

# In Writing

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*Affiliate Professor Andrea Kaitany Teaching Kids in Kenya*

## Building Education

### *Devin Prasatek*

At GVSU, many professors conduct research or publish books, but Affiliate Professor Andrea Kaitany of the Writing Department is doing things a little differently—she's in the middle of building a school in Africa and changing education.

"In addition to high levels of academic achievement, we wish to foster community, social responsibility and creativity": this is the mission of Simbolei Academy, the all-girls school founded by Kaitany. It is currently under construction in Rift Valley Province of Kenya where it will hopefully be completed in 2017 and open in January 2018. It will include a community center and library on campus and will provide full boarding and education to 320 girls between the ages of 14 and 18.

This project was not chosen on a whim. Kaitany explained, "Richard and I knew we wanted to do something for the area where he grew up." Her husband Richard was able to

receive his education at St. Patrick's High School in the village of Iten, near where he was born and raised. With the help of one of his teachers, he got a scholarship to Iowa State University where he and Kaitany met as undergraduate students.

While her husband was able to get his education, the girls in the area did not receive the same opportunities. They had to settle for overcrowded public schools. Although better quality high schools existed in the cities, most girls had to travel long distances to attend them. So when the teachers and parents expressed a desire for a girls' high school to Kaitany and her husband while they were visiting his former elementary school in 1998, the idea stuck with her. However, it took a few more years for the project to find its legs.

*See BUILDING on page 10*

# HA HA HA Thump is No Joke

D. Cole Eichelberger

Even now that Assistant Professor Amorak Huey's second poetry collection *Ha Ha Ha Thump* has been released by Sundress Publications, he does not call himself a poet. Huey, a writer published in many journals and anthologies and a professor on the subject, said that this comes from internalizing society's view of the poet as pretentious. "[The word poet] has this cultural cachet of 'I'm a poet, I think deeply and I'm very sensitive.'"

*Ha Ha Ha Thump* is in no way pretentious. It is a book of poems that reach out to the reader with a language that tries to understand and explain life and love with crisis, laughter, and the silence that falls between people who stay together. It is about stick figures in love, the Pope imagining his wife, love affairs in the night, the opening scenes of *Law & Order*, and the distance between thunder and lightning.

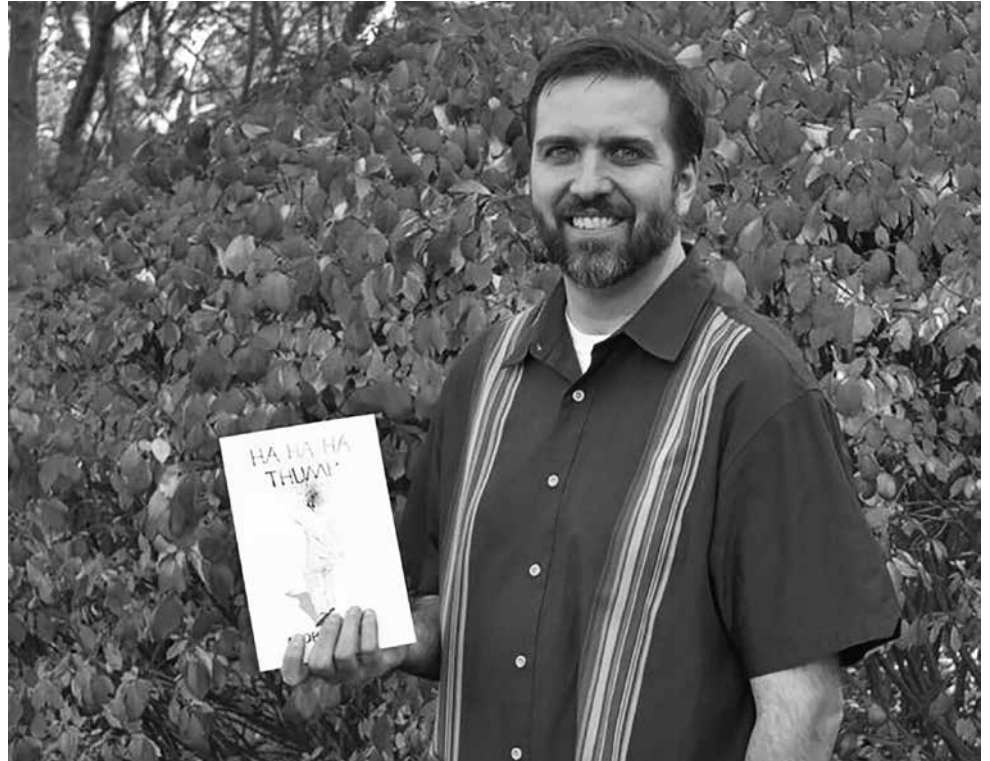
Most of the poems in this book are from an ever-growing body of individually published pieces sectioned by four different poems all based on the same child's joke: What goes ha ha ha thump? A guy laughing his head off.

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**"I'm interested in how we use language to make sense of the world and the ways in which we can never fully make sense of the world, because language isn't the world. It's an interpretation."**

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The answers Huey leaves readers with in no way match the punch line of the child's joke they come from. Each page gives readers more questions and creates the feeling of the heart's isolation. Each poem speaks in its own way to find connection, whether it's a bartender in love, a vampire reading *Twilight*, or men at a block party. Huey writes in the third version of the poem "Ha Ha Ha Thump": "we are naked / as beer bottles, we are aging rock songs.



Amorak Huey and his new book *Ha Ha Ha Thump*

That bleed like smoke or gravel. / We gaze with lost eyes / at our wives, their legs. Our Children are pale streaks, tiny fires / at the edge of our vision. We are keepers of a ghost ship."

Huey finds his subject matter in the world around him, in the complicated, bittersweet things that can't be expressed or that just aren't said.

"I think the project of poetry is language on experience," Huey says, "and I'm interested in how we use language to make sense of the world and the ways in which we can never fully make sense of the world, because language isn't the world. It's an interpretation."

This barrier does not stop Huey's continuing work with language to understand life through poetry. He is in the process of developing two new manuscripts and

continues to grapple with the project of poetry with his students, all of whom he calls poets because to be a poet is not actually pretentious. "A poet, to me is someone who writes poems," Huey said.

Each section of *Ha Ha Ha Thump* illustrates the connections of desire for love, and how love makes life meaningful. His last poem by the title's name ends with the answer: "What we're looking for is form: / a sense of the proper order of things / first lightning then thunder— / laughter to measure the silence between."

*Ha Ha Ha Thump* is a book that reaches out to connect with readers and each time a poem is read, it connects readers back to themselves. Copies of *Ha Ha Ha Thump* can be purchased at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, sundresspublications.com, and bookstores everywhere.

**Writing Major Scholarship Applications are due March 1**

See the Writing Department Website for details about availability, eligibility, and how to apply.

<http://gvsu.edu/writing/scholarships-for-writing-majors-5.htm>

# New Faculty Profile: Jennifer Tynes

*Rachel McLaughlin*

New Affiliate Professor Jennifer Tynes joins the Writing Department this year as an experienced educator who wants to help students produce good writing. “Not everyone is going to agree on what is good writing,” Tynes said. “I sometimes see student writers get so caught up trying to please one professor or publication or audience that they lose track of what they, the writers, actually want to express and create.”

While Tynes is starting her new position with the Writing Department this year, she is no stranger to teaching. She started teaching for GVSU in 2011 as an Adjunct Professor on a part-time contract. During this time she also taught for a number of other colleges and online to make ends meet. She has also taught at the University of Denver and Brown University where she completed her Ph.D. in English and her M.F.A. in Creative Writing, respectively. “I took every opportunity I was given to be a teaching assistant,” Tynes said. “I discovered

that I learned a lot about writing by teaching, and I really enjoyed spending my days talking about amazing pieces of literature with students who were encountering them for the very first time.”

In addition to her teaching, Tynes is also an accomplished poet and editor. She is the Founding Editor of Horseless Press, a small poetry press that publishes full-length poetry books and chapbooks. She is the author of eight chapbooks and four books of poetry, the latest of which is *Hunter Monies*, forthcoming from Black Radish Books. Tynes describes her most recent book *Trick Rider* as a “not-very-narrative travel narrative” of B. Lee, a woman in a traveling circus who may or may not be dead. The poems are from the points of view of Lee’s companions, an influence from William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, a book Tynes reads almost every Spring.

*Trick Rider* started out as a part of Tynes’s dissertation at the University of Denver. She was trying to write a contemporary

epic poem and said that she “failed, but, like most writing failures,” the process helped her realize what she wanted her book to become. “There are always pages you throw away, but I think I did more writing that ended up in the trash—or put aside to be used elsewhere—for that book than for any other,” Tynes said. When editor Megan Burns of Trembling Pillow Press finally accepted the book for publication, Tynes was thrilled. “The whole process, from when I first started writing to when the book was published, took about three years,” Tynes said.

In her role teaching mostly students in WRT 150 and 098, Tynes’s expertise as a writer will enable her to help students develop into strong young writers themselves. She offers this tidbit of advice to writers: “One of the most useful skills you can develop as a writer—and perhaps as a student—is the ability to winnow and apply the feedback you’re receiving to the goals you have set for yourself.”

# New Faculty Profile: Glenn Shaheen

*Kate Ryan & InWriting Staff*

As he joins the Writing Department this year as a Visiting Professor, Glenn Shaheen has high hopes for his students. “Creative writing allows us to look at a troubled world of limitless potential and theorize a way to build a version of it that is a bit better, a bit less painful,” he said.

Shaheen brings a wealth of editing and writing experience to the classroom. He has worked as an editor for the flash fiction journal *NANO Fiction*, as poetry editor for the literary journals *Gulf Coast* and *Third Coast*, and most recently as a founding editor of *Matter*, a journal of political poetry and commentary. Additionally, his first book of poems, *Predatory*, won the Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize in 2011, and his flash fiction chapbook, *Unchecked Savagery*, was published by Ricochet Editions in 2013. Shaheen says his second book of poems, *Energy Corridor*, due out in March 2016

from University of Pittsburgh Press, “is about the circles of community we inhabit, and how the rich continually try to unravel these connective strands.”

Originally from Nova Scotia in Canada, Shaheen comes to GVSU from Kalamazoo, where he recently completed his Ph.D. in English Literature and Creative Writing at Western Michigan University, and before that, he earned his MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Houston. He first visited GVSU in 2011 and was drawn to the way that the Writing and English departments are independent of one another. “Having a separate Writing Department allows the professorial staff to place a real emphasis on development for writers of all kinds of professional writing and creative writing, which is my empha-



*New Visiting Professor Glenn Shaheen*

*See SHAHEEN on page 11*

# Opening Doors to the Curriculum: The Writing Department Advisory Board

*Jonica Lister*

Students might not realize that the GVSU Writing Department is unique in the way it blends the worlds of creative writing and professional writing, allowing students to become well-rounded, skilled professionals who can adapt to any writing environment. A new Department initiative will help students become more aware of the broad range of career opportunities available for them after graduation and show them how the distinctive skills they've gained in college can be put to use in the real world.

The Writing Department Advisory Board is a group of writing professionals who will act as resources by showing students the connection between their educational and professional careers, and reassuring professors that their roles are significant in providing students with the skills necessary to work as writing professionals after college.

According to Affiliate Professor and Internship Coordinator Dauvan Mulally, "The Writing Department Advisory Board is the Writing Department's attempt to bridge the world of academia with the real world—the workplace—to show that once

you graduate, there's actually a real world out there that you have to be prepared for."

Associate Professor Laurence José and Professor Mulally have partnered together to bring this idea to life. After receiving a \$3,500 grant from the GVSU Career Center, José and Mulally contacted a variety of writing professionals, some of whom are GVSU alumni, and invited them to be part of the Advisory Board. After assembling the group, the next step was to plan a full-day event in either March or April for them to visit campus and see the "curriculum in action," according to José. On this designated day, Advisory Board members will observe writing classes relevant to their own careers.

There will also be time available for students to meet with the board outside of the classroom setting. Students can use this one-on-one time to network with writing alumni, learn more about employment opportunities available upon graduation, and describe their own personal writing identities to professionals who recently began their own careers in writing.

José stressed that she and Mulally wanted the Advisory Board to be made

up of non-academic professionals so that students can learn from and engage with different stakeholders who work outside of the university. These professionals work in a range of different careers including freelance, editing, nonprofit work, website and magazine writing, and technical and corporate communication writing.

Advisory Board members' roles don't end after their visit. When they leave, members will be expected to reflect on classroom observations and conversations they shared with students and provide feedback to José and Mulally about the types of skills they think students are gaining from the writing curriculum at GVSU.

Both Mulally and José believe that the Advisory Board will have a positive impact on writing professors as well as students. "I think in terms of metaphors, and I show [students] the metaphor in the classroom," José said. "I actually open the classroom door. To get new ideas, you need to open the door."

Mulally also feels that the Board will benefit professors with the sharing of information regarding the students' internship experiences. She said, "I think it's always good to have outsiders come in to weigh in on how things are going, to take a pause and make sure that we're listening to all the constituents involved—especially employers, as people who oversee internship experiences." Gaining insight on how prepared GVSU writing students are for their internships can influence how professors choose to adapt their teaching methods to better serve students' needs.

Most of all, the Advisory Board will act as a reminder to both students and professors of how unique, important, and meaningful the GVSU writing program is. According to José, "Writing can mean everything and anything. It's a very broad field, which makes it exciting, but then also challenging sometimes, when you start thinking about: What's the professional identity of our students?" The Writing



*Associate Professor Laurence José and Affiliate Professor Dauvan Mulally*

*See ADVISORY on page 11*

# Who's Behind the Laptop Screen?

*Sarah Cauzillo*

An assortment of characters align a rectangle table in a small meeting room in the lower level of Kirkhof Center. They have smiling faces, aglow from their laptop screens, which dip down for a moment to post and to read, and then pop back up, laughing at another joke told from across the table. Who is this group of part-time comedians and full-time conversationalists? They are a close-knit group of friends. They are GVSU students. They are the Writers' Club.

Amongst the regular fifteen to twenty members that gather around the table each week with their laptops, at least six different conversations can be going on at once—about a new movie, a videogame, a crazy roommate, weekend plans, or their NaNoWriMo progress. They are not just writing majors, but psychology, social studies, film/video, philosophy, and even geology students. But they are more than just students—they are writers above all.

Emily Neier, the club president (and 'Fearless Leader,' as she is jokingly called by members) says, "Writing is often a 'sit at your desk alone with your laptop' activity, and Club makes it less lonely. It's an opportunity to share work and make friends and grow as a writer." Neier has been with the club since she was a freshman. Like almost all of the members, she found the club at Campus Life Night and hasn't left since. It's easy to forget that it is just a Thursday evening, and they are in a conference room in Kirkhof for a club meeting. The room feels like your best friend's basement, and the meeting like an intimate gathering of friends.

However, they are there for more than the social hour. They each have an innate love of the written word: to write it, to share it, and to listen to it. So each week, the members gather and post their pieces that they will share throughout the night on their group Facebook wall. Interwoven between breaks of their chatter, members take turns sharing their pieces aloud. Fellow members read along on their laptops or phones.

"It's nerve-wracking," member Rachel Krawchuk, a sophomore writing major, says of sharing aloud for the first time. "But it gets better because you trust these people;



*Members of Writers' Club, pencils ready at their Halloween gathering*

they are your friends. And you get such good feedback and comments on your writing." Positives, negatives, and suggestions are all part of the feedback process. Members come back each week to a safe environment where they can be themselves and work on their writing.

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**"Writing is often a 'sit at your desk alone with your laptop activity,' and Club makes it less lonely. It's an opportunity to share work, and make friends, and grow as a writer."**

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With a group of such creative, innovative, and comedic minds in one room—they are bound to break out of their own mold. Aside from the workshops they lead, meetings are spontaneously festive. A lively pizza party was given to celebrate the end of midterms, clever Halloween costumes were worn the week prior to the holiday, and they often leave the meeting room altogether to take group trips to poetry readings.

Beyond the pizza parties and Halloween costumes and the style and technique work, the club is a launchpad into the publication world. The club publishes *Running Out of Ink*, an entirely student-led and student-submitted publication each semester. Some club members even go on to continue publishing; most recently, World Castle Publishing released Writers Club Alum Lily Raine's Young Adult novel: *Destria Waves* in September 2015.

Writers Club is a diverse group of majors, from geology to psychology. It is a diverse group of personalities, from loud and funny to quiet and thoughtful. It is a diverse group of involvements, from Dance Troupe to Intervarsity. And it is a diverse group of goals, from publication to a place to meet up with friends. All in all, Writers Club is a common ground for writers of many different backgrounds, a place to be heard for those with a passion to write. As Fearless Leader Emily said, in such a competitive field like writing, it's a refreshing atmosphere to come back to, a place where club members are constantly rooting for and supporting one another.

# Writers Series: A Day with Marcia Aldrich and the Craft of Creative Nonfiction

Claire Fisher

Bringing together elements from fiction, nonfiction, reference books, poetry, and prose, author Marcia Aldrich writes by bending the rules.

As a part of the 2015 Grand Valley Writers Series, Aldrich visited GVSU on October 1. She began her visit with a craft-talk about creative nonfiction and gave a reading that evening of her essay “Enough,” which has been selected as a Notable Essay in this year’s *Best American Essays* series.

Aldrich used her creativity to bring a new perspective on nonfiction to writing students. During her craft talk, Aldrich brought a variety of descriptive essays and asked for volunteers to read them aloud. She prompted students to analyze these pieces and highlighted the different ways writers tackle similar ideas.

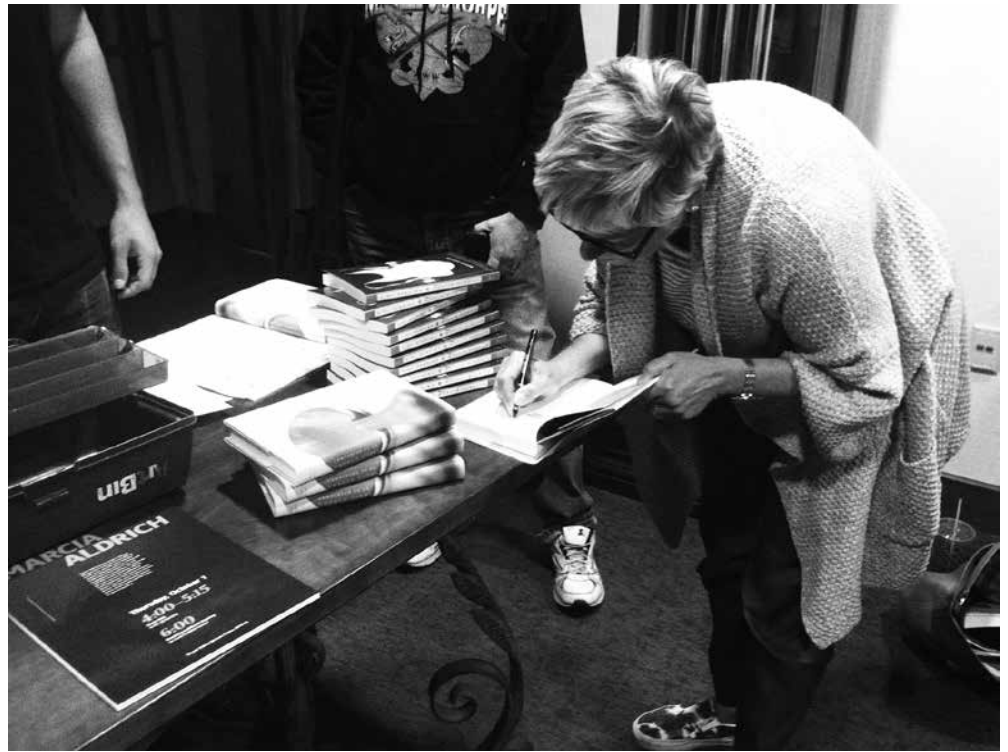
In her craft talk, Aldrich engaged students and asked them their opinions to help them identify what was unique and intriguing about each of the essays discussed. She showed students the value of taking a specific moment and focusing on just the physical moment before analyzing the bigger issue.

“Start at the physical world around you, the physical memory that you have,” Aldrich said. “Don’t look too soon at the bigger question of ‘what is this all about?’ Try to stay in the moment and if you do that well enough, it will speak to larger issues.”

She helped students look more deeply into the essays and understand what made each of them great.

“I think about myself when I was a young student and what I needed,” Aldrich said. “I think that’s very much about hoping that students who come to these events have the same kind of needs that are seeking to be met. I really like to make things and teaching is also making in a way. It’s different than doing the writing, but I think I’m helping people become excited about the making of things.”

Assistant Professor Oindrila Mukherjee, coordinator of the Writers Series said, “[Aldrich] does very interesting things with language and form. She’s always pushing the boundaries. She really experiments with form and structure. She just does really



Marcia Aldrich signing books after her reading

interesting things with language. She’s always experimenting and challenging herself as a writer.”

In her book, *Companion to an Untold Story*, Aldrich uses the alphabetical structure of a reference book to work her way through the story of her friend’s suicide, as well as her own grieving process. Using prose and poetry in this reference book style, Aldrich gives readers a new nonfiction form. Her memoir *Girl Rearing* tells the story of growing up as a woman in America in the 1950s. In her essay “The Blue Dress,” Aldrich discusses her experiences in the past, and her experiences as she became an adult after moving to New York, using the story of her blue dress to explore issues and challenges that women face.

Later that night, Aldrich read for the audience, for the first time in public, her essay “Enough.” “Enough” also addresses challenges faced by women in society by exploring Aldrich’s own experiences in her professional and personal life.

Aldrich said that she wishes she had taken

the time in school to study different types of genres to use in her work. During the question and answer session of the event, Aldrich shared with students that she had focused on poetry during her time in college. She advises students to take the opportunity to try out different genres of writing and not decide too early on any one genre in particular.

“I started as a poet and I really didn’t allow myself to diversify in my writing,” Aldrich said. “I chose way too early that I was a poet and didn’t take nonfiction classes. I am now an essayist.

“I love poetry, but I wish I had experimented more,” she said. “There’s an awful lot of connections within the genres. You can move from poetry to prose a lot more easily than you’d think.”

The Grand Valley Writers Series continues in the winter semester with nonfiction writer Ruben Martinez and poet Jericho Brown. More information can be found on the Writing Department website.

# Writing Department Offers New Bachelor's of Science Degree

*Anna Bouwkamp*

If students are thinking about majoring in writing—or even if they already are—there is now another degree option for them to consider. The GVSU Writing Department is offering a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in addition to the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.).

Before now, the only option for writing majors was the B.A. This could be somewhat limiting for students who want to use their abilities in other ways.

“There are certain assumptions that go along with any Bachelor of Arts degree, like the assumption that you must be interested in communicating across cultures,” explained Associate Professor Laurence José, referring to the B.A. requirement of three semesters of a foreign language meant to make students more well-rounded, as well as increasing their knowledge about different cultures and even of their own language.

While this works for many students, Associate Professor Charles Lowe acknowledged, “what is easy for some, may be difficult for others.” Now writing students can choose whichever feels best for them.

“Up until now, writing majors had to fit into the B.A. mindset, even if it didn’t make sense to them,” José said. “Being able to shape your degree to your own identity and professional aspirations just makes sense and makes it more usable for students.”

Regardless of whether a student chooses a B.A. or a B.S., the degree requires 42 major-specific credits. The B.S. focuses on the more scientific characteristics of the field, replacing the language requirements with three courses that focus on the technical aspects of writing. These courses include CIS 238, Internet Media and Programming; ENG 261, Foundations of Language Study; and STA 215, Introductory Applied Statistics.

This is a significant change, but current students should not be alarmed. This new option affects only one area of degree requirements. Students are still free to choose modules in any combination that they desire.

“These courses are designed to act as a jumping board into areas of writing that many students might not consider on their own,” Lowe explained. The courses also provide skills directly transferable to a future in writing: statistics can lead to research, a scientific understanding of language improves writing, and computer expertise is useful in most fields in the current job market, especially for media-related writing.

“If they enjoy these classes,” Lowe suggested, “it might even lead them to take more of that type. Perhaps they might even

*See DEGREE on page 11*

# WRT 365: Magazine Writing Students Mining for Ideas at ArtPrize 7

*Chiara Licari*

Pretty pictures on flimsy pages that stick together and take up too much space on the coffee table are how some may see them, but in reality, magazines, and the art behind them, are much, much more.

WRT 365, Intermediate Magazine Writing is taught by Assistant Professor Oindrilla Mukherjee, reader of *The New Yorker* and *Harper's* and who was a reporter in Calcutta, has now been teaching at GVSU for five years. In her class, students were assigned to find a fresh angle on the iconic event that has given Nessie a home and has illuminated the night sky with fifteen-thousand paper lanterns. They were asked to not only report, but to also write creatively about the city-wide canvas that has brought more life to Grand Rapids than ever before: ArtPrize.

Students were encouraged to “get out of their rooms and be there,” Mukherjee said. She wanted them to have fun with the feature, venture out, take pictures, and get involved—not just sit at home researching. Students wrote about many different aspects of the event, interviewed many people, and participated in the social event by getting to know their topic personally and finding what really made it stand out amongst other ArtPrize topics. Some students focused on the businesses affected in both positive and negative ways by the three-week long event, as well as different kinds of art, whether it be multimodal or interactive, and some focused on the pinpoints of the city, such as Rosa Parks Circle and The B.O.B. This is exactly what the assignment asked of them: to find something different to say outside of simply analyzing the artwork itself.

“[It’s] ideally a combination of good writing as well as reporting because you’re really a journalist, gathering information like a reporter but then writing about it beautifully, using your creative writing techniques,” Mukherjee said. Having magazine writing experience herself, she challenges students to become experts. They must analyze, stay current, and have the initiative to learn for themselves that they must have a fresh and successful angle.

But let’s not forget about that paintbrush. Magazine writing is similar to poetry or fiction in that it’s creative. It’s more than quick blurbs of headline and seven inches worth of newsprint chock full of information. In this literary journalism, you have to really feel for what you’re uncovering

*See MAGAZINE on page 10*

# Mosquitos and Salmon: Annual Poetry Night Brings Diverse Pair of Poets

Laura Thaxton

On October 15, the lights dimmed inside the L.V. Eberhard Center as the audience grasped their hot ciders in anticipation. It was time for the annual Poetry Night in the Fall Arts Celebration to begin. This year, poets Aimee Nezhukumatathil and Kwame Dawes were invited to come and read their diverse work. Fred Antczak, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, took the stage to introduce both the event and Full Professor Patricia Clark. Clark, Chair of the Writing Department, has spearheaded the event since its beginnings in 2002. Since then, hundreds of people have come every year to listen to poetry.

After Clark's initial remarks, Nezhukumatathil climbed the stage excitedly. "This is known across the country as being one of the premier poetry events," she said. "I'm honored to be at a place where the written word is so valued and celebrated."

Nezhukumatathil has published a multitude of poetry books, all of which have



Visiting Poet Aimee Nezhukumatathil

received awards. Her most recent collection is *Lucky Fish*, and her poems are currently taught in some high school curriculums. Nezhukumatathil is currently a Professor of English at State University of New

York-Fredonia, teaching creative writing and environmental literature.

She began her readings with an anecdote from her childhood, describing the joy of finding her mother's medical journals just because they were something to read. When she was a junior in college, she made the drastic change from a chemistry major to English—with all the desires to become a poet. The poems she shared ranged in topic from the Incredible Hulk, to her cesarean scar, to a spice rack, and even about a cat boat. The topics were full of both whimsy and truth and they resonated with the audience, as she described both sentimental human experiences and seemingly universal childhood feelings.

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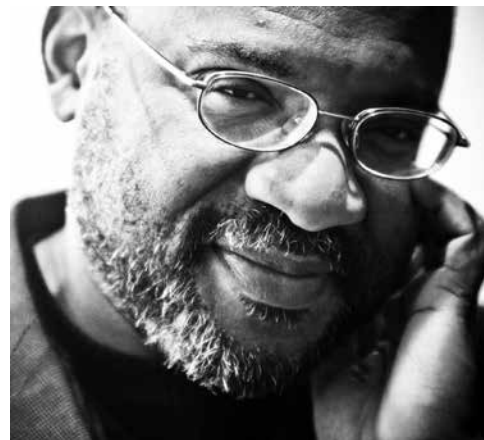
**“This is known across the country as being one of the premier poetry events,” Nezhukumatathil said, “I’m honored to be at a place where the written word is so valued and celebrated.”**

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In one particular poem, “Mosquitos,” Nezhukumatathil expressed the exasperation she felt whenever her father took her out to search for the constellations—all she could focus on were the bugs eating away at her in the warm Arizona night. But, as the poem continued and evolved, she read, “I know one day he won’t ask me / won’t be there to show me the rings of Saturn glowing gold through the eyepiece ... the mosquitos will still have their way with me— / and my father won’t hear me complain.” The crowd collectively held their breath on that last line, in sudden realization about the fragility of life, as an annoying childhood recollection became a treasured memory about a loved one—seamlessly through poetry.

As she finished her time on stage, Nezhukumatathil offered some advice for writers

and future poets. For writers’ block, Nezhukumatathil suggested researching phobias and writing characters with them. Or better yet, “Pay attention [to the world], be astonished, and then write about it.”



Visiting Poet Kwame Dawes

Next, Kwame Dawes took the stage. Currently, Dawes is the Chancellor’s Professor of English at the University of Nebraska and has published multiple volumes of poetry, several plays that have been produced, fiction, and nonfiction—he has also written the most authoritative study about Bob Marley’s lyrics. His work has earned a plethora of awards and praise, including an Emmy. Among other successes, Dawes is an actor, broadcaster, and was once the lead singer in a reggae band—and the crowd even got a taste of it.

The poems he shared ranged from heartfelt poems addressed to his wife to a comedic piece with sociopolitical undertones. Dawes read—and even sang at some parts—about images of an African postman, life in Africa and Jamaica, and an enigmatic tornado child. Dawes draws the majority of the inspiration for his poetry through the history of cultures, human experiences, and even more serious topics such as race and racism. After spending most of his childhood in Jamaica, it would be hard to not be influenced by the music and atmosphere of the country.

Dawes then read one of his more well-known poems, “Progeny of Air.” The

See *POETRY* on page 11



# The Door to Salt Lake City: A Student's Reflection on Attending the NCPTW

*Sydney McCann*

*Follow your bliss and the Universe  
will open doors for you where there  
were only walls.*

—Joseph Campbell

I first read this on the wall of a yoga studio in Dublin, Ireland, and I found the words to be true. Following my bliss—namely, writing and my work as a writing consultant—was what had brought me to Ireland in the first place. I had no idea then that just over a year later, writing would open another door for me, this time leading to Salt Lake City, UT, and a future of collaboration for GVSU.

During the weekend of November 5, my writing center work led me and four other members of the Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors (FMCWMA) to the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW). This annual conference brings writing center professionals together from colleges and universities across the nation for a weekend full of learning and professional develop-

ment. Attendees are invited to share their own research and perspectives by giving presentations that examine writing center pedagogies and practices. This helps writing consultants to further their understanding of the work that writing centers do and find better ways to serve student writers.

The theme of this year's NCPTW was "(De)Center: Testing Assumptions about Peer Tutoring and Writing Centers," and brought with it an assortment of presentations on topics ranging from how to navigate racial privilege in one-on-one sessions to working with extraverted students as an introverted tutor.

Over the course of the conference, my fellow writing consultants and I attended many sessions, but we each also brought our own presentations to the table. Associate Professor of English Lindsay Ellis, GVSU's Director of the Writing Across the Curriculum and Supplemental Writing Skills programs, gave a presentation about her work teaching WRT 306, in which she has students interview writing professors

to learn about the best ways to work with students and integrate writing consultants into classrooms.

GVSU Writing Center Specialist Melanie Rabine held a panel discussing the use of comics in the writing center. Rabine has developed a series of comics that visually represent grammar rules and have been integrated into the handouts and resources offered at FMCWMA.

Lead Writing Consultant Teresa Williams led a workshop on the use of multimodality in the writing center and offered strategies for the best ways to work with students on multimodal projects.

Megan Rodawold and I, also Lead Writing Consultants, led a roundtable discussion examining the mission statements of writing centers, specifically breaking down the language and rhetorical construction of our own mission statement, which states that we "build better writers, not better papers."

*See NCPTW on page 10*

## Students are Onboard with Nonfiction

*Gina Barger*

On a sunny Friday in early September, Assistant Professor Beth Peterson of the GVSU Writing Department led her Intermediate Creative Nonfiction class on a grand adventure aboard the *D.J. Angus* research vessel in Grand Haven, MI. The *D.J. Angus* is one of two scientific aquatic vessels used in the GVSU Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute's Water Resources Outreach Education Program.

This fall semester, nonfiction students read "Consider the Lobster" by acclaimed essayist David Foster Wallace. In conjunction with reading Wallace, the trip aboard the *D.J. Angus* helped to inspire students' follow-up assignments—nonfiction pieces of their own about a place or experience—inspired by the writing style of Wallace. Peterson hoped the boat trip would foster her students' creativ-

ity and help them to relate to Wallace's research-reporting technique.

Outfitted with pens, notebooks, and their best sea legs, the students set sail for the afternoon guided by *D.J. Angus* Lead Instructor Paula Capizzi and Science Instructor Diane Veneklasen.

As the boat coasted through choppy Lake Michigan waters, Capizzi and Veneklasen pointed out different landmarks along the Grand Haven shoreline, educated students about the careful process of aquatic sampling of fish and plankton, and described the different threats to the delicate freshwater ecosystem, such as the introduction of the menacing Asian carp into Lake Michigan. In addition to dialogue, students got an up-close look at a handful of the university's collected aquatic sample jars containing

bottom-dwelling marine organisms such as the zebra muscles and bloodworms.

"The boat trip was really awesome," student Jackie Vega said. "I really feel like being given the opportunity to immerse myself in the beauty of Lake Michigan while listening to the educational commentary provided to us by Diane and Paula was great when it came to incorporating some rich imagery and facts into my piece."

This being the first ever nonfiction class to set sail on the *D.J. Angus*, Peterson worked closely with Writing Department Chair Patricia Clark, Capizzi, and Veneklasen in planning the outing, and she says plans are in the works for another excursion in future semesters of WRT 360 so that more students can share this truly extraordinary learning experience.

## *BUILDING* continued from page 1

“In 2006, the perfect piece of land came on the market and we refinanced our house in Michigan to buy it,” Kaitany said. “It was a decision that took a long time to act on, but it wasn’t hard to make.”

After purchasing the land, construction didn’t begin until 2012. It is still ongoing, and progress is slow, since it is funded only by the Kaitanys’ salaries and money received from donations and fundraising. With limited funds and a family with four children, Kaitany’s family makes some sacrifices.

“We don’t have big vacations or new furniture or lots of things people in middle-age would usually start to have. But the project has become the second most important thing in our lives, next to the kids, so we have to cut back somewhere, and furniture and cars and vacations aren’t that important

to me,” Kaitany said.

Furthermore, Kaitany does not sit idly by and wait for the school to be completed. She has taken to visiting primary schools in that area and learning about their literary instruction. She explained that the students in primary schools did not have access to good quality children’s literature they could learn from and enjoy at the same time. Pure memorization and little interaction with texts led students to become reluctant readers. To combat this, Kaitany began bringing in children’s books and reading aloud to the students to encourage them and to demonstrate the storytelling skills to the teachers. Last year alone, she and her volunteers distributed hundreds of donated books to six primary schools and read to approximately 900 children.

“Reading to the kids is lots of fun,”

Kaitany said. Like all kids, they love to look at the pictures and become immersed in the story. They also like to ask questions. Sometimes they ask about the U.S. and what it is like here.

“One time a student asked me, ‘Why is the U.S. rich and we in Africa are poor?’” Kaitany said. “I told her that was a very good question but that it was a complicated answer. The social studies teacher was there and together we talked a little bit about different kinds of economies and the history of colonialism. That was the hardest question anyone ever asked.”

Kaitany plans to keep visiting Kenya and making an impact on education. Information about volunteer opportunities and donating can be found on the Simbolei Academy website at [www.simboleiacademy.org](http://www.simboleiacademy.org).

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## *MAGAZINE* cont. from page 7

and write about it passionately. Of course, learning how to do so may be a difficult task, so the class goes a more non-traditional route for the best learning tool, by using magazines such as *Vanity Fair*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Esquire* as textbooks.

Offered every fall, Professor Mukherjee mentions that although the module is comprised of mainly writing majors, both in creative and professional fields, she has definitely had other students involved, especially those in advertising and public relations. In fact, there has been an increasing interest in the module, allowing for two sections of WRT 365 to be opened next year, perhaps making way for WRT 465,

Advanced Magazine Writing to be offered every winter. But she does have advice for future students: “People who sign up for this class should be prepared to be reporters...to do the legwork. Students don’t need to be in journalism classes to be good magazine writers,” she said. It’s crucial that students know that this kind of writing is a blend of the two very important skills.

In the past two years that Mukherjee has assigned this project, GVSU and the Writing Department has been fortunate enough to have the resources to allow students to go on excursions as well as cultivate a relationship with *The Rapidian*. Graduates have been recruited to write for

the magazine and students’ ideas have been pitched to the editors about their ArtPrize ideas, resulting in the best two articles being submitted and published. This just goes to show how many doors have opened for the students who take this module, and that the legwork is worth it.

This is the angle of WRT 365: approach the world ready to ask it something new and write about your discoveries like they’ve never been written before. As the beginning of the rubric states: “There’s nowhere better than a big, unique, local event to mine for ideas for magazine articles.”

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## *NCPTW* cont. from page 9

Presenting at this conference was a great experience for all five of us, but there was one session we attended during the weekend that resonated with us above the rest, and we returned to GVSU with ideas that could potentially change the way FMCWMA trains writing consultants in the future.

The presentation that sparked our inspiration was a special interest group session titled “More Than Awareness: Strategies for AAVE and LGBTQIA Language in Writing Centers.” The session itself created a dialogue that generated many ideas for

everyone in attendance. During the session, we mentioned that our full-staff training meetings included a representative from the LGBTQ center at GVSU so we could direct our clients there if the situation ever arose.

Afterwards, we spoke with a student from Saginaw Valley State University who told us training like that has never happened at their school, and suggested that we try to do a shared Allies and Advocates training together in the future. The two schools that usually only ever meet for the “battle of the valleys” could join together for a common

cause: raising awareness and increasing support for the LGBTQIA community, both on and off our respective campuses.

Now that we have returned back to Michigan and have had a chance to digest all that we learned at NCPTW, it will be exciting to see what opportunities lay ahead for FMCWMA. What started as a few writing consultants and writing center staff traveling to give presentations at a national conference may have just opened the door to much bigger and brighter things than we ever would have thought possible.

*POETRY* continued from page 8

poem described the plight of a trapped salmon trying to escape its inevitable capture. In this reading, he brought to life a fisherman “[wearing] layers, the fisherman’s uniform...the plaid shirt, the stained yellow jacket...the whiskers / eye of sparkle, as if salt-sea has crystallized / on his sharp cornea,” and salmon in captivity, “[as] they twitch, then tentative/as hungover denizens of nightmares, they swim/the old Sisyphian orbit of their tiny cosmos.” By juxtaposing these two images, Dawes brought a human-like quality to animals of nature, proposing that most aspects of life are cyclical and will run their full circles.

Later, after sharing a particularly dark poem with images of a hanging, Dawes remarked seriously, “My readings can be pretty disturbing,” and then chuckled. “But that’s alright. Beauty is not always pretty.” Dawes then finished his readings with some poems devoted to his wife, who inspired a lot of his work.

As expressed through Nezhukumatathil and Dawes’ poetry, some things are better said in stanzas. Both poets stayed after the event to sign their books, which were available for purchase. Next fall, there will be another pair of poets, as GVSU’s Poetry Night continues to be an annual tradition for students and the community alike.

*Grand Valley Writers Series Events for Winter 2016***Thursday, January 28****Faculty Event**Glenn Shaheen &  
Oindrila Mukherjee

Reading: Cook DeWitt, 7:30pm

**Wednesday, February 24****Nonfiction/Journalism Event  
with Rubén Martínez**

Craft Talk: KC 2263, 4:30pm

Reading: Cook DeWitt, 7pm

**Monday, March 28****Poetry Event (Pew Campus)  
with Jericho Brown**

Craft Talk: DEV 203 E, 6pm

Reading: University Club, 7:30pm

*DEGREE* continued from page 7

decide to minor in one of these areas to complement their writing careers and find something they love enough to do for the rest of their lives.”

With the recent switch to a modular curriculum, the expansion of degree options

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**“The core courses offer a way to look inward in the field of writing,” José said. The B.S. vs. B.A. option is a way to look outward. Where do I want to go and with what do I want to connect my writing major?”**

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is part of the Writing Department’s attempt to give writing majors more opportunities to define themselves as individuals, giving students more control over what aspects of writing they want to pursue in order to discover who they are as writers.

“The core courses offer a way to look inward in the field of writing,” José said. “The B.S. vs. B.A. option is a way to look

outward. Where do I want to go and with what do I want to connect my writing major?”

She emphasizes that it all comes back to helping students realize their career goals as early as possible: “We hope that having the option to choose between a B.A. or a B.S. will encourage our writing majors to think critically about who they want to be as writers early on, so that they can tailor their degree to fit their needs.”

By offering the choice between a B.A. and a B.S., students may meet with advisors early on and begin thinking about what they would like to do with their writing degree sooner and what steps they need to take to get there.

It is also an opportunity to see how writing is positioned in other disciplines: “Think of it like Russian dolls,” said José. “Each smaller focus fits inside something bigger and every big focus has more than meets the eye.”

The Writing Department plans to continue making the writing major as flexible and student-centered as possible in the future.

*SHAHEEN* continued from page 3

sis in this field,” Shaheen said. “It was one of the things that really excited me about Grand Valley.”

Here at GVSU, Shaheen will mostly teach Introduction to Creative Writing. “Teaching creative writing is terrific because it means every day I get to have conversations about something I love with students,” Shaheen said. “It’s a great feeling when I can show students the power of a great piece of poetry, fiction, or nonfiction.” A tremendous hockey fan, Shaheen will also teach Sports and Writing in the winter. “It’s not going to be sports journalism,” he said. “We are going to look at the way the narratives

woven into sport create parallels in several styles of creative writing. It’s going to be a lot of fun.”

Shaheen plans on helping his students become writers, and as he does so, he will remind himself what it means to be a writer too. “When you teach creative writing you tell your students certain things that they need to know at this point in their writing life,” Shaheen said. “Sometimes as an established writer you think that you don’t have to listen to what you tell your students. We tell them to write every day or do some kind of creative exercise, and saying that to four classes a week makes it stick with me.”

*ADVISORY* cont. from page 4

Department Advisory Board will help students by encouraging their self-explorations as writers even further.

Students can check the Writing Department website in the coming months as

detailed profiles of board members will be posted on the website to provide more information. Students and professors will also receive information through emails, announcements, and flyers.

# Alumni News

## 2005

**Chris Beal** was recently appointed Deputy State Director of the Michigan Republican Party. He lives in Mason with his wife **Sara Stuart Beal** and their infant daughter Julia.

## 2006

**Lindsey Drager** is completing her Ph.D. in creative writing at the University of Denver, where she serves as the Associate Editor of the *Denver Quarterly*. Her debut novel, *The Sorrow Proper*, was published in 2015 by Dzanc Books.

**Mike Salisbury** works for the literary agency Yates & Yates, one of whose recent projects—*For the Love: Fighting for Grace in a World of Impossible Standards* by Jen Hatmaker—spent seven weeks on the *New York Times* bestsellers list. His short story “All the Women Gone” will appear in *Echolocation*, Issue #15. Mike recently moved back to Grand Rapids from Denver, CO. He lives with his wife Amy and infant daughter Evangeline Grace.

## 2009

**Nancy Finney** received her Master’s of Public Administration from GVSU in 2013, where her thesis, “Historic Preservation Act of 1964” was published in the SPNHA review. She is currently the technical editor at the National Environmental Health Association, where she produces educational materials in the field of Environmental Health. She lives in Denver, CO and performs poetry and music at venues throughout the area.

**Connie Pan** lives on O’ahu, where she works as a Communications Specialist for Chevron. In 2013, she earned an MFA in fiction from West Virginia University. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Rosebud Magazine*, *Hawai’i Review*, *Bamboo Ridge*, and *Ms. Aligned*, an anthology featuring women writing about men. “The Patron Saint of Exits,” an excerpt from her novel-in-progress, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

## 2010

**Susan Kieda** works full-time as the Advertising and Communications Coordinator for GVSU. She writes copy for communications materials, proofreads various university publications, and reviews artwork submitted by outside vendors containing logos or trademarks of the university. She earned her M.A. in English from GVSU in 2015.

## 2005

**Kiera (Wilson) Prince** started in April 2014 at Hewlett Packard Enterprise (formerly HP) as a Learning and Development Specialist. She works with internal and external clients to develop, design, and deliver training to call center agents based in Pontiac, MI.

## 2013

**Sara Crill** works at Great Lakes Companies as the Great Lakes Marketing Services, Inc. Marketing and Publications Specialist. She got married in May to Robert Crill (maiden name Sara Warren) and just had a beautiful baby girl named Olivia in October.

**Briana-Raine Gersky** is pursuing her Master’s of Social Work at Wayne State University. She just released her YA novel *Destria Waves* under the pen name Lily Raine with World Castle Publishing.

**Mieke Stoub** recently accepted a position as Marketing Manager for Local First of West Michigan. He will transition from his current role as Membership and Marketing Coordinator for the Grand Rapids Bar Association in early December.

## 2014

**Nikki Fisher** is pursuing her Master’s degree in Scientific and Technical Communication (RSTC) at the University of Minnesota where she works as a graduate instructor teaching first year composition.

## 2015

**Larissa Babak** works as a Marketing and Social Media Assistant for Feinberg Consulting.

**Logan Bailey** is currently a writer for *Women’s LifeStyle Magazine* with recent articles about poetry and about the Grand Rapids Orchestra. Recently, one of his poems was published in *Ilanot Review*.

**Grayson DeYoung** works as a Knowledge Management Technical Writer for Return Path in Broomfield, CO.

**Kendra Vanderlip** is finishing up her first semester in the MFA program at the University of Memphis. In her current assistantship, she splits her time between grading for Literature professors and coordinating the River City Writer’s Series.

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