

# In Writing

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Tracy K. Smith reads her poems and speaks on social justice.

(photo: Todd Kaneko)

## “Perhaps What We Seek Lives Outside of Speech”

*Maria McKee*

Lights dimmed and the packed room fell silent on October 13, as faculty, students, and poetry lovers from West Michigan gathered downtown at GVSU’s L.V. Eberhard Center for the 14th annual Poetry Night. An installation of the annual Fall Arts Celebration, poetry night has been known as one of the foremost literary events in West Michigan for some time, bringing renowned writers from across the country to share their work. This year, GVSU welcomed poets Oliver de la Paz and Tracy K. Smith to read their work for students, faculty, and members of the local poetry community.

The event began with opening remarks by Full Professor Patricia Clark, who has led Poetry Night since its beginning in 2002. Clark said she turns to the books she’s reading and excited

about when considering who to invite to the event. It is no surprise that de la Paz and Smith were received so warmly by those in attendance.

“What an attractive crowd,” said Oliver de la Paz as he approached the stage with laughter. He prefaced his reading with smiles and jokes, but the room changed when he began his first poem: a more political piece that drew on his personal history. Originally from the Philippines, de la Paz and his family moved to Oregon when he was young. One particularly impactful moment was when de la Paz read, “Like bats spiraling along a mustard crowd...the angels for those of us who

*See PERHAPS on page 10*

# Writing with Alum Mike Salisbury

Annie Livingston

Graduating writing students are often faced with the question: what happens next? GVSU Alum Mike Salisbury advises students: “Don’t let people make your world small.” Ever since Salisbury graduated from GVSU in 2006 with a dual degree in Communications and Writing, he has lived by these words. On October 11, Salisbury, this year’s CLAS Alumni-in-Residence, returned to campus and spoke to a room full of writing majors and minors, professors, and writing-minded folks alike.

While life after university can seem overwhelming, Salisbury’s experience should assure students of the amazing opportunities and experiences with which their degree can provide them. Salisbury’s success post-GVSU is a testament to how advantageous the writing degree is. Salisbury works with individuals and leading publishers like Hachette, HarperCollins,

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**“Being a successful writer means you need to know how to build your ‘lifestyle around your writing.’”**

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and Penguin Random House. As Salisbury puts it, a degree in writing can be as versatile as students need it to be.

After attending Pacific University of Oregon’s MFA program in 2012, he became a literary agent for Yates & Yates, and has worked with extraordinary writing, like New York Times bestselling authors. Salisbury considers himself as someone whose “communication and creative collide.” While many writing students may be under the impression that a degree in writing necessitates a career in academia, Salisbury said he “always knew I didn’t want to be a professor.” Instead, working in the world of publishing has been rewarding and inspiring for him. In addition to assisting others in the telling and spreading of their stories, Salisbury strives to dedicate himself

to his own writing.

Despite having a toddler to take care of, he still creates time to write every day. He says that being a successful writer means you need to know how to build your “lifestyle around your writing.” Among many others, his fiction has been published in *Black Warrior Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *Midwestern Gothic*. In 2012, his short story “Horizontal Accidents” was adapted into a film by GVSU’s Film/Video Department’s Summer Film Project.

On the nature of writing and what a difficult beast it can be, Salisbury is nothing short of inspirational. He knows that “storytelling is core to our being, it’s in our DNA.” Learning how to channel this storytelling in his career has been beyond rewarding. It is what led him into the world of publishing and a life dedicated to writing.

“As a student, Mike was a talented writer and a generous critic of his classmates work,” says Associate Professor Chris Haven and longtime friend of Salisbury. “But what is most remarkable is how much he loved to read, both inside and outside of class. It’s his love of reading that has fueled his success in writing and publishing.” Since Salisbury graduated in 2006, GVSU has grown as a university in many ways. “There were a lot more cornfields,” Salisbury laughed regarding his own time here. But besides the sheer appearance of campus, it is hard to see a contrast between the GVSU Salisbury described and the one students know today, especially within the Writing Department. The caliber of the faculty at

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**“Storytelling is core to our being, it’s in our DNA.”**

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GVSU and the amount of time given to pure student-faculty connection is a staple that has remained since day one. Salisbury credits much of his passion for writing to the talented faculty at GVSU.

“He shared with students the wide relevance of the major,” Haven said of Salisbury’s visit, “and how the skills they’re

developing in our curriculum translate in a variety of ways that might not be immediately apparent to them.” Seeing and hearing from successful alumni is part of what empowers students to reach for bigger and brighter opportunities and to grow their world of possibilities, instead of letting anyone “make their world small.”



## *New Chair of the Writing Department: Christopher Toth*

The Writing Department is pleased to announce that Associate Professor Christopher Toth has assumed the role of department chair as of Fall 2016.

Dr. Toth holds a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Professional Communication from Iowa State University and has been teaching at GVSU for seven years.

Look for a full profile of Dr. Toth and his first year as the chair of the Writing Department in the Winter Issue of *InWriting*.

# New Faculty: Amy Ferdinandt Stolley

*Eliza Ruffner*

**A**my Ferdinandt Stolley has a vivacious spirit for teaching writing and a passion for getting students to think critically. She has joined the GVSU Writing Department as an Associate Professor of first-year writing and, as of January 2017, will serve as director of the First-Year Writing Program.

Stolley makes it clear that she is not the type of professor that wants students to see her as superior to them. “I want my classroom to be a place where students are free to ask questions,” she says, “where students are challenged or pushed beyond what they were expecting.”

Stolley received her Ph.D in English with a concentration in Rhetoric and Composition from Purdue University. In addition, Stolley is an accomplished published writer. She has been published in *WPA: Writing Program Administration* and has co-authored a book, *GenAdmin: Theorizing WPA Identities in the Twenty-First Century*, with Colin Charlton, Jonnika Charlton,



*Associate Professor Amy Ferdinandt Stolley*

Tarez Samra Graban, and Kathleen J. Ryan. The book received the Council of Writing Program Administrator’s Best Book Award in 2014.

Throughout her education, Stolley has consistently centered herself around developing a student-minded writing pedagogy. Her research has surrounded writing program administration. In combination with her writing center work experiences, she has been enabled to see the value that comes from talking with students face-to-face about their writing.

“Most of us are better writers when we are talking to other people about the writing we are trying to do. When we talk to each other the act of writing becomes communal,” Stolley says. She is a professor and administrator that sees writing as a powerful tool made better by community. “My belief is that all writing—regardless of purpose—is an act of civic engagement.”

# New Faculty: Aiman Wesley Mueller

*EJ Fowler*

**G**etting involved in the Writing Department as an undergraduate can lead to a career with the university. No one knows that more than Affiliate Professor Aiman Wesley Mueller, who has joined the Writing Department as a first-year writing professor this fall. Mueller has a long history with GVSU, both as an alum and as an educator. Born and raised in Jackson, Michigan, Professor Mueller spent the first three years of his undergraduate career at Calvin College studying engineering. After transferring to GVSU, he shifted his focus to linguistics and creative writing and was drawn to Writing Department. “[The Writing Department] is a good group of people, and I liked communicating with them and working with them,” Mueller says of his time as a student.

While pursuing a Bachelor of Arts

in creative writing as an undergraduate, Mueller became more involved with the department than just taking writing classes. He was a contributor to *InWriting* and worked as a writing consultant at the Fredrick Meijer Center for Writing. His experiences at the Writing Center contributed to his passion for teaching. “I look at it [the Writing Center] as almost like another degree,” he says, “because of the interactions there.” The Writing Center was such a strong influence on Mueller that he continued to work there as a graduate assistant while pursuing his Masters of Education in Literacy Studies with an emphasis in TESOL (Teach English to Speakers of Other Languages).

As an educator, Mueller embraces all types of students and thrives in a diverse classroom setting. “I can begin each



*Affiliate Professor Aiman Wesley Mueller*

*See MUELLER on page 11*

# Writing Students Exploring Art in the Age of Activism

*Ashley Benedict*

**H**ow can artists create activist art? Why does art even matter in the age of activism? These are just two of the questions that Assistant Professor Beth Peterson's new writing class examines. This class is called WRT 180: Art and Activism. Like the name suggests, this class works to combine activism with art and encourages students to get outside their comfort zone. College students are placed in environments that actively explore the issues of the world and are often interested in figuring out ways to engage with these issues. Peterson has created a course that reflects and engages with students' activist interests and passions. The class grants more creative freedom to its students than most.

"Students are getting out [of the classroom] and their curiosity is the central thing we're working with," says Peterson. "Everyone is creating one project throughout the semester that looks different for each student, like eighteen different independent studies, because each student picks an area of focus." The medium that

each student chooses for their project can vary as well. Some have decided to create films, while others have worked on writing essays or poetry collections.

As long as the content relates to activism, Peterson says that they can be as creative as they want with it. "People think that art has to be art for art's sake and can't have a message or a purpose," she says. This class is trying to change the way we think about art and view the world around us. As writers, Peterson says that it helps her students think about questions to ask, how to write ethically and in a literary way, and also makes their work interesting and engaging.

One student and activist, Teresa Williams, is completing a mapping project about coffee shops and gentrification, "I'm hoping my audiences will see that coffee shops, while not the cause of gentrification, are often associated with it." Students are actively leaving their comfort zones and seeing the world with different eyes. "We have to make an effort to get to know what's happening and talk to people about

it," Williams says. "One of the best lessons I've taken from this class is using the ability I have as a writer to also do activist work—that my work can be both a piece of art and inspire social action." The writing skills they have learned have enhanced their abilities to be not just writers, but also creators within a community.

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The class is currently only offered for the Fall 2016 semester. However, Peterson encourages students to keep an eye out for future news on the development of this course. Students currently enrolled in this class will be showcasing their finalized projects to the public on December 8, 2016 at the Great Lakes Commonwealth of Letters in Grand Rapids.



*Assistant Professor Beth Peterson*  
(photo: Todd Kaneko)

***Writing Major  
Scholarship  
Applications  
due March 1, 2017***

***See the Writing  
Department Website  
for details about availability,  
eligibility & how to apply***

# To Be Raw, Honest, and Feeling

Laura Thaxton

Why am I writing this right now?" asked acclaimed author Claire Vaye Watkins, alongside fellow author and husband Derek Palacio during their visit at GVSU on October 25. The Grand Valley Writers Series hosted their visit, with the two fiction authors providing a craft talk and a reading for the GVSU community.

Claire Vaye Watkins is the author of two books, *Battleborn* and *Gold Fame Citrus*. Although she was raised in Nevada in the Mojave Desert, she earned her MFA at Ohio State University and is now a faculty member of the Helen Zell Writer's Program at the University of Michigan. Her stories and essays have appeared in *Granta*, *Tin House*, and *The Paris Review* among many other acclaimed literary journals. *Battleborn*, a collection of short stories, has also won a multitude of awards as well.



Claire Vaye Watkins and Derek Palacio speaking to GVSU students on October 25  
(photo: Todd Kaneko)

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**“Instead of asking how we should write, we should be asking why we write about certain things.”**

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Derek Palacio also received his MFA from Ohio State University. His short story, “Sugarcane” won an O. Henry Prize in 2013. His other work includes a novella, *How to Shake the Other Man*, and his debut novel *The Mortifications*, which was just published on October 1. He also teaches in Ann Arbor, MI, and is on faculty at the Institute of American Indian Arts MFA program.

What Watkins spoke of was a question many writing students seldom ask themselves. “Instead of asking how we should write,” she elaborated, speaking of how most writing classes operate, “we should be asking why we write about certain things.” Watkins stated that getting published was a “process of legitimization” for her as a growing writer. But now, she says that the point of writing should not be publishing “to the man” or to earn an “external mark of success.”

She told writing students and faculty in attendance at the craft talk that once you earn this external mark, you keep reaching. Watkins shared a story to the audience that even when she got into *The Paris Review*, which she claimed before would legitimize her as a writer, merely deadpanned: “*The Paris Review*... it’s not what it used to be.” Constantly looking for validation is a struggle many writers feel on a daily basis.

“The true value of writing exists outside these structures,” Watkins affirmed.

Palacio posed to the audience a similar question. He prompted those in attendance to ask themselves three questions: five years ago, why did you write? As of yesterday, why do you write? Why do you think you’ll still be writing five years from now? “I don’t think I could even answer that,” Watkins chimed in.

Esmé, the writers’ two-year-old daughter was also in attendance with them, and the two were trying to juggle talking about their craft and entertaining her. Eventually, Esmé settled in her mother’s lap. But, instead of writing on the paper in front of her, she took to drawing all over both Watkins and Palacio’s hands and arms with her pen.

“Look,” digressed Watkins, “she’s a writer too!”

Palacio talked earnestly of his debut novel, *The Mortifications*, specifically about his Cuban background and how that influenced his writing. Although he wasn’t born in Cuba himself, he feels strongly attached to the country and its traditions,

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**“Five years ago, why did you write? As of yesterday, why do you write? Why do you think you’ll still be writing five years from now?”**

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and to Cuban-American literature. He advised students to find a true reason for why they write what they write—whether it be personal experience, heritage, or just to make sense of the feelings they have about the world around them.

Later on in the day, the duo’s reading took place in Lake Superior Hall. Watkins delighted the audience with lyric prose inspired by her daughter and some new material that is still a work-in-progress.

See RAW on page 11

# Of Ducks and Donovan Hohn

*Abby Schnell*

Author Donovan Hohn came to GVSU to take us on a journey. Not only one in the literary sense, but also on a real-life adventure. With his 2011 novel *Moby Duck*, Hohn guided students and spectators through the endless sea of creative nonfiction. On Thursday, September 29, Hohn presented the first craft talk of GVSU's annual Writers Series. With a slideshow and podium, the professor from Wayne State University showed GVSU the amount of depth that goes into travel writing.

In the words of Hohn himself, "Not for nothing does the word 'quest' appear in question." Through a voyage of discovery, Hohn spent summers abroad on land and at sea, hunting the truth behind the story of the missing rubber ducklings. When almost 30,000 bath toys were lost at sea on a cargo ship, he set out to write the story behind these ducks and where they had sailed off to. What began as research from a comfy laptop would turn into months of global expeditions, with assistance from sea captains and oceanographers. As he was drawn further and further into the intricacies and dropped cases of these bath toys, Hohn finally realized it was his calling to find the truth for himself: "I had to go."

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What happened next was a series of expeditions and interviews. In a classic sailor's yellow rain slicker, Donovan Hohn teamed up with oceanographer Amy Bower to learn of the inner workings of the ocean, something that had fascinated him since

childhood. The quest was to learn how these ducks were lost in the first place and where they were today. This time at sea reminded him heavily of the classic *Moby Dick*, which served as inspiration for his own novel.

The craft talk itself discussed more than just his book. Hohn spoke of many authors who have published "quest" stories, from journeys in Australia to hitch-hiking girls in America. Each of these authors had to travel to get their content, but Hohn also focused on the importance of their writing: particularly the beginning and end. "Give them a glimpse of the whale at the beginning," he told us. "Give the audience a glimpse of the treasure at the end, so they will be with you as you continue to hunt for it."



*Donovan Hohn takes students on an adventure.*

For endings, reality can make things more difficult. Unlike fiction, there isn't always a satisfying ending wrapped in a bow. Hohn stressed the importance of telling the story, even if there is not a classic ending. Sometimes, the whale escapes us. But that will not stop us from saying it was there.

With Hohn's poetic style, hunks of plastic toys become intriguing. When reading excerpts of *Moby Duck* and a collection of

other works, Hohn admits that his writing really was a blend of two styles: what was nonfiction became poetry, and poetry became nonfiction. This blend of art and fact made its way into several of his readings at the event, from his novel to a prose on his love of snails. In the quiet light of the lecture hall that evening, all had hushed to hear him read. To hear an author pick through his pieces in his own voice is truly something to remember.

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**"Give the audience a glimpse at the beginning. Give the audience a glimpse of the treasure at the end, so they will be with you as you continue to hunt for it."**

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Donovan Hohn also captured his audience with the idea of writing in new lands. Often, writers reframe themselves to working from home with a good idea and some Wi-Fi. But like these ducks, some stories take an expedition to uncover what's beneath. Through travel writing, an author can earn their story by living it. When the curiosity strikes, any writer has the power to answer.

In a world of internet access, rarely does one have the guts to go and carve their own story. But with so many tales to tell, students have the option to go and get lost in their own treasure, to chase after their rubber ducks, and like Hohn's book shows us, it is worth taking note.

# An Internship that Has Shaped a Community

*Sarah Cauzillo*

It started as a pipe dream,” Danielle Clark, a senior writing student, says of her internship. “I just wanted to have a space to hold readings for my friends.” What began as a mere dream for Clark has now evolved into full-scale programming at the Great Lakes Commonwealth of Letters (GLCL) and a full-time internship. Clark not only coordinates and moderates the programming, *Writers Under 30* at the GLCL, but she created it.

The GLCL is a nonprofit writers center in Grand Rapids. It is a community hub for writers seeking workshops, programming, readings, and more. Clark began to dream of a reading event for writers under 30 at the GLCL when she noticed that there was a lack of literary youth representation.

“I wanted to create a bridge between the community of GLCL and new-school people, young writers.” Clark connected with GLCL management through Assistant Professor Todd Kaneko. After expressing her dream of holding reading events for young writers, she found herself creating the first *Writers Under 30* event during the summer of 2016.

Clark, a poet, was immediately thrown into tasks in which she had little experience, like event planning, itinerary writing, and collaborating with partner sponsors. She was granted independence and freedom

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**“I wanted to create a bridge between the community of GLCL and new-school people, young writers.”**

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in her position to create *Writers Under 30* from the ground up, and continues to have independent responsibility in managing the program. This has meant she has used more “professional” writing skills and theories than she had ever anticipated.

“Honestly,” she says, “all I do is communicate and email. And that has been vital.”

Knowledge taken from traditionally “professional” writing courses such as document design and professional communication have helped her immensely. She never

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**Because of her initiative, drive, and passion, GVSU students, alum, and Grand Rapids community members now have a collaborative space with *Writers Under 30*.**

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expected that this dream of hers would turn into event planning and management, but she has enjoyed it immensely.

Clark is graduating in April 2017, and

is currently applying to MFA programs across the state and nation. She says this internship has given her a leg-up on other MFA candidates, because she is doing a similar level of MFA caliber work by coordinating and facilitating readings and workshops for *Writers Under 30*. Clark says she now has a unique perspective of workshopping and communal writing that she believes will show universities that she is ready to fit right into their MFA program.

Clark hopes to stay at the GLCL for as long as she can until attending an MFA program. “Hopefully, I’ll be able to hand it off to the community,” she says, “I want to say, ‘we cultivated this, let’s continue it’ to the successors.” Clark has now coordinated, moderated, and facilitated three *Writers Under 30* events at the time of publishing. They have each been massively successful, with the available reading spots filling up quickly. Clark has recognized through GVSU workshop courses the unique needs

*See CLARK on page 11*



*Danielle Clark moderating Writers Under 30 at the GLCL.*

*(photo: Sarah Cauzillo)*

# Writing *In the Margins*

Riley Collins

There's a new writing club breaking out on campus. *In the Margins* poetry club is a new GVSU writing club, serving as a space for student writers and poets with marginalized identities to experiment with spoken word and connect through their similar experiences, while participating in socially conscious campus conversations.

The type of writing during meetings consists mostly of poetry and spoken word, though within these genres there are no guidelines, and feedback is only given when asked for by writers. Performing is optional. An emphasis on writing, rather than workshopping, during meetings is a goal of *In the Margins*, since many students do not have time to write for the sake of writing outside of class. "This is a set time where you're going to think, you're going to write, and you're going to have people to support you in that who won't judge you," co-creator of the club, Eliza Ruffner says.

*In the Margins* was created after an enthusiastic response to the LGBT Center's "Queer the Air" event, which takes place once per semester in celebration of National Coming Out Day. The event is a night filled

with spoken word, poetry, and a celebration of community for those of marginalized identities. Students Eliza Ruffner and Ashlyn Rowell saw reason to continue the celebration and expand the space for not just LGBT individuals, but those of all marginalized identities.

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**"This is a set time where you're going to think, you're going to write, and you're going to have people to support you in that who won't judge you."**

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Before efforts to create a formal student club occurred, *In the Margins* actually started as a monthly meeting in Rowell's apartment. After "Queer the Air," students of marginalized identities wanted more opportunities to express themselves among friends in a safe



Writers working at *In the Margins*.

(photo: Ashlyn N. Rowell)

space, where issues like reclaiming language and marginalized experiences could be grappled with. "But even monthly meetings were too infrequent for people," Rowell says, "so we just decided to open up an actual club."

The club was created primarily as a safe working space for marginalized students, but allies are also more than welcome. It is a good place for writers without much experience writing poetry to try out or cultivate their skills. "This is a club for people who have all different skill sets," Rowell says. "Even if you're new to poetry or a poetry veteran. Any type of skill set can find a place at this club."

Anywhere from twenty to thirty students are taking part in the club this semester, with about twelve dedicated students attending every weekly meeting. Meetings take place at the LGBT resource center at 8:00 p.m. on Wednesday nights and are usually followed by informal readings after meetings. Not only does the club serve as a creative outlet and safe space for those of marginalized identities, it is also a place to make friends and keep a celebration of identity alive all year long.



*In the Margins* poetry club gathers at the LGBT resource center.

(photo: Ashlyn N. Rowell)



# Furthering Writing: Grad School Night

*Teresa Williams*

The night began with cider, red velvet cupcakes, and apprehensive writing students finishing their undergraduate journeys. As students look into potential career opportunities, their futures can feel intangible and surreal. Grad School Night is one of the ways the Writing Department aims to guide undergraduate students towards potential future goals.

On September 26, Associate Professors Caitlin Horrocks, Laurence José, and Assistant Professor Beth Peterson hosted Grad School Night in Lake Ontario Hall. The session felt more like a conversation than presentation, with all three professors sitting down across from students at tables. Students were encouraged to ask questions throughout the evening, as Peterson, Horrocks, and José took turns offering their unique perspectives.

Having professors from both the creative writing and the professional writing sides of

the writing major gave students a glimpse at the different graduate school potentials. The Writing Department's module curriculum

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**“Graduate school provides the opportunity to interact with other writers who also want to learn, ask questions, and understand the theory behind writing.”**

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encourages this cross-pollination between professional and creative writing. Several students even voiced being caught between the two and wanting to know their options

for both.

The first question was slightly abstract, but probably the most important of the night: why go to grad school?

Students may want to head to graduate school to build their professional identity through their program and the coursework they engage with. Graduate school provides the opportunity to interact with other writers who also want to learn, ask questions, and understand the theory behind writing.

Horrocks explained that students in the creative writing field might choose graduate school to dedicate more time to reading and writing. MFA programs can be a place to read heavily and study the genre students want to write in, as well as have a like-minded group of peers to provide feedback.

*See GRAD on page 11*

# Self-Discovery Through Internship Night

*Lindsey Krawczak*

On November 7, a room filled with writing students gathered for internship night, hosted by Associate Professor Laurence José and Affiliate Professor Dauvan Mulally. The event was held to help writers find and secure internships, as well as address any apprehension or intimidation students may feel about this process.

While writing majors are required to complete an internship, the event focused on the opportunities and discoveries that can arise through the process of interning. “An internship gives you a means to discover,” José told students. These discoveries lead students to learn more about their own skill sets and strengths, while allowing them to try out a field they are interested in.

Three writing students shared their experiences with their internships. Senior Kelly McMillen shared about finding her internship at the public library in her hometown. At her internship, McMillen wrote for the library's newsletter, and through that experience learned how to

promote her skills in order to create a position for herself. Later, McMillen also found another internship that allowed her to experience technical writing, a field that also sparks her interest.

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**“An internship gives you the means to discover.’ These discoveries lead students to learn more about their own skill sets and strengths.”**

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Tim Harkins, another writing student, spoke about his internship in Dublin, Ireland. His internship allowed him to focus on multicultural aspects and work for a newspaper. Harkins stressed the importance of letting those in charge of your internship know what you want to get out of it so you

can get the most from it. Learning to step out of his comfort zone as a fiction writer, Harkins was able to experience news writing with the help of an attentive editor.

Another writing student, Anna Bouwkamp gave her own take on internships from her publishing experience at Dzanc Books. Bouwkamp shared that her internship is virtual and allows her to work with manuscripts of novels and short fiction. The virtual aspect of her internship means she has no prearranged time set aside for working. Ultimately, this taught her how to create her own work schedule and build time management skills. Bouwkamp explained, “The virtual internship definitely requires more effort on the student's part, but it is worth all of it.”

To writing students who may feel intimidated about the prospect of finding and beginning an internship, Internship Night gave a variety of responses. José and Mulally told students to broaden their search

*See INTERN on page 11*

*PERHAPS* continued from page 1

are unspeakable,” which provided guests the opportunity to contemplate complacency during moments of injustice. His words, matched with moments of unwavering eye contact with the audience, made the poem a truly moving beginning to the reading.

Throughout the rest of his reading, de la Paz shared moments of laughter, sadness, and raw honesty as he discussed his cancer diagnosis near the birth of his first son. He explained that he thought he was writing against the clock, and wanted to leave behind moments for his wife and son. Everyone listened intently to de la Paz tell his story; emotions were high as he again moved the room to reflect on the frailty of what it means to be human.

After sharing a poem about this experience, he dedicated a poem to Associate Professor Caitlin Horrocks’s son, Galileo Hawk, and then closed his reading with the poem “Prince Credo” which was written after the passing of Prince earlier this year. This final poem injected energy and laughter into the audience and served as an opportunity to celebrate otherness. “I believe in the gospel of summer,” de la Paz read, “And in the car parked sideways. / And goddamn, I believe in the party, / and that it was meant to last.”

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**“I believe in the gospel of summer ... and in the car parked sideways. / And goddamn, I believe in the party, / and that it was meant to last.”**

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Much like de la Paz, Tracy K. Smith also provided the audience with reflective content on a number of issues ranging from death to parenthood to social justice. She began by reading from her book *Life on Mars*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 2012. As she read, she explained that while much of the content is based on fears she experienced after the passing of her father, it is also a celebration of life. This is seen in her poem “Sci-Fi,” from which she read: “Weightless, unhinged, / Eons from even our own moon, we’ll drift / In the haze of space, which will be, once, / And for all, scrutable and safe,”

leaving listeners in a place of contemplation and comfort.

Throughout her reading, Smith spoke with a gentle humor in which she confessed that a lot of her poetry is based on reconciling being a parent and being a “real person.” Beyond that, Smith revealed that much of why she writes is to release anxieties about the world, history, and social events. From her poem “Ghazal” Smith read, “Perhaps what we seek lives outside of speech,”— an important reminder to any human struggling with how to release emotion.



*Poet Oliver de la Paz reads at Poetry Night.*  
*(photo: Todd Kaneko)*

Smith closed her reading by talking directly about issues of social injustice. As a person of color, Smith explained that she feels deeply about the racial injustices too often witnessed in the world. When asked how she deals with anger toward these topics in her writing and in life in general, Smith reminded the audience of a basic truth of poetry: that emotions are fluid and writers should not hold themselves to anger or any one emotion in a poem. “We will wear ourselves thin fighting something that isn’t our natural inclination,” Smith said.

What makes someone human? What roles do we play in times of injustice? When do we speak, and how do we speak? These questions may not have been asked directly by either of the poets that night, but as the lights came back up and people blinked

themselves back into their surroundings, those were the questions on the minds of many in the Eberhard Center that evening. For those who have been so affected by Smith and de la Paz’s written words, this

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**“What roles do we play in times of injustice? Where do we speak, and how do we speak?”**

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event was an excellent opportunity to engage with the poets and others who admire their work. Following the reading, guests met in the lobby for food, drinks, and discussion. They also had the chance to meet Smith and de la Paz, who signed books and answered questions. Ultimately, this year’s event provided not only an opportunity to attend a poetry reading, but also served as a reflection on what it means to be someone who writes poetry.

***2016–2017 Writing  
Major Scholarship  
Winners***

**1st Place:  
Teresa Williams**

**2nd Place:  
Andrea Klapp**

**3rd Place:  
Nicole Kariotis**

*MUELLER continued from page 3*

semester welcoming students who hate to write just as warmly as those who love it,” Mueller says when discussing his teaching philosophy. “My role is to initiate or accelerate each student...with comprehensible balances of challenge and support, critique and affirmation, authoritative guidance and naïve provocation.”

Along with a dedication to teaching, Mueller has a deep passion for human interests and exploring different and global perspectives. “Learning processes thrive in infinite progression,” he says. “This is why teachers never cease to study.” He believes in the importance of constantly striving to learn and discover. As someone with a passion for global perspectives, Mueller has also worked as an English as a Second Language tutor for years, forging strong connections with local immigrant communities.

The Writing Department is thrilled to welcome Mueller to the First-Year Writing Program as an affiliate professor. He cares deeply for the program, his students, and the department, as shown by his history with the university.

*INTERN continued from page 9*

when applying for internships. Fields that students may not feel immediately qualified for, or that are not necessarily directly relevant to writing, can be great opportunities for experience. Professor José explained that fields like public relations and communications demand interns to be skilled at writing, and will provide ample opportunities for students to use what they learned in the writing curriculum.

Both Bouwkamp and Harkins gave similar advice to students with the same concern of securing internships. “It doesn’t have to be exactly what you want to do,” Bouwkamp explained, “it’s surprising how many related jobs can make you marketable to the job you think you want.”

Through internships, students learn to connect ideas taught in classes with outside experiences needed in their future jobs. Internships lead students to discover more about their potential fields in writing and develop the skills that they will need to succeed after college.

*CLARK continued from page 7*

of writers to work in community, and that writers work best in collaboration with other writers. And because of her initiative, drive, and passion, GVSU students, alum, and Grand Rapids community members now have that space with *Writers Under 30*.

*RAW continued from page 5*

Palacio took the stage and read aloud parts of his new novel. A hush grew over the audience as he described the plight that his characters faced in America. His characters came to life in the room as he read from different parts of his novel, tempting everyone to hear how it ends.

October 25 gave the writing community around GVSU a chance to come and hear about craft from two acclaimed and celebrated authors. Watkins and Palacio sought give thought-provoking advice for writing students who seek publication in the future, and to understand students’ motivations and compulsions to write. The Watkins and Palacio duo illuminated the idea throughout their talks and readings that being a writer is all about being human: raw, honest, and feeling.

*GRAD continued from page 9*

Graduate school is an opportunity to extend and enhance the undergraduate education gained from the Writing Department. “Don’t think of grad school as a mandatory step,” José told everyone. “Take a moment and think about what you’re doing and what you want to do.”

All three professors echoed: research, research, research. They all recommended that students look into a wide variety of programs and scrutinize what they have to offer, including funding opportunities, location, and resources available for graduate students. All of these aspects are important to what grad schools have to offer.

Writing students at GVSU are fortunate to have the expertise of well-trained and experienced faculty who are eager and excited to help. Horrocks, Peterson, and José all encouraged students to talk to them, or anyone else, in the Writing Department regarding questions or advice.

“I felt like they wanted me to succeed, and they encouraged us to come talk to them if we needed help,” senior Laura Thaxton said after Grad School Night. “It really put my future in perspective.”

Figuring out whether graduate school is the next step takes a great deal of time, research, and effort—but students have the Writing Department’s unwavering support and dedication through it all.

## *Grand Valley Writers Series*

### *Winter 2017 Lineup*

#### **Amorak Huey & Caitlin Horrocks**

GVSU Writing Dept.

Faculty Reading

Tuesday, January 31

#### **Vieve Francis & Matthew Olzmann**

Poetry Craft Talk & Reading

Monday, February 27

#### **Bich Minh Nguyen**

Fiction Reading

Thursday, March 24

#### **Austin Bunn**

Fiction Writer, Playwright

& Filmmaker Events

Thursday, April 13

# Alumni News

## 2008

**David LeGault** and his family just moved to Prague for a two-year stint at an international school where he is helping to develop their AP English curriculum. He is a contributor to the Essay Daily/Coffee House Press anthology, *How We Speak to One Another* which is forthcoming in March 2017, and his book of essays *One Million Maniacs* is forthcoming in June 2017 from Outpost19.

## 2012

**Alexandra Dailey** currently works at Crooked Tree Arts Center of Petoskey, MI as the Public Relations Specialist. As of 2016, she began writing monthly columns for the *Traverse City Record-Eagle* and the *Petoskey News-Review*.

## 2014

**Amy Hinman** works as the Development and Communications Manager at HQ, a drop-in center for young people experiencing unsafe/unstable housing.

## 2016

**Michelle Kuznicki** works at Columbia Southern University as a Writing Center Specialist, where she works with students by phone, email, and through screen share software, offering students feedback as well as tutorials, personalized recorded lessons, and other tools. She is currently pursuing her Master's Degree in Organizational Leadership with a concentration in Human Resource Development at CSU's sister school Waldorf University. She lives in Alabama with her cat, Randy.

**Sydney McCann** currently works for a nonprofit, teaching ESL to recent immigrants and non-native speakers and writes for the online magazine called *Because I Got Wine*. She is also a sexual assault advocate at a domestic violence shelter called SafePlace.

**Megan Rodawold** is currently on a Fulbright Fellowship to the Czech Republic where she teaches English language and conversation at two secondary schools. She is also studying Czech as a language student and working on two nonfiction pieces, one long-form and one a series of letters.

# InWriting

Fall 2016

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## Got an Alumni Update?

Email Professor Todd Kaneko at [kanekot@gvsu.edu](mailto:kanekot@gvsu.edu) so we can spread the word about your success.