there, Alexie's talk unraveled. Carole Levine, my mom, and former columnist for national newspaper, *Native American Times*, and international arts magazine, *Scene 4*, made it her job to know folks like Alexie. She also attended.

"Sherman Alexie's walked in two worlds. That conflict has been reflected in his art. In his novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, he seemed to become more comfortable with who he is. This talk seemed to reflect more of the attitude in *Indian Killers*," she said.

Indian Killers (1996) is dark—really dark. Main character John Smith, born Indian and raised white, scalps and terrorizes white men as he yearns to conjoin his two cultures. While this story is fictional, it is hard to deny that its undertones hearken on Alexie's own struggle to mesh his yin and yang.

During the talk, Alexie posed the question, "If we stopped writing about reservations, would you read us?" This kind of assumption—one that insinuates the readership looks for struggling Indian stories, and struggling Indian stories only—turns people off. It's the stuff that segregates and divides. It's the stuff that reveals Alexie's personal culture clash, as he pegs his heritage against his experiences and interactions with the non-Indian world. That being said, the man is still brilliant. He is an artist for the fact that he describes his hydrocephalus poetically as water on the brain. And, he's a man wading through his beefs—just like the rest of us.

Steven Johnson: "Skim and Plunge"

Adele Jones

You know what you breathe. Air, right? More specifically, oxygen. But how was it discovered? Steven Johnson's nonfiction book, *The Invention of Air*, follows Joseph Priestley's discovery of oxygen and the social aspects of the time period that fostered innovation and great ideas.

"The Biography of a Book" was the first of two Writers Series' events with Steven Johnson on October 15, 2009. In a Q&A session facilitated by Assistant Professor Austin Bunn in front of a packed audience, Johnson discussed his writing process and how he was able to get his ideas published.

Steven Johnson talked about how he pitched ideas to publishers. According to Johnson, it is a lot easier to sell them on a really cool nonfiction idea, get them to fund your research, and produce a book

based on the idea, than it is to write a fiction book and try to convince them to publish it. Publishers seem to be more willing to take a gamble on an informative nonfiction than fiction. This gives nonfiction a marked advantage over fiction, because writers can get more easily paid for their ideas.

On the writing process, he stated that the inspiration for his books comes from extensive research and making connections between different topics. He suggested "skim and plunge" as a useful technique. Skim web search results, journal and book titles, and even Wikipedia until you find something that looks interesting, and then plunge into in-depth research. This approach can be especially useful if you don't know much about the topic. Johnson admitted that when he starts his research, he really doesn't know much about his topic. Even though he has written books about neuroscience, he has never really considered himself good at science.

The second event was "The Long Zoom: A Natural History of a Great Idea." Steven Johnson presented the main ideas in *The Invention of Air*. It centered on the story behind how hobby scientist Joseph Priestley discovered oxygen, his relationships with the Founding Fathers, the creation of the Unitarian Church, and his struggles with England. The book examines how innovative ideas emerge and spread in society and drive historical changes.

GVSU was pleased to host the two events with Steven Johnson, the best-selling author of six books on the intersection of science, technology and personal experience. His writings have influenced everything from the way political campaigns use the Internet, to cutting-edge ideas in urban planning, to the battle against 21st-century terrorism. Johnson had a lot of interesting things to say about his writing and publishing process, and enthusiastically shared the stories behind *The Invention of Air*.

Novelist-Poet Combination Reading

Dan Michniewicz

When deciding who to invite to GVSU to read as part of the Writing Department's Writer's Series, Assistant Professor Austin Bunn only had to consult his personal Rolodex, within which he found two former colleagues: Jeffrey Bean and Darrin Doyle.

Bunn met the pair during his fellowship at the University of Louisville, where Bean was also on fellowship and Doyle taught as a visiting professor.

During the reading at GVSU's University Club on February 15, Bean, a poet, read from his first collection, *Diminished Fifth*.

Bean's Midwestern roots and experiences studying music as an undergraduate influenced many of the collection's poems, including *Why I Failed at Baseball* and *Encyclopedia of Wheat*.

He also read from his forthcoming

collection, *Sonnets to Loud God*, which Bean said reflects the "ratcheted up" nature of private prayer.

Doyle read selections from his second novel, *The Girl Who Ate Kalamazoo*, a story about Audrey Mapes, a girl with no feet who also suffers from Pica, a disease that compels sufferers to eat anything and everything, including nails, coins, and crayons. But Audrey takes it to the extreme, devouring the entire city of

"...meticulous attention to physical detail... is necessary for convincing the reader that an impossible thing is true," Doyle said.

Kalamazoo.

Doyle said that Kafka's *Metamorphosis* is one of his all-time favorite books, and that the Russian author's magnum opus heavily influenced *The Girl Who Ate Kalamazoo*.

"I have always admired Kafka's meticulous attention to physical detail, which absolutely is necessary for convincing the reader that an impossible thing is true,"

Doyle said.

Doyle added that he is writing a new novel that in comparison to his first two is "less dark, more straightforward comedy."

He's also working on a collection tentatively titled, *The Human Part*, which has a number of flash fiction pieces about individual body parts interspersed among longer fiction pieces.

Bunn said he thought that Doyle, who grew up in Saginaw and earned his

undergraduate and graduate degrees at Western Michigan University, would be a good addition to the series because of his local ties.

"Not only is he a writer and from this area, but he writes about this area," Bunn said.

Doyle and Bean currently teach at Central Michigan University's Department of English Language and Literature.

"[Bean's] work is really musical," Bunn said, "so I thought that would be a good pairing."

GR's Most Explosive Reading Series

Meghan McAfee

"But only figuratively," jokes Visiting Professor, Elena Passarello.

Passarello speaks of the Cherry Bomb Reading Series—an idea which came to fruition in Summer 2009. Created by Passarello and fellow Visiting Professor, Christina Olson, Cherry Bomb is a truly high-octane event.

Cherry Bomb aims to spotlight small-press writers and quirky performances. "We wanted it to be a civilian reading series, featuring some local writers who deserve love, too," says Passarello.

Creative themes unify each hour-long reading and provide guests with plenty of unexpected surprises along the way. The first theme "Islands" featured a nonfiction piece about the island of Macau by Riley Hanick; a scene from *Killadelphia: Mixed Tape of a City* performed by playwright Sean Christopher Lewis; and a rendition

of David Foster Wallace's essay "Shipping Out".

November served "Good Food" to Grand Rapids. Newly-published Keith (KP) Liles read poems from his premiere collection, *Spring Hunger*, inspired by his experiences working in restaurants. Visiting Professor Matt Frank, a fellow foodie and poet, joined Liles. Frank read poems from his book, *Sagittarius Agitprop*. He also recited an excerpt from his new memoir, *Barolo*.

The first Cherry Bomb of the new year spun the audience in circles. "Hoopla" featured an electric fiction reading by Adjunct Professor Ben Drevlow. Drevlow's short story about basketball was taken from his collection, *Bend with the Knees and Other Love Advice from My Father*. Along with Drevlow, local hula-hooping extraordinaire, Audria Larsen shared a portion from her forthcoming memoir and an impromptu hula-hoop performance.

The final Cherry Bomb took audience

members "Up There". Essayist Ashley Butler defied gravity with a reading from her new prose collection, *Dear Sound of Footstep*. Local playwright David Turkel, and a small cast of actors, performed a selection from his 2007 production of *A Key to the Field*.

Passarello strives to incorporate "non-literary" acts. "The human ear can only listen to so much," she says. Wine-tasting lessons, grape lectures, and choreographed hula-hoop routines demonstrate the wide variety of entertainment—and education—found at a Cherry Bomb event.

Future Cherry Bomb readings hope to incorporate student pieces, as well. "We want to give students the opportunity to stand up there and perform their work," says Passarello. "It'll be scary, but isn't that the point?"

Learning Through Internships

GRPS Communications

LaTricia Phillips

During my sophomore year, I became interested in participating in the Writing in Distinction program offered by GVSU's Writing Department. To complete the program, I had to choose semester-long commitment activity. I chose to complete an internship as a professional writer.

I found an interesting internship for Fall 2009 by researching past internship sites on the Writing Department's website. I interned with the Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) Communications and External Affairs Office under the supervision of John Helmholdt. This office handles news reports, broadcasts, media relations, all GRPS events planning, and any complaints or suggestions from the Grand Rapids community regarding the schools. In addition, the office works directly with the superintendent of the Board of Education. Without the GRPS Communications Office, the media and public would not be as informed about what is happening within GRPS.

My major responsibilities during the internship experience included answering phone calls and listening to voicemails, contacting news media stations, gathering detailed information for events or news stories, drafting three to four press releases daily, managing the GRPS website for targeted schools, updating GRPS social networks, and telemarketing and recruiting sponsors.

Overall, I think this internship was a valuable and positive experience. I explored and learned about unfamiliar areas of communications and public relations in addition to writing. I have further developed my skills to communicate with various audiences, and through experience, I became accustomed to a professional writing style. I also developed a strong, mentoring relationship with my supervisor. I can always go to him and ask for advice or guidance. The most beneficial outcome of this internship is that GRPS offered me the chance to continue working as a

Communications Technician.

For students who have yet to complete an internship, here is some advice: relax. At first, starting an internship is nerve-racking because you never know what to expect from your supervisor, coworkers, or the environment itself but you will become accustomed to it. Have confidence in yourself. If you make mistakes, it is okay; learn from them because it is all a part of the process. And most importantly, ALWAYS ask questions. Do not be afraid to get a better understanding of what you

If you make mistakes, it is okay; learn from them because it is all a part of the process.

are doing or will be working on. Not only will you gain more from the internship by asking questions, your supervisor will appreciate your interest.

Safe Haven Ministries

Elizabeth Uhl

During Fall 2009, I worked as an intern at Safe Haven Ministries, a domestic abuse shelter located in Grand Rapids, MI. Safe Haven is a non-profit organization that offers emergency shelter, non-residential services, and prevention and education programs to the community.

I was hired by Susan Halteman, Safe Haven's Development Director, as a fund development intern. I was lucky in that I did not have to seek this internship out; it came to me as a result of a project I had done in a grant writing course. During that course, students wrote a grant for a local organization, and I chose Safe Haven. After I had completed the project, Halteman offered me the internship.

I was hired primarily to assist in grant writing and research, to help plan and execute a major fundraising event at Frederick Meijer Gardens, to develop content for Safe Haven's new website, to help update and develop a media contact list for press releases and other promotional material and to generally assist in

other writing assignments that may come up during the course of the work day.

Many people think of internships as a time when you'll be doing grunt work—getting coffee for a demanding boss or filing paperwork for endless hours. Being a small non-profit, all of Safe Haven's employees deal with huge workloads and not enough hours in the day. As a result, I worked on projects that made an important impact on the organization. During the four months I spent interning at Safe Haven, I brought in just over \$25,000 in funding as a result of grant proposals I wrote with Halteman's guidance.

Additionally, I helped plan and organization a major fundraising event. Instead of engaging in three smaller-scale fundraisers as it had done in the past, Safe Haven chose to focus its efforts on organizing one large fundraiser in October 2009. This event was a luncheon held at Frederick Meijer Gardens. In addition to planning, I also wrote materials for the program and the subsequent thank-you letters to everyone who attended the luncheon (a surprisingly difficult task).

This internship was an incredibly valuable experience for my development as a writer and as a professional. I learned what it takes to plan a successful fundraising event. I learned how to research grants and how to write proposals so that they will speak directly to the reader and entice her to fund your project. I learned that thank-you notes can double as tax-receipts. Perhaps most importantly, I learned the value of a supportive work environment. I was extremely lucky to find myself surrounded by a group of women who were unfailingly positive, helpful, and encouraging.

More than anything, this experience taught me that professional writing can make a real difference. The proposals and grants that I wrote while at Safe Haven were translated into funds that help women and children leave behind lives of abuse and trauma.

I would strongly encourage any student to seek an internship to not only bolster your resume and make you a more attractive job candidate, but to gain a professional perspective that you just can't get inside a classroom.

Grad School: A Cautionary Tale

Leah Mastee

Three weeks into winter break, I found myself frantically scribbling disjointed thoughts, hoping the phrases would magically turn into an organized personal statement. My brain hurt, already frazzled from spending hours prior revising a 14-page story I wanted to put in my portfolio. The first deadline for the MFA programs I decided to apply to was January 1: a short two weeks away. Plus, I knew with the upcoming holidays, the mailing system was bound to be less than reliable.

Now, months after the final deadlines for my programs passed, I doubted the choices I made during my application process.

So learn from my mistakes. Take these easy rules and follow them when applying for an MFA in creative writing.

Start looking early.

Not really thinking about what to do after graduation, I entered my senior year barley considering grad school. But as the year progressed, more of my friends started talking about the benefits of MFA programs. An MFA program gives students time to intensely focus on their writing, provides publishing opportunities and internship experience, and offers qualification to teach at the collegiate level. The downside—I didn't make this decision until almost early November, a bad choice

considering most deadlines run December through February, if you're looking for financial assistance.

Take the GRE early. Study even earlier.

My biggest mistake when taking the GRE reflects well on the rest of my application experience—I rushed into it and thought about the specifics later. I knew schools recommend applicants take the GRE months in advance, but because I applied so late in the game, I completed the GRE late as well. I took the test on the Saturday after exams, a huge mistake. Because I was so busy studying for my exams, I spent little time studying for the GRE. My friend, who was infinitely smarter than I in this process, bought a word book and started building his vocabulary months in advance. Both his Verbal score and Writing score (the parts of the GRE grad school put the most emphasis on) reflect his hard work.

Research the rankings.

Apply to schools with various rankings. *The Creative Writing MFA Handbook*, among other sources, ranks schools based on program strength, funding, and competitiveness. I made the mistake of only applying to top tier schools, all of them ranked in the Top 50, so I left myself with no backup plan. Ultimately, my selections weren't diverse enough. Adding

a few last resort schools to your list is a good idea if your funding allows it. Apply to 8-12 schools: 2-3 dream programs, 3-4 middling programs, and 2-3 safe bets.

Get used to rejection.

Writing is subjective. If you apply one year and don't get in, there's always next year, or the year after, or sometime down the road...

Plan your finances accordingly.

College students, with high aspirations and limited dollars, might be surprised at how much the application process costs. While a lot of MFA programs provide great funding packages after you're accepted, the application process can quickly drain your bank account. Between the cost of the GRE (\$150) and spending between \$40 and \$100 each on 7-10 applications, applicants can spend upwards of \$500 on the application process.

Know it is okay to take time off.

Many professors recommend taking a year or more off between undergraduate and graduate programs. This break gives you time to strengthen your portfolio and gain a better understanding of your authorship, as well as build "real world" experience. You will also have time to save money for the application process.

Study Abroad Offers Writing Majors New Material and Experiences

Ariana Hendrix

Writers constantly search for something new to write about, and we're often given the advice of that old cliché: write what you know. Through study abroad, students can observe the cultures and landscapes of unfamiliar places, experiences that will never fail to give dynamic new material

and endless inspiration for writing.

Caitlin Horrocks, Assistant Writing Professor, studied in England as an undergraduate and has since lived, traveled, and taught throughout Europe. Horrocks said she "feels strongly" about encouraging more writing students to spend a semester or two abroad.

"A traveler is an observer," she said. "Living abroad has changed the way I use language and create characters and

dialogue. When I came back, I had something to draw from for my stories that was different and fresh."

According to the 2009-2010 GVSU Study Abroad catalog, students can study creative writing in countries such as Germany, Greece, or England. Ghana, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain

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Barolo: A Little Taste of Italy

Madeleine Hart

To anyone around GVSU who has taken one of Visiting Professor Matt Frank's classes, heard his readings, or has maybe just encountered him randomly, one thing is clear: Matt Frank loves food.

Abandoning a childhood diet filled with saturated fats and preservatives, Frank set out on a food-centric endeavor. While reading an article that detailed Barolo wine, Frank vowed that he would someday visit the Italian city.

In 1998, this dream was achieved, ultimately inspiring Frank to write his recently published book, *Barolo*.

"I was young and fell in love with everything there," Frank said. "The women, the food, the wine, the lifestyle (which is slow), and the driving (which is fast)."

Barolo is a compilation of Frank's travel memoirs and culinary education that, in



many ways, pays homage to the city that introduced to him a new way of life.

"Without the people of Barolo, who took the time to befriend some scruffy American kid who still had the stink of the microwave on him...there would have been no book," Frank said.

The 246-page book opens with Frank's return trip to Italy. After a brief and charmingly written back-story that details Frank's previous (and tumultuous) relationship with food that's sure to leave the

reader avoiding the frozen food aisle for some time, the real story begins. Frank's memoirs, once no more than loosely conducted scribbles in an unkempt spiral bound notebook, take the reader through the countryside of Barolo, introducing locals and unlocking culinary secrets along the way. Frank's writing is littered with repartee that breathes new life into his insights the whole way through.

Most recently, Frank returned to the city of Barolo in March 2010, rekindling his romance with the culture and cuisine of the region.

"My return there...served as a confirmation of [my] young affair with [this] place and pace," Frank said. "In a way, it was as if I had never left, once again eating *carne cruda* with the local butcher, hazelnut cakes with the baker...It reminded me, in ways, of who I am, why I love the things I do."

Professor Finds the Heart's Desire

Ian McCaul

Catherine Frerichs, Professor of Writing, experienced a childhood that few can claim: she grew up in what is now Papua New Guinea the daughter of Lutheran missionary parents. She has chosen to turn that experience into her recently published book, *Desires of the Heart*.

The seed for the book came after the death of Frerichs' father, Albert. She came into possession of boxes of her parents' letters, and after reading through them, she felt the urge to do something. She consulted her siblings, and they all wanted to know the same thing: Why did their father choose to become a missionary? What led him to make a decision that not only dramatically altered his life but also the lives of the members of his family?

At first, Frerichs says that she envisioned that the book would be an edited collection of her parents' letters; in her time not devoted to work, she would organize

and read the many letters her parents had saved, writing down summaries, explanations, and her own responses. Over time, however, she was convinced that she needed to include more of her memories and reactions along with the letters. With the help of people who knew her and her parents, the project grew into a personal reflection of her parents' choice, their motives, and what their decision meant for their children both when they were growing up and now that they are adults.

Initially, Frerichs sent the book to a variety of publishers, a university press, an historical society, and religious publishing

companies. In the end, she decided to self-publish through Cold River Studio, despite the strong bias against self-publishing present in academic circles.

"The greatest thing about self-publishing is the freedom it gives you, and the worst thing about self-publishing is the freedom it gives you," said Frerichs. To assist her process, she had several professional editors in addition to a graphic designer. Frerichs has performed readings at the Cascade Library and Saint Mark's Episcopal Church in downtown Grand Rapids, as well as a reading at the GVSU Allendale campus.

Copies of *Desires of the Heart* can be found at the University Bookstore, as well as local bookstores such as Schuler's and Literary Life; they can also be purchased from the publisher and from Amazon. While Frerichs says that she imagines her audience will be other adult children of missionaries or people raised in other exotic or extreme locations, the story is interesting, personal, and moving enough to interest any reader.



GVSU Provides New Home for the CWPA

Megan Smith

GVSU's Writing Department has recently been named the home institute for the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA). The CWPA is a national organization comprised of first-year writing program directors, heads of writing departments, and directors of writing centers.

The CWPA is a place where university writing professionals can collectively discuss programs and policies, receive grants for projects, and obtain information for creating policy documents.

Assistant Professor Keith Rhodes, WRT 150 Director,

stated that the CWPA is "like a support group." Essentially, it is a resource where writing directors, professors, and graduate students can share successful practices and collaborate to improve their programs and the discipline as a whole.

The CWPA currently has about 540 members nationally and is run by a small volunteer staff. Part of becoming the institution's home means more responsibility and management from GVSU writing professors such as Rhodes, who currently volunteers as the organization's secretary, and Assistant Professor Charlie Lowe, who serves as both the organization's treasurer and web developer. Though the organization is small, Rhodes and Lowe both hope to see the CWPA grow to encompass a greater number of writing professionals.

The CWPA is currently in a transition period as GVSU settles into the role of home institution. What does this new change mean for GVSU? It means that writing programs and administrators across the country are watching the Writing Department.

"There is more attention to what our

program is doing," stated Rhodes. He went on to say that becoming the home institute of the CWPA "reminds them [other universities] who we are, which creates a good reputation. A good reputation helps get our name around."

This reputation helps students and professors on a number of levels. "People [potential faculty members] choose [which university to apply for] based on reputation, and this can affect who will apply," said Lowe. The greater selection of qualified applicants may help further establish and refine GVSU's Writing Department as a top notch program. This

good reputation may also impact writing students as they apply for graduate school elsewhere. "Students

would be looked at very favorably," commented Rhodes.

While the new national association may help both GVSU professors and students, CWPA ultimately comes down to improving the discipline of writing as a whole. Both Rhodes and Lowe volunteer their time to not only improve GVSU's Writing Department but also to improve the writing community. Rhodes commented that it is a "service to the profession" and that it is about the "larger good to the writing business." Lowe agreed, stating that GVSU now has a hand in "influencing the way knowledge is made into a discipline." It's an exciting time for GVSU writing professors, students, and all those involved in the discipline as GVSU finds its voice in the larger, national writing community.

ABROAD

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are just a few examples of countries whose programs offer literature classes, for which GVSU writing majors can receive credit. Many programs also offer courses in writing-related fields such as communication and journalism. Students can also take general education classes or complete their theme abroad, which will give them the experience of travel while freeing space for more writing classes back home. Other universities offer even more opportunities for finding a program that fits you best.

Ashley Zirkle, who is majoring in both creative writing and Spanish, studied at the Universidad de Deusto in Bilbao, Spain during the summer of 2009. While she was there to study Spanish language, she said, "studying abroad helped me not only to grow as a person, but also being able to see and experience things you would otherwise only be able to read about makes studying abroad worth it for a writer. You can research a place forever and never gain the same kind of understanding that you get by going there."

In addition, many employers and universities look more fondly upon job and graduate program candidates who are globally and culturally aware. Study abroad not only allows students to "internationalize" their résumés and applications, but also allows them to become more dynamic and experienced individuals, providing a leg up when searching for careers or graduate programs after graduation.

The Padnos International Center is conveniently located on the first floor of Lake Ontario Hall. Here, you can learn more about the programs, financial aid, and scholarship opportunities, and talk to students and advisors about when and where you want to go. Go in. Look around. You never know where you, and your writing, will end up.

"There is more attention to what our program is doing, said Rhodes. A good reputation gets our name around."

InWriting

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Alumni News

Andrew De Haan (2008 CW) currently serves as an AmeriCorps member with Cherry Street Health Services. He serves on the editorial staff for the online journal *Through the Third Eye*, and has been published by the *North Central Review*, *fishladder*, and *Fogged Clarity*.

Michelle Disler (1996 English) received her PhD at Ohio University in creative nonfiction and an MFA from Western Michigan University. She currently holds a tenure-track position at Ohio Wesleyan University.

Lindsey Drager (2008 CW) is an MFA candidate in fiction with a Gender and Women's Studies minor at the University of Illinois where she teaches and assistant edits for *Ninth Letter*. She plans to pursue her PhD in Writing Studies.

T. Fleischmann (2005 CW) completed an MFA in nonfiction from the University of Iowa in 2009 and has work forthcoming in *The Pinch*, *Fourth Genre*, *make/shift*, and elsewhere. Fleischmann's essay "Fist" was a Notable Essay in *Best American Essays 2009*.

Josh Fish (2008 CW) teaches English to four, five, seven and eight-year old kids in Taiwan. He has accepted another teaching position in Jinan, China beginning in September of 2010. He plans to apply to MFA programs for Fall 2011.

David LeGault (2008 CW) is currently pursuing an MFA at the University of Minnesota, where he is finishing a nonfiction manuscript about life in the Upper Midwest. He is also the nonfiction editor for the literary journal *dislocate*. His writing has recently appeared in *cold-drill*, and is forthcoming in *Black Warrior Review* and *Pank*.

Tracy Lee (2005 CW) teaches English at Muskegon Community College and serves as an Assistant Editor for *Narrative Magazine*. Her writing appears in *Narrative Magazine*, *Dogzplot* and *49/51*. She received an MA in English with an emphasis in creative writing from Eastern Michigan University.

Charlie Lemmink (2006 CW) lives in Carbondale, Illinois, where he studies fiction writing and teaches in Southern Illinois University's MFA program. He spends most of his time reading and working toward finishing his thesis by the spring of 2011.

Jason Lenz (2008 CW) is pursuing an MFA at Western Michigan University. His most recent play, *Rondo Rubato*, was a Regional winner and National finalist in the 2010 Kennedy Center's American College Theater Festival. He received of the Norma VanRheenen Award for Excellence in Teaching College Writing.

Michelle (LaPointe) Lewis (2004 PW) is a copy editor for CE (formerly Campbell-Ewald), a Detroit-based advertising and communications firm whose clients include Chevrolet, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Postal Service, among others. In addition to copy editing and proofreading, she maintains various client style guides.

Anne McKay (2006 PW) is Youth Services Librarian at Shiawassee District Library in Owosso, Michigan. She also serves on the statewide committee that selects the Michigan Library Association's Mitten Award for the best children's book published in the previous year.

Jenna McWilliams (1999 English) earned her MFA in poetry from Colorado State University in 2005. She is now working toward her PhD in the Learning Sciences Program at Indiana University and writes a blog on cultural issues.

Bison Messink (2006 CW) is finishing his MFA in fiction at the University of Wyoming. For his thesis, Bison wrote a novel set in Detroit on October 14, 1984, a project that began years ago at GVSU, originally as a history paper.

Danielle Monroe (2007 CW) worked as an Associate Acquisitions Editor with Elsevier and now studies creative writing in Emerson's MFA program. She also is a fiction reader for *Ploughshares*. This summer she has organized a non-profit program teaching Boston's youth resume writing, web skills, and Latin dance.

Derrick Mund (2005 CW) is in the MFA program at the University of Colorado at Boulder focusing on poetry.

Jacob Powers (2006 CW) recently completed his thesis, *Notes on a Downer Peninsula*, in the MFA program at Boise State University, and is graduating in May 2010. While at Boise State, Jacob read for *The Idaho Review*, and was the fiction editor for the graduate run literary magazine, *cold-drill*.

Suzanne Rivecca (2001 English) has a book coming out from WW Norton in July 2010 titled, *Death is Not an Option*. She earned an MFA from University of Minnesota and won a Stegner Fellowship at Stanford where she studied for two years.

Mike Salisbury (2006 PW) has been accepted into the MFA program at Pacific University. His story, "Horizontal Accidents," which appeared in *fishladder* and the *Black Warrior Review* is being adapted for The GVSU Summer Film 2010.

Morgan Sherburne (2006 CW) graduated with her MFA in creative nonfiction at the University of Minnesota. She is now enrolled in the science writing program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Travis Taylor (2005 CW) is completing his MFA at the University of New Hampshire. After graduating from GVSU, he wrote for *Metro Parent Magazine* and *BookPage*. In 2008, his work with the advertising company Team Detroit, Inc. was awarded the first place Target Award by the Direct Marketing Association of Detroit.

Megan Ward (2006 CW) completed her MA in Rhetoric and Composition from Miami University of Ohio in 2006. Since then, she has been working as the Writing Center Coordinator for Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City. Along with running the writing center, she works as adjunct faculty, teaching first-year composition courses.