

# In Writing

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Lindsey Drager, author of *The Sorrow Proper*

## Successful GVSU Alumna: Lindsey Drager

*Annie Livingston*

Lindsey Drager says her writing stems from her “need to tell the stories no one else is telling.” So it is out of necessity that Drager, a GVSU Alumna, wrote her debut novel *The Sorrow Proper*. Her novel has two such untold stories woven together: there is the enigmatic romance between a deaf mathematician and a photographer who exhibits his work in the public library—a library which is being shut down, displacing thousands of books and the librarians who have dedicated themselves to protecting the literary safe haven.

These narratives navigate the reader through the processes of falling in love, coping with loss, and the processes of stories themselves. *The Sorrow Proper* concerns itself with not only the stories people tell, but the ones they don’t. Drager inspects the paths her characters take

and questions these loose ends, wondering if what is unspoken in this world is, perhaps, echoing through the halls of an alternate universe.

There is such metaphysical depth to *The Sorrow Proper* that it comes as no surprise that Drager began at GVSU as a philosophy major. In studying philosophy though, she found herself “increasingly more invested in exploring ideas...through narrative rather than explicitly through theory.”

A comfort to any of us, by which I mean all of us, who have changed our majors at least once, Drager’s path to becoming a writing major was not the most straight-

*See DRAGER on page 10*

# AWP Intro Award Reading

*Kristen Guilbert*

Students, professors, family, and friends gathered in the multipurpose room of the Mary Idema Pew Library on the evening of January 29, to experience the readings of well-crafted poems, nonfiction, and fiction of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs Intro Award nominated and honorable mention entries. This reading series brought together a talented group of writing students excited about their accomplishments and eager to share their writing with their peers and the community.

The AWP Intro Journals Project is a literary competition for the publication of the best new works by students enrolled in AWP member programs. The Writing Department office accepted submissions for the competition. The submissions were judged by GVSU writing faculty members and sent on to the national organization. The national winning entries were selected for publication in participating literary journals.

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**“The AWP Award Reading Series did not only inspire the students who attended, but encouraged them to work harder, and to enter contests themselves if they have not already.”**

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Student Reading Series events are arranged and publicized entirely by students, and provide a monthly reading for student work to be heard by others. The readings are often themed, and this reading presented the works of student writers with achievements to be proud of.

The students whose exceptional writing was shared that evening were Cole Eichelberger, Kelsey May, Michelle Kuznicki, Jackie Vega, Zach Sheneman, and Danielle Marie Clark.

Jackie Vega, whose poem “The secret of dirt” was selected as a winning entry,



*Michelle Kuznicki reading at the AWP Award Reading Series*

describes her experience entering the contest: “The hardest part about entering was probably deciding which three poems to submit, because I had written quite a few in my poetry class,” Vega said. “I decided on the poem I wrote as a response to a poem by Aimee Nezhukumatathil called ‘The Secret of Soil,’ and two others.”

“I was especially surprised about my winning nonfiction piece, ‘Blessed Be,’ because it is very experimental in form,” May said. “Also, my winning poem, ‘Spiders in Sailboats,’ is the most surreal piece I’ve ever written, and even reading it now, I have a different experience every time.”

As May and the other readers of winning and honorable mentions would likely agree, Vega explains that having her work selected

was rewarding and reassuring.

“It meant a lot to me to have my poem chosen as a winning entry. I have pretty recently taken on poetry as my main preferred genre, so it really felt like validation that I’m doing good work. It was also encouragement to keep writing and submitting, which can be difficult to keep up with,” Vega said.

The AWP Award Reading Series did not only inspire the students who attended, but encouraged them to work harder, and to enter contests themselves if they have not already. On a greater scale, this event displayed to the community the exceptional things happening in the midst of GVSU’s writing community.

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

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

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

# Exploring Possibilities at Swift Printing

*Danielle Marie Clark*

As writing majors, we've all been badgered by the age old question, "So...what are you going to do with that degree?" Luckily, in Visiting Professor Zsuzsanna Palmer's Introduction to Document Production and Design class (WRT 253), I was able to explore the answer to that question with a field trip to Swift Printing"

In WRT 253, I was given the opportunity to create professional documents using the digital design software Adobe InDesign. I first learned the basics of the design software and then began working to create my own documents. After completing multiple assignments, I worked with a client to create professional documents to get real world experience. Throughout this process, I often met with my classmates and discussing our work, which created a collaborative environment that helped me gain positive feedback and affirmation about my documents and writing.

Working in the classroom was absolute-

ly integral to learning about design, but getting out of the classroom and into Swift Printing helped me understand how important my design knowledge could be after graduation. Swift Printing, a large family-owned printing company located in downtown Grand Rapids, takes digitally designed documents, like the ones I made in class, and prints them for the masses. They communicate directly with designers to make sure that documents are perfect for their audience, and then get into the dirty work of physically creating the documents on paper. Swift Printing's employees are responsible for operating large printing machinery, making sure that designs are identical to what has been communicated, and then trimming or packaging them as necessary.

Seeing the things I'd learned in WRT 253 in action at Swift Printing's headquarters gave me examples of what I could be doing in the workforce after graduation. With my InDesign skills, I could be designing

documents for clients or for my own work. I could work with designs after they've been created, mediating between print shops and designers to make sure that companies are getting the documents that they need to sustain business. These documents include, but aren't limited to, handouts, "pluggers," flyers, political campaign signs, large posters for local businesses, and company mailers.

Once I saw documents and their design outside of class at Swift Printing, I couldn't stop looking at designs that I had come across in everyday life. Seeing InDesign documents at Swift Printing allowed me to see this kind of work on billboards, on candy wrappers, and as advertisements on the sides of busses.

Now when people ask me what I'm going to do with my degree, instead of stuttering over possibilities, I share opportunities. Learning about the production of professional documents expanded my knowledge to just one of the many career opportunities that a writing degree has to offer.

# Internship Abroad: Summer in London

*Teresa Williams*

The roads were twisted, brick, and bumpier than Michigan's pot hole filled streets, looking as though they had legitimately been pulled out of the early twentieth century. The buildings were shorter, softer, not the modern edged skyscrapers you would see in Chicago but a mix of older architecture and newer buildings...In the middle of the whole thing was a creek and a miniature waterfall - barely fifteen feet high - that you could maneuver around to sit on this brick island and watch everyone pass by. This is how Kayla Williams, a third-year writing major, describes Camden, England, a place she visited while studying abroad for her internship in London.

GVSU is fairly well-known for its encouragement of students to study abroad. Up until recently, the writing major had seen hardly any students taking advantage of this opportunity. This past summer, Williams

became the second writing major to intern abroad as she wrote for *Prima Baby*, the parent-focused magazine and branch of the content and platform company Immediate Media.

At *Prima Baby*, Williams' day-to-day tasks varied. Sometimes she was out in the field gathering information for her next story. At other times she was writing her articles, including a feature focused on ticks and how to stop the spread of Lyme disease. Sometimes she would take pictures, and at other times she would attend events or do location studies of activities for the summer. She edited letters mothers sent in to the magazine and even conducted an interview with a child author.

Williams feels the Writing Department prepared her for her internship by provid-



*London, England*

*See LONDON on page 11*

# Publishing Opportunities in Student-Led Running Out of Ink

*Nannette Foster*

Like most college and university students, those at GVSU are driven to communicate experiences, share ideas, and narrate the issues of today, and to display their creativity. Many of us may already recognize our intense desire to write, but having a place to get started can make all the difference in whether we pursue that passion or not. This is why one group at GVSU is encouraging all students to write by providing them with the opportunity to get published.

GVSU's Writer's Club started *Running Out of Ink* in 2010, and students have been avidly pursuing the biannual publication opportunity ever since. This entirely student-run publication accepts fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, and drama submissions. After six years, *Running Out of Ink* has earned its reputation for rich, lively pieces that showcase the creative writing works of an array of GVSU students—any GVSU student is welcome to submit, whether their discipline relates to writing or not.

Writer's Club itself is constructed of a diverse group of scholars, from majors such as computer science and psychology to elementary education and everything in-between, which is why they are so dedicated to creating a publication that includes writers from all different backgrounds. During club meetings, members read their pieces and receive constructive criticism, and they have a lot of fun doing so. Some members' pieces go on to be published in *Running Out of Ink*, while others just appreciate the friendly environment. "Writer's Club is a safe space to bounce ideas off of other writers and get feedback without having to worry about a grade," says Emily Neier, the president of Writer's Club and editor-in-chief of *Running Out of Ink*.

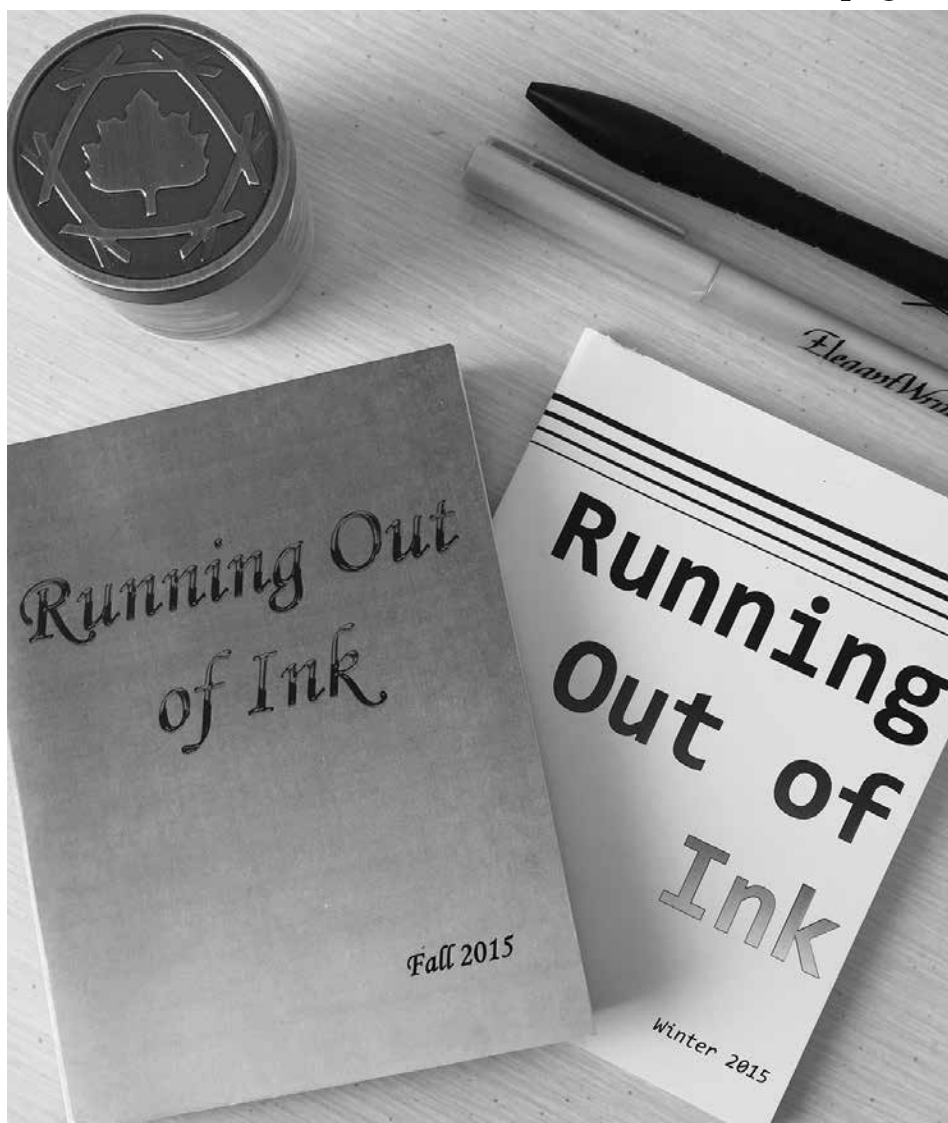
The Winter 2016 *Running Out of Ink* publication committee is currently made up of around ten students, an all-time high. Each member reads the submissions before coming together to discuss each piece, deciding if it is ready for publication.

If not, the committee gives student writers feedback on what changes they'd like to see take place, whether the piece gets accepted or not. Submitting early is key if writers wish to get feedback before the final submissions are selected. The committee looks forward to finding pieces comprising originality, and they seek writers that can push boundaries. Jessie Kenely, a patron of the committee since her freshman year, explains, "We like people to push. If a piece is bordering on being creepy, most of the time we like to push the author to make

it creepier. If something is on the verge of being beautiful then we want them to push it further." On average, between 30 and 40 submissions are sent in for consideration, and the committee works towards a consensus to publish all of the best pieces within the book.

Neier eagerly awaits getting her hands on the fresh copies of the latest publication at the end of each semester, describing the feeling as "the most relieving thing in the world." The publication committee shares

*See RUNNING on page 11*



*Past Issues of Running Out of Ink*

# The Culmination of Magazine Writing

*Sarah Cauzillo & Jonica Lister*

**D**ifferent teams of writers are huddled around tables in a small room discussing section deadlines and making notes. With only a few weeks to go until publication, time is of the essence. They've decided on a theme, read submissions for their individual sections, and met for meetings with their managing editors. They've communicated and collaborated to ensure that the final product will be perfect. These individuals are the brains behind *Grandeur* magazine—more specifically, they're GVSU students enrolled in Advanced Magazine Writing (WRT 465).

“The logic behind offering this assignment is that when you're taking a class like Magazine Writing, it's not just about writing. It's about editing and making executive decisions about design,” says Assistant Professor Oindrila Mukherjee, who teaches WRT 465. Offered winter semester of even years, WRT 465 builds upon the fundamental skills students learn in the Intermediate Magazine Writing course (WRT 365). This includes writing pitches, research and reporting, and developing articles tailored for a magazine style. This semester, the eighteen students in the class are emulating a magazine production scenario involving everything from original conception to publication.

At the beginning of the semester, the students were broken into editorial teams for the various aspects concerning the creation and production: design/layout, photography, and production, as well as editorial teams for the content sections. The design team prepared two marketing pitches of magazine styles with characteristics of the target audience. The class chose to create *Grandeur*: a magazine for an adventurous, Californian/bohemian audience, with a humorous, casual, conversational-tone and colorful, crafty splashes on the pages.

“We have had to figure out most of everything ourselves,” Managing Editor Jacqueline Bull says. “There isn't a particular model to follow. All of the decisions about what and how to write, how we want to present the information, all falls to us. It is exciting to make something from scratch like that, but it is also a little scary.”



*Students in Advanced Magazine Writing*

Student writers pitched angles to section editors, designers pitched layouts to the production team and managing editors, timelines and deadlines were drawn in permanent ink, and every mode of communication was in use. It was a practical lesson on collaboration in the workplace.

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**“The class became a team, and the team became a group of friends. An editorial meeting was always filled with jokes, laughter—and hard work too, of course.”**

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In working with any published medium, Mukherjee stresses that collaboration as a writer is vital. “You can do your little bit, but you also have to work with a team of graphic designers, photographers, production people, and the advertising department,” she says, “you cannot just have your vision and say, ‘This is it.’”

All eighteen students in the class are juniors and seniors. Many of these

upper-level students are currently enrolled in capstone courses, completing internships, and preparing for graduation—so this upper-level preparatory class is further equipping students with the skills they need for the writing they will do outside of GVSU. No matter where they go, they will be required to work in conjunction with other artists to create a finished project. This level of collaboration was not only a learning experience for students, but an enjoyable one. The class became a team, and the team became a group of friends. An editorial meeting was always filled with jokes, laughter—and hard work too, of course.

“At the end of this project, having a real product to showcase what we've done is the best part to me,” says Bull, “Also, having an opportunity to look critically at your own work and your peers [work] to have a quality collaborative result is a great experience. It goes beyond just workshop feedback because we are more involved with each other's work.”

WRT 465 students will formally launch the magazine on April 27th at 6 P.M. in HON 219. Writing Department faculty and writing majors and minors are invited to attend and see the completed project—in all its grandeur.

# Rubén Martínez: Optimist Born in Crisis

*Bennett Slavsky*

Author, musician, and Emmy Award-winning journalist Rubén Martínez came to visit GVSU on February 24th as a part of the Grand Valley Writers Series and spoke of his passion and his craft. The son and grandson of immigrants from Mexico and Central America, Martínez has an insatiable fascination, compassion, and fixation over the ever-controversial borderlands of this country. “I write because my grandparents immigrated from Mexico and my mother from El Salvador, the land of poets,” he said. “I write because of my brown skin and because I was born on a border; I write because of who I am.”

Growing up in Southern California, while also spending much of his childhood in Mexico and El Salvador, Martínez describes his ongoing sense of alienation and acceptance throughout adulthood—a perfect recipe for the voice of the narrator. His brown skin and bilingualism set him apart from the feathered blonde norm of Southern California, but he was a generation or more removed from being an immigrant. An outcast to the in-crowd, he was a “brown cowboy” with snakeskin boots and a guitar slung over his shoulder. During his senior

year of high school, a civil war broke out in his mother’s native country of El Salvador, and Martínez dropped out of school to cover the atrocities as a journalist. He would go on to spend the next 30 years living and writing everywhere from Mexico City to Joshua Tree.

February 24th was a blizzard. Heavy snowflakes were whipping through howling wind—it was bitterly cold, with iced sidewalks and classes canceled. Despite this, all three of Martínez’s lectures throughout the day were packed with students leaning in and listening intently as he told stories of his inspiration and exploration. He reminisced of another time he came to America’s Heartland, traveling with a family of immigrants from a small, dusty Mexican town all the way to a small, icy meatpacking town in the Midwest as research for his book *Crossing Over*. And this has been Martínez’s life, completely immersing himself in his work and in controversy to try and peer through the eyes and into the lives of those on the other side.

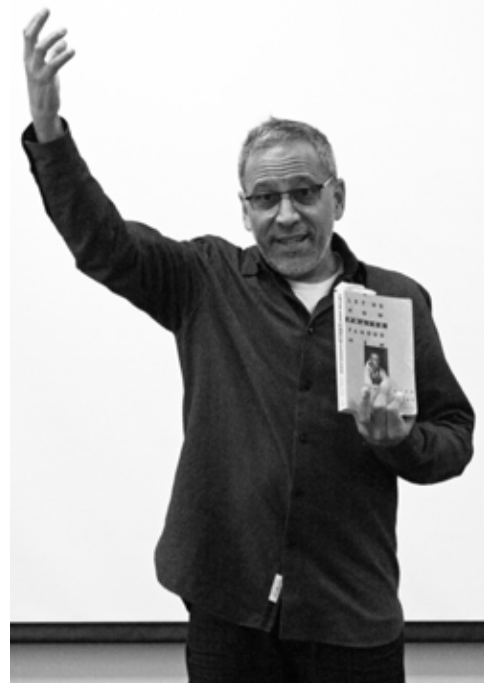
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## “Martínez’s life is his work, and his work is his life.”

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The first of Martínez’s talks was a commentary of the ongoing conflict surrounding the border, the second was a nonfiction craft talk, and the last was part reading and part musical performance. Despite the different nature of each lecture, they all seemed to have this common thread of “embracing the stranger”. He spoke of the American Dream, the desire for something more for yourself, for your family, and for your descendants. He remarked that this is not only the American Dream; it is everyone’s dream. If you capitalize on the opportunity to escape oppression, poverty, and violence, then that is true courage and true optimism—an optimist born in crisis.

Martínez’s life is his work, and his work is his life. His style of writing is a combination of memoir and journalism, his story intertwined with history. He concludes the introduction of his book *Desert America* with



*Martínez telling stories to students*

the statement “I lived in and among them all. The only way to tell my story, it seemed, was to tell theirs.” And this is exactly what he does. His writing is entangled with his life, his music entangled with his writing, and so on.

Martínez concluded his visit to GVSU in Cook-DeWitt Center with a guitar and a mic stand. He explained to us how his music deeply emulates his writing, how it is truly the soundtrack to his written word. Martínez talked about how profoundly he is affected by music and described to us a time of true peril in his life and said, “I took the last thread of sanity I had left and concentrated it into the narrative of this song.”

Each chord he strummed warmed the air as his fingertips hummed up and down the strings. His raspy voice—weathered by decades of desert breath—echoed throughout the auditorium. Every note he struck was filled with tension and angst, a true captivation and retelling of the emotional conflict in which it was written. Behind his glasses and his waning eyesight, underneath his graying hair and years of experience, was the same passion and creative powerhouse of the young cowboy from Southern California.



# Jennifer Polasek's Awesome Virtual Internship

*Anna Bouwkamp*

When fourth year student Jennifer Polasek began her search for an internship, she never thought that she would find one that so perfectly matched her goals and interests. Working at *The Awesome Mitten* not only offers a combination of her writing major and advertising/public relations minor, but also allows her to express the passion she has for Michigan.

"This state has so much to offer and I enjoy getting out on the weekends or during the summer and discovering new adventures," Polasek explains. *The Awesome Mitten* shares news and information on exciting experiences, events, and activities from all over the state. According to their website, their primary goal is to cultivate "a fresh perspective on Michigan by engaging local communities, businesses, and people."

Polasek's internship is virtual, which means that she completes her work

independently over the Internet and by phone. This is an option for internships that many students are unaware of, Polasek herself found it by chance while browsing and was surprised by the convenience. Once a week, she and her supervisor have a phone conference to discuss her assignments. In many ways, Polasek describes, this internship is "similar to independent study," but with the addition of the workplace culture, even from far away.

"It really comes down to developing skills of time management and having open communication with your supervisor," says Polasek. She and Alex Beaton, her supervisor and *The Awesome Mitten* founder, are in constant communication by email and text message, making it easy for her to ask questions and receive answers quickly.

Even so, Polasek is always busy. "Every week is different at *The Awesome Mitten* with new and exciting projects," she says.

Altogether, Polasek estimates she spends 10 to 20 hours each week on her assignments for *The Awesome Mitten*. Her main responsibilities are public relations and marketing projects, which includes researching businesses for possible collaboration, surveying businesses and followers, and assisting in brand development and event PR.

One of Polasek's favorite experiences from this internship was writing articles on Polish holiday traditions from her perspective as a Michigander. The articles she has written have done very well on the company's website and have given her a new confidence in her writing abilities, as well as an opportunity to publish her work.

Polasek also feels that the skills she has gained will be invaluable in future workplaces. "Working with real deadlines

*See VIRTUAL on page 11*

# Supplement to Success: Exploring GVSU's Distinction in Writing Program

*Riley Collins*

It's no secret that being a professional writer is not an easy gig. With so much talent and competition within the field, one can't blame even the most passionate writing major for being skeptical about finding a job after graduation. In answer to this ever-growing worry, GVSU created the Distinction in Writing program as a means for writing majors to expand their writing portfolio through a series of requirements outside the university with the help of an advisor. Don't be fooled, however—this program isn't equivalent to a set of training wheels. As the Distinction in Writing section on the Writing Department website states, "We provide the framework, but you enact the program."

It's a program "designed to get students ready for the real world," explains Writing Department Chair Patricia Clark. With this

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**"With this real world outlook woven into all of the program's requirements, it's every writing major's dream: enjoyable, portfolio-savvy opportunities in a city setting with a multitude of writing job prospects (all determined by the student, of course)."**

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real world outlook woven into all of the program's requirements, it's every writing

major's dream: enjoyable, portfolio-savvy opportunities in a city setting with a multitude of writing job prospects (all determined by the student, of course). For example, among one of the five program components is "writing for publication or performance" in which two of the activities students can choose to complete include publishing "a substantial piece of writing in a regional or national market" and "giving a public reading of your own work."

From reading through the program's five components, it's easy to see the ways it can be extremely beneficial to students trying to stand out from the crowd. "It's just a fun experience to connect with the community and other writers," says Clark. Indeed, the program is as much about networking as

*See PROGRAM on page 10*

# Faculty Reading: A Performance by Oindrila Mukherjee and Glenn Shaheen

D. Cole Eichelberger

Outside a blizzard plastered the auditorium windows as an audience of students and faculty gathered on January 28 in the cold Cook-Dewitt Center for the annual Faculty Reading. Writing Department Chair Patrica Clark took the stage first and gave the introductions of Visiting Professor Glenn Shaheen and Assistant Professor Oindrila Mukherjee, writers from Nova Scotia and India, respectively. Although they are from different places, they are connected by their careers and by writing.

Mukherjee's work has been published in *Salon*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Oxford Anthology of Bengali Literature*, and many more. She grew up in India where she worked as a journalist before coming to the United States and earning her MFA in creative writing from University of Florida and her Ph.D. in literature and creative writing from University of Houston. She is currently working on two manuscripts: a book of short stories about recent immigrants to the U.S. and a novel set in India.



Visiting Professor Glenn Shaheen

Shaheen's book of poetry *Predatory* won the Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize and was a finalist for the Norma Farber First Book award. Born in Halifax, Nova Scotia,

Shaheen moved to the U.S. and received his MFA in creative writing from the University of Houston at the same time Mukherjee was earning her Ph.D. there. Shaheen recently completed his own Ph.D. in English from Western Michigan University.

For Shaheen and Mukherjee, reading together at GVSU was a surreal experience. Just a few years ago, they were playing trivia at a bar in Houston over the summer while studying for their degrees. "If someone had told me that we would be reading in this place, I would probably not have believed them," said Mukherjee.

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**"The questions that each writer asked revolved around what an invading species is, then how people interact with other people, how money makes people crumble, but independent."**

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The reading was a straight-through performance where the readers told the audience to hold their applause until the end because they were going to weave their work together. Shaheen provided poems from his two books *Predatory* and *Energy Corridor* followed by prose excerpts from Mukherjee's novel-in-progress and published stories. The result was a fishtail braid of connecting images, tone, story, and emotion.

It began with a poem about deer entering the suburbs, a bit of natural phenomenon entering a city of broadcast entertainment, but as the speaker of the poem sees it, "The question of the deer / arose before the deer / emerged from the well-trimmed yard." The poem flowed into an excerpt about a gated community built out of arid farmland like an oxbow. The questions that each writer asked

revolved around what an invading species is, then how people interact with other people, how money makes people crumble, but independent. Infrastructure of cities and houses became a reoccurring metaphor for the self and the hopes characters held were like sentences of house arrest.



Assistant Professor Oindrila Mukherjee

The connections that appeared between Mukherjee and Shaheen conflicted and agreed in a surreal symmetry of poetry and prose. The themes of what society needs and our individual desires blended, and were made poetically poignant through imagery. Mukherjee's final excerpt was about how a woman who was once an immigrant sees America now that she has lived it: "This is an ugly city, but it is still my home," she read.

When Mukherjee and Shaheen finished, the audience applauded, still finding the connections braided into their performance. Outside, the blizzard continued to fire endless rounds of snow. This faculty reading was unconventional, poetic, and at times surreal. It was honest, like the other readings that have taken place in the reading series, which keeps audiences returning through every storm.



# Unearthing Potential for Writing Students in GVSU's fishladder

Laura Thaxton

If she had to describe GVSU's literary and art journal, *fishladder*, in one word, Editor in Chief Jacqueline Vega thoughtfully said potential: "It's the potential to be great, and to help create something elegant and cohesive about writing and art." Vega has been involved with *fishladder* since her sophomore year, and was assistant head editor just last year.

*Fishladder* has been in production at GVSU since 2003, and this year marks its 13th edition. Constructing the journal is a process that takes the entire year to finalize. Its primary goal as a publication is to support the arts and writing community on campus, and to create authentic and beneficial experiences for budding writers and artists. It's also an opportunity for students to get more involved in the Writing Department, and to learn more about the editorial and submission processes as an undergrad that might help them in later internships or job opportunities. For many writing students at GVSU, becoming published in literary journals can be an important first step in professional publication or even self-publishing.

Compared to national journals, *fishladder* is the best place to start for GVSU students, since it's so accessible and easy to get involved. *Fishladder* provides a great experience for those planning to go into the writing arts, whether it be in a graduate program or as a published author. However, *fishladder* is not limited to those writing and art degree seeking students, as submissions are open to all across disciplines. The journal is also entirely student-run and organized, featuring only student work.

Year after year, hundreds of submissions flow into the hands of the readers and editors of *fishladder*, with a hopeful optimism rooted in the chance to be recognized for their writing. Submissions for the journal open up near the end of the Fall semesters. Students can submit work in either fiction, nonfiction, poetry, photography, and art in all mediums. In the past, *fishladder* has also accepted plays and segments of a student's graphic novel.

Besides submitting work, students can

be involved in *fishladder* in other ways. Applications to be readers or editors for the journal open up at the beginning of every Fall semester. As a reader, students meet with their genre editor and other readers to review and discuss every submission in a workshop style setting. Each piece is carefully considered in deep, intelligent, and thoughtful critique.

Once the pieces are considered and chosen, the editor in chief works with their staff to craft the aesthetic of the publication. This also includes the order of the written pieces, and overall layout and design. All readers, editors, and contributors are formally recognized for their work in each issue.

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**"Our issue this year is kind of grungy or gritty. A lot of the pieces this year are really emotional and vulnerable," said Smith about the chosen pieces, "They're not muted in any way. They're raw and honest."**

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Assistant editor-in-chief Sarah Smith couldn't contain her excitement for this year's edition. "Our issue this year is kind of grungy or gritty. A lot of the pieces this year are really emotional and vulnerable," said Smith about the chosen pieces, "They're not muted in any way. They're raw and honest."

Being involved and or even published in *fishladder* is something any student should be proud of. It's not only a resume builder, or the chance to be a formally published creative writer. As Smith says, "it's helped me realize what I want to do with my writing degree." Smith will be spearheading *fishladder* next year as editor-in-chief, and has been involved since her freshman year as a reader.

Once publishing is finished, *fishladder* holds their annual unveiling party to launch the issue. "The party is so cool because of how each work speaks to each other," says Vega. "We take a lot of pride in *fishladder* as real and valuable experience. At the party, we are honoring and validating the students who made it all possible. Look at this amazing thing you all created."

This year's launch will take place Friday, April 15th in Lake Ontario Hall 174 from 6-8pm. Food and refreshments will be provided, as well as new copies of the issue. Students across campus are invited to attend, especially those who made it into this edition. At the party, these newly published authors will have the opportunity to read their work in an open mic type setting. "It's also a chance for the author or artist to talk about their motivations and inspirations," Vega said, "that's something you can't hashtag in your submission." The unveiling is personally her favorite part because of how all the students, readers, and editors come together to see the finished product.

"Students here are actual writers," Smith added. "And it should be celebrated. We all need to care about that." *Fishladder* makes this a reality as it unfolds a plethora of opportunities for writers. Whether they submit, read for the issue, or help compile it all together, students take away invaluable experience they can translate into life after graduation.

"Every year there's potential for the journal to be different, there's potential to submit a piece, the potential to bolster your confidence in your own writing," said Vega enthusiastically. "And it's the potential to get that experience right in college, here at GVSU."

Students who are interested in participating in *fishladder* can find more information at [fishladder.wordpress.com](http://fishladder.wordpress.com), and can find past issues in the Writing Department main office.

## DRAGER *continued from page 1*

forward. She admits, “I kept asking my philosophy professors if I could write satires and allegories for my final papers ... finally a professor said, ‘have you considered creative writing?’” If only all students’ paths to their majors were so straightforward.

During her time here at GVSU, the Writing Department was still a new concept and, by extension, a new major. Drager marvels that she “thought that if you wanted to write, you studied English.” She wonders at the experience now, that she, “remembers being so interested in a department of active writers—both creative and professional.” She says she used to devote long stretches of time to “reading through literary journals... feeling like I was being offered the most intimate access to the international literary community.”

Drager has now joined this community, both with her work in academia and with her novel. She received residency fellowships to the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, as well as the Vermont Studio Center, and has just recently accepted a job as an Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing at the College of Charleston, in South Carolina. There she

will teach in their renowned MFA program and serve on the masthead of the highly regarded literary journal *Crazyhorse*.

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**“Pursuing the writing life means giving voice to narratives that might not otherwise be heard and, therefore, it is about fostering a sense of empathy.”**

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She connects her current success to her time at GVSU, saying, “of course, working on *fishbladder* and in the Fred Meijer Center were crucial in helping me parlay my desire to be writing.” In light of her teaching position, she reflects that she, “doesn’t really see editing, teaching, and writing as separate ventures.” Instead, she thinks now that the three are “a prism of ways to be a literary

citizen,” and she credits GVSU with this realization.

I asked Drager about the age-old dilemma of writer’s block. She replied, “When I’m facing that sense of defeatism, I ask myself: why must this story be in the world and why must it be here now?” A crucial and inspiring question to shape her frame of mind when writing, the reply suits the nature of her novel. It’s a story full of love, yet it resists the label of a “love story.” The world Drager creates within *The Sorrow Proper* is a complex and beautiful one that will inspire, delight, and ultimately make readers feel.

When asked what has surprised her about her career in writing, Drager replied that what struck her most was the new awareness that “pursuing the writing life means giving voice to narratives that might not otherwise be heard and, therefore, it is about fostering a sense of empathy.”

This pursuit is practically philanthropic, or, as Drager describes, it is “the good work.” Lucky for us, she goes one step further to say that, “we are doing it [the good work] well, with the help of the GVSU Writing Department.”

## PROGRAM *continued from page 7*

it is about a student’s personal portfolio. Clark sums up this important distinction by adding “writers need other writers.”

Shortly following the emergence of a new department all to themselves, writing majors were added the benefit of the Distinction in Writing program to catalyze the often slow-going process of building a portfolio fit for life after graduation.

One such writing major who took advantage of the program was writing alumna Heather Bulliss who claims that for her, after graduation, “it wasn’t about the distinction, but more about the experience.”

A graduate of the class of 2013, Bulliss says as a sophomore, she saw the program not only as an opportunity to showcase her work and develop her skills, but to “have something to show for all the work.” Currently, Bulliss is pursuing a series of small projects that she intends to have published and has taken over as director and editor of the online zine, *The Third Eye*,

which also satisfied one of her Distinction in Writing requirements at GVSU.

Though the program is not an impossible thing to finish, students who get involved during their sophomore year have ample time to not only complete it at a pace that suits them, but to complete it with gusto (and maybe even with time to spare.) Starting is easy and having an advisor at one’s side makes the process smoother. All writing majors have to do is sign an informal intent statement with their writing department advisor and begin strategizing.

For students excited to get started on their own portfolio but wary of what comes after graduation, hearing that things don’t have to be so hard is always a relief. Clark explains that all of these requirements were incorporated into the program in order for it to be versatile and to “have something for everyone.”

## *2016 Distinction in Writing Recipients*

**Annabelle Miller  
Jacqueline Vega**

**Winners of the 2016–2017****WRT Major Scholarships****1st Place:** Teresa Williams**2nd Place:** Andrea Klapp**3rd Place:** Nicole Kariotis**Writing Department  
Award Recipients****Writing Department  
Outstanding Student**

Jackie Vega

**Kenneth R. Venderbush  
Student Leadership  
Award Nominee**

Marcee Wardell

**Glenn A. Niemeyer  
Award Nominee**

Paige Dhyne

**VIRTUAL** *continued from page 7*

and editors made me more aware of the process of publishing and how to better take constructive criticism,” she explains. She has also gained a great mentor in Beaton, who helps and supports her in many ways, from advice on assignments to being a resource

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**“Polasek believes that her experiences at GVSU have given her an advantage; not many universities even have an option for a writing degree.”**

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while she found her second internship.

She is not currently taking the WRT 490 course necessary to fulfill the internship requirement, having taken it previously, but still feels the experience was extremely helpful: “the course gave me more confidence and knowledge to help me move

forward towards my career goals.” She also found it encouraging to witness how many ways a degree in writing can be utilized.

Polasek believes that her experiences at GVSU have given her an advantage; not many universities even have an option for a writing degree. She first realized the significance of this while filling out job applications. “Normally,” she explains, “applications include majors like journalism, communications, English, and graphic design. Thanks to my writing major I’ve experienced all of these divisions of education and many more.” She is excited to see how this will affect these kinds of positions in the future.

Polasek has this advice for students looking for internships: “Whether you’re completing a virtual internship or an internship at an office, it’s really important to understand the culture of the company and be comfortable working within that culture. If you’re passionate about the company you’ll likely enjoy the work you’ll be doing.” Given the success she has achieved in each of her internships, there is clearly truth to her words.

**LONDON** *continued from page 3*

ing a variety of coursework that encourages writing students to be adaptable. She appreciated the fast-paced nature of the coursework at GVSU, which translated over to working for a magazine.

An important skill Williams gained from her internship was brevity. While she feels it was something stressed at GVSU, the nature of magazine writing demands concise and clear language. The first article she wrote had to be cut down from 150 words to just 50. Williams now feels more comfortable cutting unnecessary wording for the sake of clarity.

One of the differences Williams describes

is how the company she worked for gave feedback. Because critique and feedback are key elements in GVSU’s writing classes, Williams expected to receive the same while writing for *Prima Baby*. Instead, she found herself having to ask for critique on her work.

“Any internship is good, but getting into a foreign one changes your perspective,” Williams says. She feels that her internship helped her learn to navigate new company cultures outside of the U.S. Studying abroad for her internship also gave her a sense of independence—something all students will find useful after graduation.

**RUNNING** *continued from page 4*

in her relief, their dedication to the cause shown by how excited they are to help other writers get published. Kenely explains, “It’s always a bit of a boost when we can say yes to someone. Everyone in the room can agree they liked the piece, and you just know it makes the writer feel good to be published.” She adds, “We all understand

how rare and wonderful it is to hear a yes, so we try to say yes as often as we can.”

Copies of the latest issue of *Running Out of Ink* can be found at the Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors and in the Writing Department main office.

# Alumni News

2004

**Cindy Penman Rinna** lives in northern Alabama where she writes about homeschool, autism, and healthy living on her blog “My Life as a Rinnagade.” Last August, she published her first ebook *Welcome to Autism: Empowering Parents of Children with Autism* for Kindle. She also runs a special needs ministry and helps churches start up their own special needs ministries.

2006

**Morgan Sherburne** is a science writer for University of Florida Health, a health science center in Gainesville, Fl. She also freelances for *The Flyfish Journal* and other water-related publications.

2007

**AJ Gretz** graduated from Calvin Seminary with an M.Div in 2013. He currently serves as the Pastor of Community Life at Third CRC in

Kalamazoo, MI. He is married with two children: Eli (3) and Fiona (1). He continues to occasionally write freelance articles and enjoys biking to work as often as possible.

2011

**Meghan McAfee** currently works at the Literacy Center of West Michigan. As the Development Assistant, she plays an active role in the organization’s fundraising and communications efforts. Previously, she served as the Program Director at the Creative Youth Center, where she focused on curriculum development, volunteer management, and program evaluation for youth-oriented creative writing workshops. She also volunteers at T.E.A.M. 21 and Gilda’s Club – Grand Rapids.

2012

**Molly Waite** is working towards her master’s degree in Arts, Literature & Society at Maastricht University in Maastricht, the Netherlands where

she also works as a tutor for the university’s Writing Studio.

2013

**Krisy Force** works for GVC Mortgage in Indiana where she blogs, writes marketing copy, and manages social media for corporate and branch locations. She also writes, edit, and formats policies and procedures for the company.

2014

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

2015

**Rose White** is currently completing her master’s degree in Journalism at the University of the West of England (UWE, Bristol).

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