

*This special edition
issue takes you
back to where it
all started 20 years
ago, featuring the
layout from the
very first editon!*

—Maddie Cesarz, Editor

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The Writing Department Goes to Scotland

Fall 2024
Vol 18.2

Angelina Fimalan

During the Spring 2024 semester, the Writing Department successfully launched its Writing in Action study abroad program to Edinburgh, Scotland. After the pandemic disrupted the study abroad trip to South Africa, Professor Christopher Toth and Affiliate Professor Samantha Dine stepped in to create a fresh opportunity for students. The program officially debuted in May 2024, combining on-campus preparation with hands-on internship experiences in Scotland. I caught up with the faculty and students who participated in the program to hear about its impact. With the first summer behind them, these professors and students share their experiences and offer advice for students heading to Scotland in 2025.

Reflecting on this past spring, Toth recalled the origins of the program:

“Historically, writing majors did not study abroad.” He explained the Writing Department’s push to create a meaningful faculty-led study abroad program that would “give students the chance to professionalize.” In other words, the goal was to offer students the opportunity to develop their professional writing skills, addressing a gap in existing study abroad opportunities which are often geared more toward creative writing.

As the program kicked off with preparatory courses, including meetings during the Winter semester and intensive weekly classes in May, both faculty and students began setting expectations for the program. Faculty expected to provide students with professional development and personal growth, while students wanted to gain practical experience and embrace adventure.

see *SCOTLAND*, 12



Writing in Action Students in Scotland (photo: Angelina Fimalan)

Just Tell Me a Story

A Reading and Craft Talk with Michael Nye

Grace Locke

On Oct. 10, GVSU welcomed fiction editor and writer Michael Nye to campus for the Fall 2024 Writer's Series. Nye gave a fruitful craft talk and reading of his short story, "Beauty in the Age of Chaos and Savagery."

Michael Nye is the author of several works such as *All the Castles Burned*, *Strategies Against Extinction*, and *Until We Have Faces*. He has worked for several literary magazines and is currently the editor for *Story* magazine. Nye has also taught creative writing at Washington University, the University of Missouri, and Kenyon College.

At the start of the event, Nye talked about his early experiences with literary magazines including *Boulevard*, before discussing extensively his time at *The Missouri Review*. He explained how *The Missouri Review* received around 15,000 submissions, only to publish around 1% of these submissions. He described this as tedious work, emphasizing just how much

"Sitting and staring into space is writing"

reading he must do for a living, and how if you want to pursue such a career, you need to really love it. Nye elaborated, stating, "You're going to have to make, and as much as possible, protected time to do this kind of work."

The talk then shifted into how certain literary magazines succeed, and also how certain writers can succeed in the industry. Nye said the reason certain magazines succeed is because they have a strong, distinct voice. Before this, he emphasized just how much trust goes into such a field, as the writer shares something so sacred with a team of people they do not know personally. He said the relationship between the literary magazine and the writer is "one of openness, one of confidence."

During the Q&A session, Nye answered questions regarding the writing and publishing world. One student asked what tip Nye

would give his younger self when it came to his writing craft. Nye said bluntly, "Cut 500 words." He elaborated, discussing how making the story "tighter" can be hard to do, and then simply said, "just tell me a story." To make a story tighter, he implies that cutting out any flowery language is the first step.

Another student asked about navigating writer's block, to which Nye said he does not believe in writer's block. He added to this, stating, "Sitting and staring into space is writing." Nye emphasized once again the importance of protecting the time to write in one's life.

After a brief intermission, Nye started his reading of "Beauty in the Age of Chaos and Savagery." This work tells the story of ex-NFL star Denny "Birdy" Birdwell and his struggle following a life of rough football playing. Nye told the story with a calm essence that made the somber soul of the story come to life.

Michael Nye's visit to GVSU provided students with insight into the world of literary magazines and writing as a career. His stories and advice served as a grounding reminder of the importance of simplicity and resilience. His work only supports the impression of his prowess in the art of writing. From this talk and reading regarding the true craft of writing, students can remember his simple, but powerful words, "just tell me a story."



Michael Nye (photo: Maddie Cesarz)

Visiting Faculty Profile: Vince Granata

Rachel Miller

When asked how he balances writing and teaching, Visiting Professor Vince Granata responds, “How does someone breathe as they go about their life?” Writing has been his dream since he began writing “choose your own adventure” novels in the second and third grades. In Fall 2024, he brought that lifelong love of writing to GVSU.

After growing up in Connecticut, Granata earned his undergraduate degree from Yale before earning an M.F.A. from American University. He recently completed a Ph.D. in English Creative Writing from the University of North Texas. In his twenties, he taught high school English in Boston, MA, but after eight years of graduate school, he is revitalized by the return to teaching full-time. Now, he can engage with students on a more personal level, building relationships to

talk about writing effectively.

For Granata, writing is always deeply personal, even if the subject itself seems far from it. Writing is not just a tool that will work professionally and academically for his students—it is also a way of thinking. For him, that means it is a way to investigate his thoughts, feelings, or interpret his experiences.

Granata’s philosophy reflects his growing work in creative nonfiction. “Writing can be a way to churn through thoughts that might not have made sense initially,” he says. “If [students] can see writing as more than a discrete academic skill, and as a way to sort of interpret their world, I’d be thrilled.”

GVSU seems ready to bring that hope forward. Transitioning to WRT 150, Granata said the Writing Department offered so many resources and support, he almost felt “too prepared.” However, he is grateful for it, and his students who are already diving into the revision

process enthusiastically. For his future at GVSU, Granata hopes to teach creative writing, but he sees WRT 150 as creative nonfiction, just through an academic lens. “As long as I’m talking writing with students,” he says, “I’m very happy.”



Vince Granata (photo: Maddie Cesarz)

Visiting Faculty Profile: Lisa McNeilley

Sara Bagley

Lisa McNeilley is one of the newest visiting faculty to join the Writing Department. With a Ph.D. from Wayne State University, an M.A. from Eastern Michigan University, and a B.B.A. from the University of Michigan, she is no stranger to the world of education from a student’s perspective; nor is she new as an instructor. This fall, she taught Business Communication, and in Winter 2025, she will teach Writing in the Global Context. She started as an educator teaching writing at several colleges before moving to Aquinas, where she was an instructor for its Western Civilizations course.

Now she finds herself at GVSU, back in the professor’s seat after years spent in the “real world” of writing. The founder of her own consulting business, Writer’s Alley LLC, McNeilley has firsthand experience

in professional writing. “I’ve been doing freelance writing, ghostwriting, editing, and workshops for about 10 years, and I guess I just missed being with the students,” McNeilley shared. “I saw through a colleague that this position came up, and I thought, that’s just the answer to what I’ve been waiting for.”

McNeilley is more excited than ever to dive into the world of inspiring growth in young writers. “Part of why I wanted to come back to teaching is I feel like I have all of this wealth of experience of what writing can do and where it can take you. I wanted to share that with students whether they want to be writers or whether they are just looking at a career that’s going to be affected by how well they can communicate,” she expressed.

While away from the classroom, McNeilley ghostwrote memoirs for Mary Kathleen Roach Hoodhood—founder of Kid’s Food Basket, an

impactful Western Michigan nonprofit organization—and for her uncle and the story of his friendship with a man who confessed to being D. B. Cooper on his deathbed. In her free time, McNeilley enjoys exploring on hikes and walks with her husband and dog, seeing local musicians, and spending quality time with family and friends.



Lisa McNeilley (photo: Sara Bagley)

Affiliate Faculty Profile: Emily Beckwith

Sofia Pratt

Affiliate Professor Emily Beckwith is a new addition to GVSU's Writing Department. She first got into writing after being an avid reader as a kid, but it was not until she happened upon the English major at Carleton College that she considered it as a profession.

"I went through all the classes that I had taken and decided whether or not I wanted to take more classes like those," Beckwith said.

After completing her undergraduate degree, where she gained experience in creative writing and poetry, she worked for three years before she obtained a master's degree in English, Literature, and Culture and a graduate certificate in College and University Teaching at Oregon State University. What followed was another year of working and a Ph.D. in English at Georgia State University, which she completed

alongside a graduate certificate in Women's Studies and a research emphasis in British literature of the 19th century.

Beckwith credited her family for her interest in teaching. "Several of my aunts and cousins are teachers, and my mom helped out in the classroom," she said. She went on to explain how they gave her an initial interest in learning that turned into an interest in being a part of the learning process for others.

Beckwith teaches WRT 150 this semester where she emphasizes the rhetorical situation, particularly the audience. "Many of my [students] come from either not thinking about the audience or writing to the same audience over and over again, which would be their instructor or the exam," Beckwith said. "We want to start thinking outside the box."

Beckwith was drawn to GVSU because of the Writing Department.

"Everyone I met was very friendly, supportive, and open to helping me if I ever needed it," Beckwith said. "I also liked Grand Valley's overall interest in their students and their student-centered learning environment." It was a place she connected with because her teaching has always prioritized one thing above all: the students.



Emily Beckwith (photo: Sofia Pratt)

Part-time Faculty Profile: Andrea Paolini

Erin Riley

Part-time faculty Andrea Paolini says one of her favorite parts of GVSU is how beautiful campus is in the fall. She describes it as being "like a postcard." Originally from Canada, Paolini has traveled widely and taught in many places. What drew her to GVSU was how the Writing Department's standalone program "showcases the value of writing for all students."

Before joining the Writing Department, Paolini earned an M.A. in English Literature from the University of Windsor and an M.A. in human rights from the University of London. She also worked as a senior development officer in Indigenous Programming with the Government of Canada before starting her Ph.D. in critical and cultural studies with a specialization in writing studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Her

current research demonstrates how important writing is to achieving and maintaining human rights praxes and proposes possible collaborations between writing studies scholars and human rights activists.

Paolini's passion is guiding students through the writing process and fostering community in the classroom and beyond. Her pedagogy has been influenced by her international work, and she is committed to helping her students gain a more critical understanding of the worlds in which they live and write.

At GVSU, Paolini teaches WRT 120. She says teaching this course is "challenging in the best possible way" as she works with students with different understandings and skill sets. She hopes her teaching creates a sense of rhetorical awareness and an understanding of how writing is useful in global contexts. Paolini has also loved working with the Fred Meijer

Center for Writing and Michigan Authors as she believes writing consultants are integral to helping students succeed in understanding how to become better writers.

In her free time, Professor Paolini likes taking walks with her dog, finding time to be outside, and volunteering on the board of directors for Tumaini Letu. She is very excited to continue her journey here at GVSU!



Andrea Paolini (photo: Erin Riley)

Finding Strength and Community

A Reading and Q&A with Andrew Collard and Vince Granata

Maddie Cesarz & Kallie Crouch

On Nov. 14, the Writing Department hosted a second Writer's Series event. Visiting Professor Vince Granata read from his nonfiction work, followed by a poetry reading by Visiting Professor Andrew Collard.

Korey Stamper, a senior, opened the event by introducing Granata and his work with an empathetic thank you, noting how reading about Granata's experiences helped him with his own. Granata began by reading the opening pages of his book *Everything is Fine: A Memoir*, which begins to unravel Granata's relationship with his brother, the inner workings of his own grief, and those first moments of his learning about his mother's death.

After finishing the excerpt, Granata spoke about how the book came to be: "The process of writing the book was both this thing that nearly destroyed me, and simultaneously this thing that I found gave me the strength and purpose that I didn't think I was ever going to have after my mom died the way that she did." He reflected on the five years it took to write the book and how his mentor, Richard McCann, guided him through it. From that reflection, he realized what he wanted to write next.

Granata then shared the first few pages of his next book, which is only in its first complete draft. *Too Much* (a working title), is an exploration of the writing process while grieving. In it, he reflects on the five years he spent writing his first book, including how he approached writing about an event he was still grieving.

Following Granata, Collard opened his reading after a warm welcome from Associate Professor Beth Peterson with "Lo-Fi Citadel," a poem published in *The Kenyon Review* in 2023. Of the poem, Collard said, "This is a new one, which is something of a

love letter to having a body. I guess I'm doing that a lot—writing love letters to things."

Collard then read from his 2023 poetry collection, *Sprawl*, which he called a love letter to the city of Detroit and single parents. "The sprawl of the title is indeed the sprawl of Detroit," he said, a metropolitan area he described as "city on city on city." The title also captured what he called "the sprawl of history, sort of the way things get passed down."

"hold onto those relationships, because even if it's not all the time, even if it's just every couple of months maybe ten pages, that will keep you going."

The poems, including "Perpetual Motion," "Cicada Song," "Autotopia," and "Dear leasing office, dear oil slick," walk hand-in-hand with the reader down the streets of Detroit, a city buzzing with the sounds of bus exhaust, automobiles, and memory, at once urban and intensely personal.

In her welcome, Peterson praised Collard's "remarkable ability to notice, to give life and breath to what might otherwise just be things." Indeed, his poetry is chock-full of those moments of discovery in the drone of cicadas in the summertime, the flow of people on and off a city bus, and trays of supermarket blackberries. Collard's poems are love letters to many things, but perhaps best of all, his work is a love letter to the act of noticing.

A short Q&A session followed the reading and Granata and Collard shared some insights on their writing processes, including the importance of feedback and cultivating communities with other writers. Collard said he found success in library writing groups. "People sometimes talk about

the 'poetry community,'" he said, "and there's not one. There are infinite poetry communities."

Granata, too, stressed the importance of keeping in touch with fellow writers, "even if it's just one person." He encouraged students to "hold onto those relationships, because even if it's not all the time, even if it's just every couple of months, maybe ten pages, that will keep you going."

As the event wrapped up, Granata left young writers in the room with one final piece of advice: "It's incredibly important to give yourself permission to write badly." He explained that writing without restraints opens the page for writers to explore and see what sticks. "There will be a gem of something if you can give yourself that permission to keep writing," he said, "even if it doesn't feel like it's anything yet." Collard, too, mentioned the importance of remaining open to ideas that might otherwise seem unimportant. For him, the key to a piece of writing can be as simple as finding the moments that "just won't let [you] go."



Andrew Collard (left) & Vince Granata (right) (photo: Kallie Crouch)

20 Years Since the Beginning of *InWriting*

Hannah Applebee

Twenty years ago, Professor Roger Gilles, now the current Director of the Honors College, recruited students from a WRT 200 class to contribute articles to *InWriting*, a brand new, student-led newsletter detailing updates within the ever-growing GVSU Writing Department. Gilles co-founded *InWriting* with Professor Dan Royer, who created the original layout and design. “This was the early days of a new department, and we’d just moved to the brand-new Lake Ontario Hall. The newsletter, like all newsletters perhaps, was one of our efforts to ‘brand’ the department and create an identity for ourselves,” Gilles said. The two believed this effort to “brand” the Writing Department would set them apart from the “traditional” English department, as they were one of the few departments at the time with a logo.

The contents of the first issue from Fall 2004 featured a “lead article about the new building [Lake Ontario Hall], and how [the Writing Department] was moving in the ‘write’ direction. Other articles featured visiting writers, visiting professors, Poetry Night—a literary life. They also featured what [they] then called non-traditional students—ages 27, 45, 45, and 39, all with children—and professional internships.”

After the production of the Fall 2004 issue, produced by Royer, and the Winter 2005 issue, produced by Gilles, *InWriting* paused

production until Winter 2010, when Professor Christopher Toth came to GVSU. Toth saw a need to expand professional writing opportunities within the Writing Department. “At the time, we had *fishbladder* and Student Reading Series, and there were other solidified opportunities for creative writing students, but there was kind of nothing on the professional writing side,” Toth explains. He wanted to give students the opportunity to write, diversify, and professionalize their skills.

After *InWriting*’s official relaunch, the faculty advisor position shifted every few years, with Toth serving as faculty advisor from Winter 2010 to Winter 2015, Associate Professor W. Todd Kaneko serving from Fall 2015 to Winter 2018, Associate Professor Zsuzsanna Palmer from Fall 2018 to Winter 2021, and Assistant Professor Kylie Jacobsen from Fall 2021 to our current issues.

While *InWriting* has gone through many changes, including several redesigns and the

introduction of color in the Fall 2019 issue, the core values of the newsletter have remained the same: “What I liked about *InWriting* was that it gave our student writers a real publishing venue and a real audience—a real writer’s purpose,” Professor Gilles said. “Looking over the articles today, I’d say they stand up well: they helped create an image for our department that we very much wanted to convey.”

Back in 2004 and 2005, Gilles shared, the newsletter was used as a way to stake a claim within the university as a legitimate discipline, but now, 20 years later, *InWriting*, and the Writing Department, have proven themselves successful. Today, *InWriting* is a platform to share news within the department’s community of students, faculty, and alumni, and remains an active way for student writers to gain professional writing skills.

“It’s a great way to give student writers an authentic writing experience,” Gilles said. “That’s always tremendously valuable.”

*“What I liked about InWriting was
that it gave our student writers a real
publishing venue and a real audience –
a real writer’s purpose”*

COVERS OVER THE YEARS

First Issue
2004

InWriting

Stepping Away from the Sereotypical Intern Position

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Moving in the 'Write' Direction: Lake Ontario Hall

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Revamping the Curriculum

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Writing Department Pilots New Courses

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Founding: A Play of the Students, for the Students, by the Students

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Bon Voyage, Dr. Frerichs

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Distinction in Writing: Encouraging Writing Beyond the Classroom

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Proposed WRT Curriculum Becomes Reality

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Organization for Professional Writing Plants First Seeds

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

GSU Writers Visit Boston at the AWP Conference

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

New Leader for Department

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

WRT Major Wins Worldwide Comic Book Competition

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

New WRT Course Explores Global Writing Practices

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Writing Degree Set Up: Alumna for Career Success

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Building Education

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Successful GSU Alumna: Lindsey Drager

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

"Perhaps What We Seek Lives Outside of Speech"

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

A Lifetime of Poetry

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Visiting Writers: Faculty Alumni Return

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Writing Series Faculty Reading: Patricia Clark and Roger Gilles

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Writing in Action Takes Students Abroad

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Our Recent Graduates: Where are They Now?

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Writing in Action: South Africa

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Both Peterson's New Book: Dispatches from the End of Ice: Essays

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

The Internship Experience in a Virtual World

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Writing Clubs Adapt to Pandemic Times

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Professor Palmer Receives "Diversity and Inclusion" Award

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Review of Writer Series Faculty Reading: A Poetic Exploration of Community

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

WRT 120 is Back to Nature

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Internships, Mentors, and Inspirations

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Professor Stolley Named Unit Head

By: [Author Name]

InWriting

Bear River Writers' Conference from A Student's Perspective

By: [Author Name]

Hungry for History

Poetry Night with Paisley Rekdal

Arianna Bevier

On Oct. 7, GVSU's annual Poetry Night took place at the Wealthy Theater in Downtown Grand Rapids. This year, former Poet Laureate of Utah, Paisley Rekdal, visited to read from *West: A Translation*. She began the day with a morning Q&A session at Kirkhof, an opportunity for students to learn more from her. Students asked questions such as why she writes poetry, how her essay work and poetry work compare, and how she approaches writing about one's culture or identity.

In the evening, the conversation moved to the Wealthy Theater for a poetry reading and discussion. The event was free and open to the public. At 7 p.m., following an introduction by Associate Professor W. Todd Kaneko, Rekdal introduced her work.

When she was commissioned to write a series of poems for the 150th anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, Rekdal said she was originally annoyed, unsure of how she would create poetry about the railroad. But as she researched, she said she began to get excited. She asked herself, "Who have we not heard from?" Looking to include the stories of the Chinese immigrants who helped build the railroad, she was frustrated by a lack of representation. Feeling a sense of panic, she said she went on a run where the idea of using a Chinese poem as the "spine" for her work came to her.

She translated a poem by a

Chinese immigrant on Angel Island eulogizing a fellow immigrant who had committed suicide and assigned a poem to each Chinese character of the translated poem. She compiled the poems into a collection which can be found on her website, www.westtrain.org. This website is a truly innovative approach; the Chinese characters are each a link that corresponds with a poem. Many of the poems are presented with an audio reading and a video. This format allows readers to not only read the poems but also hear them read and view them alongside historical images of the Transcontinental Railroad and its workers.

"If no one presents your history to you, you will find yourself hungry for it."

Rekdal used her website to present the audience with an interactive poetry reading, providing a list of topics and inviting people to call out which poems they wanted to hear. She gave a brief background and introduction on the inspirations and history of each poem before playing the videos or reading the poem live. Rekdal read "Dead," "Homeward Facing," "Your," "What Day," and "Hold Sorrow."

Following the reading, the audience was given the opportunity to ask questions. Rekdal was asked by one member about reactions to her work and if she had received any negative feedback.



Paisley Rekdal (photo: University Communications)

She responded, "We're living in a time of banning books and narrowing curriculums... but in my experience, people are happy to get more complexity, not less."

In her work, Rekdal indeed touches on complex topics, telling the stories of not only the Chinese workers on the railroad but also the stories of labor unions, LGBTQIA+ issues, women working in brothels, and many others. In choosing which topics to present in her work, Rekdal said she wanted to focus on those who we had not yet heard from, explaining, "If no one presents your history to you, you will find yourself hungry for it."

That hunger can be felt in the words of many of the collection's poems, desperately reaching out to share stories that have not been told in many years. Her ability to combine historical text with poetry and her command of rhythm and cadence make her work an absolute pleasure to read and listen to. Kaneko quoted his mother when introducing Rekdal: "She's a genius!" Although Rekdal denied it, her innovative format and thoughtful work can best be described as just that: genius.

Experimenting with WRT 307

Lucy Billingsley

Professors and students in the Writing Department are excited about the experiments with the Working with Writers and Manuscripts module to ensure the curriculum is modernized and incorporates student needs. This semester, the conversation for the module is focused on WRT 307. Initial experimenting with the course began in Winter 2024. That same semester, WRT 307 students conducted focus groups that asked writing majors about their experiences with the degree. This focus group data and faculty experiences informed further changes to the course. I had the pleasure of interviewing some experts on the development of WRT 307, Associate Professor and Writing Department Unit Head Amy Stolley, and Assistant Professor Danielle DeVasto. They informed me that the course is being reviewed and tweaked to include new approaches to the consulting content.

Some of the changes made by DeVasto so far include shortening the original course's research project on consulting, adding remote consultations with technical writers, and creating a new developmental editing project. She reports the students in her classes have responded well, and the changes help address students' concerns about post-graduation relevance. The developmental editing project allows students to edit work based on their personal interests via fanfiction. Although students were already cheering for this assignment, DeVasto will continue to assess what her

students produce to ensure her new additions are effective learning tools.

Stolley said the last time she taught WRT 307, it focused mainly on consulting with writers in creative and workplace contexts, as well as the field research project. Now she has added new copyediting lessons, a personalized version of DeVasto's developmental editing project, and a project regarding freelancing work.

While WRT 308 also includes copyediting lessons, Stolley tackles it from a rhetoric perspective to ensure the courses work cohesively. With these additions, students will learn how consulting works with editing to further their proficiency with consulting strategies. Stolley aims for these assignments to cover more topics within the curriculum and test out what is most useful for WRT 307 students.

Both professors reiterated that the restructuring of WRT 307 has been done entirely for the needs of students. For consistency between the courses, every WRT 307 class has uniform learning outcomes, but professors are given the freedom to choose which methods they use to achieve the outcomes. This technique allows for exploration in the course to find what changes will be most valuable. Since these changes are still in progress, professors from both WRT 307 and WRT 308 are constantly experimenting in their classes to see what projects prove to be most effective this semester.

As a former WRT 308 student, I found the developmental and copyediting projects to be

fascinating, and I am excited to have more of that integrated into WRT 307. It is exciting to see the professors working to curate a course that better suits students' current interests. These changes have only begun this semester, but already there is a lot of time and care put into this course. GVSU students can expect that all of the professors' efforts will lead to more adaptable and work-applicable course experience.

A BLAST FROM THE PAST

Articles from past issues

InWriting reported on...

"Writing Department Pilots New Courses" in Winter 2010

"Writing Advice: A Journey to Publishing" in Winter 2012

"Graphic Novels: Illustration of History" in Fall 2012

"WRT Major Wins Worldwide Comic Book Competition" in Winter 2014

"Supplement to Success: Exploring GVSU's Distinction in Writing Program" in Winter 2016

"Graduate School Night: The Journey Beyond Undergraduate Education" in Fall 2017

All articles can be found in issues at gvsu.edu/writing/inwriting

Student Reading Series: Revamped

Kallie Crouch

The Student Reading Series (SRS) has taken on new life this semester, thanks to the efforts of co-directors Hannah Applebee and Angelina Firmalan. “Last year, SRS struggled with low student turnout,” Applebee explained. Applebee and Firmalan noted that the decision to move SRS to the Kirkhof Center last year may have contributed to the low turnout, as the space was less inviting.

To increase attendance and foster a greater sense of community within the Writing Department, they shifted SRS back to the Niemeyer Reading Room. “Our major goal was creating a sense of ambiance that was inviting and inclusive,” Applebee said. To do so, Firmalan and Applebee set out to create a warm, interactive atmosphere centered around

themed events. This semester’s first event, “Those Summer Nights,” featured crooning summer ballads, warm fairy lights, and fruity mocktails. A month later, “Spooky Scary SRS” enticed participants with a costume contest, apple cider, spooky decor, and frightening tales.

These efforts proved fruitful, and attendance at the first two SRS events tripled that of the previous year. At both, faces both new and

familiar gathered around to support their fellow writers. “We had half an hour of conversation,” Applebee said, “followed by an hour of students reading their writing.”

Applebee and Firmalan will continue their run as co-directors next semester. They hope to maintain a consistent turnout and further establish SRS as a community-building organization for all student writers at GVSU.



“Those Summer Nights” SRS Event (photo: Angelina Firmalan)

Alumni News

Audrey Grunwaldt

Mike Salisbury (BA 2006) pursued a M.F.A. in Writing at Pacific University and then entered the marketing field for Zondervan Publishers and David C. Cook Publishing. In April, Mike Salisbury celebrated ten years as a literary agent at Yates & Yates. He has worked with several bestselling authors, including John Mark Comer, whose book *Practicing the Way* has spent 17 weeks on the New York Times bestsellers list. *The Quarry*, a graphic novel he co-created, was published with Scout Comics in the spring of ‘24. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/mikesalisbury/>

Megan Taylor (2004), a contributor to the first *InWriting* publication, worked exactly 3 years in the writing field as

a staff writer and office manager at a newspaper. After it closed, she worked non-traditionally in a pharmacy. She now works at a place that digitizes records. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/megan-taylor-2b02b8205/>

Amanda Cilla (BA 2007, MPA 2014) currently works for Priority Health as a Provider Reimbursement analyst and has been with the Corewell Health/Priority Health system for 17 years, in which her minor in Latin actually helped her land her first job at Corewell. Additionally, she is learning Korean and teaching English to Korean students once a week.

Sara (Chappell) Ramaker (BA 2007) works for LKF Marketing as a Content and PR specialist. In this position

she does everything from writing media releases and technical business blogs to nonprofits and community-driven initiatives. She has also served on the Arc of Allegan County Board since 2022 where she is currently the secretary. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sararamaker/>

Robyn (Gordon) Schopp (BA 2010) is Owner and Chief Happiness Officer at Gordeaux Consulting; a business she started in 2021. Robyn also serves as an ambassador with the Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce, she partnered with TEDxMacatawa to deliver a talk in 2023 and emcee the event in 2024, and she recently joined the board of directors for the Park Theatre in Holland. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/robynschopp/>

Up In Michigana

Bear River from Students

Brooke Rempalski

In GVSU's writing community, we aim to inspire writing in the classroom and continue beyond, following that momentum as we explore new environments. The Bear River Writer's Conference creates the opportunity to move beyond the traditional classroom and learn in the setting of a summer camp, where readings, workshops, and masterclasses are interspersed with bonfires and pontoon rides.

Genevieve Balivet participated in the fiction workshop led by Pulitzer Prize-nominated Desiree Cooper with the intention of exploring how to take characters from artificial to organic, fluid, living things sprouting from the page.

"The specificity was really valuable," Balivet said. This workshop dialed into each writer's strengths, needs, and projects. The invisible scaffolding of writers' hierarchies loses its importance



Bear River Attendees (photo: Genevieve Balivet, top left)

at Bear River, where the twice-published retired novelist and the veteran hobbyist story writer are equals to the eager new Writing student tackling their first publication. While talking to Balivet, senior Writing major, I said, "In that moment, we're all in a classroom." She agreed, saying, "It's the joy of learning and the love of writing that brought us together."

My workshop leader, poet and essayist Jaswinder Bolina, told us to focus on making. There was no one to mark us down for a bad rhyme or an improper line break. Removing writing from the grading system allowed for really fearless creation and generation; fear is cut out from the picture entirely.

With rooms full of peers, it is easy to give in to the nostalgic joys of summer camp. The pontoon ride past Hemingway's summer home had writing professors going giddy. In the classroom, we huddled around mugs of steaming coffee and pointed to stanzas where we were hungry for more, where we thought the best dregs were.

In the cabin classrooms, we were all students again together and able to use a much broader world as our rubric, measuring a piece by what it brought us in the process. At Bear River, time passes in moments of wandering and moments of creation. The two do not seem to be that different.

Congratulations Kay Losey!

Audrey Grunwaldt

Emeritus Professor Kay Losey retired from the Writing Department in May 2024.

Before she was hired, she had her eyes on the GVSU Writing Department because GVSU was one of the few universities with a full writing department supported by the provost, dedicated solely to the study of writing, and open to growth.

The writing program transformed

with her and her colleagues' efforts. In 2012, the introduction of the modular curriculum changed how writing students experienced the major by "allowing students to select from modules and really be able to form their own paths."

Now that she is retired, Losey is doing things she did not have time for before: "For the last two years, I've been doing urban sketching while traveling, and right now I'm messing around with acrylic painting." She says she has always

wanted to take art classes and she is enjoying every second.

For her years of dedicated research, she received the Distinguished Contribution in a Discipline Award in 2023 and the "Emeritus" title, which she says makes her a "Laker for a Lifetime," just like the students she taught along the way.

*Congratulations on your retirement,
Professor Losey!*

SCOTLAND, *Cont'd from 1*

Dine acknowledged it was challenging to anticipate specific outcomes due to the program's individualized nature. "The expectations were that everyone would have a successful [internship] placement, enjoy it, and find it enriching," she said. "But we went into it not fully knowing what the outcome would be." Nonetheless, the open-ended nature of the program allowed for a range of experiences, where each student's experience unfolded in unexpected ways. "My expectations were exceeded in many ways because of the students that we had," Dine said. She noted that the students were not only engaged and passionate about the content but also produced high-quality work throughout their coursework and internships. "I felt very proud to see them rise to the occasion and, in many cases, doing more than what was expected of them," Dine reflected.

"[the program] was more than just gaining the skills that I needed. It was also about feeling fulfilled by the end of it."

Brooke Rempalski, a participant of the program, demonstrated this success as she discussed her internship placement with Project Esperanza, a charity dedicated to providing educational resources for immigrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking women and families. Rempalski stated, "Working for a charity was a really great way to put my skills to use for something I'm passionate about." Reflecting on her intentions with the program, Rempalski mentioned, "I applied to the program, mostly because I needed an internship credit to graduate, but it was also an opportunity to go abroad, to have that guaranteed spot, and it was going to be within an organization that did something that kind of mattered." Yet, the program "was more than just gaining the skills that I needed. It was

also about feeling fulfilled by the end of it," Rempalski said.

Toth reinforced Dine's sentiments, recognizing similar outcomes among the students during the program. He anticipated students would have the ability to professionalize and develop their writing skills while participating in the program; however, he also noted that study abroad programs give students a distinctive space to grow as human beings. "From the beginning when we were at Grand Valley in May until the program ended in July, there was definitely an upward trajectory in terms of growth," Toth said. He went on to discuss the noticeable increase in confidence he observed in his students. Such willingness was not only inspiring but also invaluable for professional development in the field.

Natalie Brooks, another participant, echoed Toth's insights. Brooks mentioned she "applied to the program mostly to push myself out of my comfort zone," and the program "would be a really great opportunity with the internship, classes, and travel combined." Brooks shared more about her experience in Edinburgh, explaining that her expectations were greatly exceeded both personally and professionally. "I was expecting to spend a lot of solitary time there as I wasn't really friends with anyone else on the program, but I ended up spending just about every second with my newfound friends and exploring the country," Brooks said. "I accomplished a lot of work at my internship that I'm proud of and I had a really great time working there."

With the study abroad program to Edinburgh, Scotland deemed a success by faculty and students, plans are underway for the next iteration to commence in the Spring 2025 semester. To assist students interested in applying to the program, Toth and Dine reiterated that the application deadline is February 1, and there are ongoing information sessions to provide students with specifics about the program and guidance on the application process.

InWriting

Fall 2024

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