

IN WRITING

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IN THIS ISSUE



Senior Affiliate Professor Dauvan Mulally and her WRT 120 class forest bathe
(photo: Dauvan Mulally)

WRT 120 is Back to Nature

Simon Kailing

In 2020, our country entered lockdown status due to the COVID-19 virus. That year is scarred indelibly into our personal and cultural memories. COVID-19 changed the way we look at disease and public hygiene. For many, it changed the way we look at life. We think about every breath we take.

We have had to help each other struggle through these last few years. They have been tumultuous, but some good has come out of them. As a society, we are more informed regarding our health and hygiene. Additionally, we pay much more attention to our mental health than we did before the pandemic.

The GVSU Writing Department is taking steps to accommodate the struggles students have been facing for the past couple of years. Senior Affiliate Professor Dauvan Mulally teaches several writing courses, from introductory-level courses to WRT 490, and is the internship coordinator. Mulally saw how the uncertainties that come with being a freshman in college,

such as moving away from home, were compounded by the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic. She mentioned a worrisome amount of mental health issues she saw amongst her students last year, when in-person classes became the norm again. In an effort to help alleviate some of the stress and discomfort that comes from moving to a new environment during such trying times, Mulally crafted a new writing course: Back to Nature.

Back to Nature is a bit different from a typical writing course. It falls under the purview of GVSU's First-Year Learning Community, a program designed for incoming freshmen to ease the transition between their home lives and collegiate life. The program "...consists of pairings of courses that have been developed by faculty to focus on a shared theme." Back to Nature is a pairing of Writing 120: Strategies in Writing (Stretch I) with Integrative Studies 100: Reflect, Connect, Engage.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Simon Kailing
Abigail Gallinger
Torianna Marasco
Ciara Branigan
Kailey Parkins
Lilly Crossley
Mark Lavish
Joi Mays
Alora Bowers
Jacob Roberts
Bailey Wochholz

Faculty's Fascinating Work Outside of the Classroom

Abigail Gallinger



Associate Professor Oindrilla Mukherjee and Visiting Professor Brandon Rushton
(photo: Abigail Gallinger)

Four years of writing and rewriting have culminated in the publication of two GVSU Writing faculty's first books. Associate Professor Oindrilla Mukherjee and Visiting Professor Brandon Rushton are both going through the exciting process of releasing their first books. It was a pleasure talking to both of them about the experiences they have had while living the dream many writers have. The complicated question that aspiring authors have is, how to get to this point in their careers.

The writing process for both GVSU professors was unexplainable at times. Associate Professor Oindrilla Mukherjee's upcoming fictional novel was born out of the ideas from her first attempt at this novel in 2016. After deciding to start over in 2018, the only chapter remaining from the original novel evolved into the first chapter for her novel, *The Dream Builders*, which will be released at Schuler Books in Grand Rapids on January 10th at 7:00 pm. Mukherjee has published

an assortment of short stories and essays, but this is her first novel. This fictional story aims to "capture the contradictions and conflicts" within different cultures.

As a child, Mukherjee moved to several large cities in India and then worked there as a journalist prior to moving to America. Her novel takes place in India and challenges different stereotypes of the country, taking an "ambitious and unusual" twist by using ten different perspectives to highlight complex universal issues. America plays a huge role throughout the plot in the form of globalization and imperialism as the characters go on a journey to understand the complexity of people and places.

Mukherjee explained that, while she had themes and settings in mind, sustaining the plot was difficult, stating, "forward momentum was a challenge for me because I like to describe things and just linger." Even now, with the finished novel, Mukherjee remarked that she could sit and revise it forever. She coined revision as her favorite part of writing as it brings extreme satisfaction when any piece of her work is improved.

As for helpful tips when facing similar issues, she said that "reading books with similar themes, similar voice, and similar structure," can help writers expand on ideas for their own pieces. As her book is getting ready to hit the shelves, she reminisces about her writing process with no regrets, realizing that if she did anything differently she would not have the book that she loves today.

Rushton and Mukherjee both spoke about their creative process with admiration towards every part. For both of them, this was their second attempt at publishing a book. Visiting Professor Brandon Rushton

wrote the poetry for this collection while waiting for a previous poetry collection to be picked up.

Rushton grew up in Michigan but went to Charleston to further his education at the University of South Carolina. He then taught at the College of Charleston between 2016-2020. Rushton's book, *The Air in the Air Behind It*, was released in September 2022. Inspired by the landscapes in South Carolina and Michigan, the poetry in his book dives into how people interact with the environment around them. It is filled with expansive pieces that highlight feelings of bafflement, wonder, distortion, and turbulence. Rushton said, "The book is elusive, it's slippery in the way that it's playing with language." Poetry that leaves the reader speechless and lost in thought is something Rushton has always been fond of, so when creating his own collection he wanted to address complicated issues that would linger with his readers. Though initially inspired by the natural disasters in South Carolina, the poetry is flexible in the way that it can draw attention to other complexities within society and readers' personal lives.

Rushton spoke about how this book was different from his previous one because he put less pressure on himself to churn out poems. While writing this one he "forgot about time," as he allowed the writing process to naturally bring the book to life. He explained any bumps in the road as a "privilege and pleasure to work through." All in all, Rushton reminds students to do what they love, and cherish every part of the process as they move towards both their personal and professional goals.

Professors Rushton and Mukherjee
SEE FACULTY'S WORK ON PAGE 8

Taking Steps and Trying Something New

Torianna Marasco



Kelcey Ervick (photo: Torianna Marasco)

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You'll make discoveries along the way as long as you continue to take that next step.

-Kelcey Ervick

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“Try things out and keep testing yourself,” Kelcey Ervick advised at the GVSU Nonfiction Writer Series Event on November 7th.

Kelcey Ervick is an editor, author, essayist, comic storyteller, and so much more. She is a versatile artist who has tried her hand at many different things, like her latest book *The Keeper: Soccer, Me, and the Law That Changed Women's Lives*. This graphic memoir is unparalleled by anything that she has done before.

The Keeper is Ervick's braided story about her life as a soccer player, a writer, a woman, and a representation of history. This coming-of-age novel about the effect of sports on one girl's life and the evolution of women's history was inspired by Title IX, which prohibits any sex-based discrimination in schools or other educational programs. Since it was established in 1972, it continues to be an important part of women's lives, whether or not we are aware of it. As the 50th anniversary of the civil rights law occurred this year, Ervick sought to release her book to recognize and

celebrate the opportunities she had.

Printed on the front of her novel is a graphic she designed. It is a team of twelve standing on a soccer field. Each “player” is an athlete, artist, politician, etc. from the past 150 years who have contributed to the stretch for women's equality, including Ervick who stands front and center.

Growing up, Ervick did not have to fight for the right to go to school or to be able to participate in extracurricular activities, like soccer. As she writes her memoir, she thought about the times before the law, after the law, and today. “We're all shaped by forces of history,” Ervick said. That history was a piece of the braid throughout her memoir that continued to develop and evolve as it progressed.

“Publish or withhold, the next day you pick up the pen and try again.”

During the development of her novel, Ervick learned to be aware of

her language and passion. Oftentimes, when writing about well-known controversies, like Title IX, the drama of it can start to seep onto the pages. “Be honest for the book and for the reader,” Ervick explained. “There's a way to be honest without having to tell everything, including feelings.”

Another major learning curve she met during production was writing and illustrating simultaneously. As she would quite literally paint the scene, she also had to be aware of the detail she provided in both the script and the graphics. Ervick wrote and deleted, drew and erased, but never gave up on the potential. “It's all part of the process,” she reasoned.

Ervick described that she matured her skills in both art forms in a way that related to going to soccer practice. Win or lose, the next day you'd go to practice and try again. Publish or withhold, the next day you pick up the pen and try again. She encourages young writers to keep testing themselves and to keep practicing. “You'll make discoveries along the way as long as you continue to take that next step,” she claimed.

**Interested in
writing, reviewing,
or copyediting for
InWriting?**

Join us at the first
information meeting
of the Winter 2023
semester in January!

“Harnessing Obsessions” and How Aaron Burch Expanded his Passion of Writing

Ciara Branigan

Founding editor of literary magazine HOBART, Aaron Burch, has done what many aspiring writers want to do: follow their passions. As a literary editor and published writer, Burch began his writing journey with an idea—an idea that began as “an excuse to design something” and “to have fun.” He shared his insights with students on October 6 at the first Grand Valley Writers Series event of the year.

In 2001, Burch’s concept started as a web journal which was a place for him to connect with friends but soon became a place for any writer to join the writing community. Today, it is known as the literary journal HOBART. Burch was excited to “be the vehicle for showing off this writing,” to connect with more people, and to discover exciting pieces of writing. He stated this was “the genesis of what ultimately became this literary journal that [he’s] been editing for 21 years.”

Decades later, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Burch founded another literary journal known as HAD (HOBART After

Dark). Based on a desire to read through writer submissions, HAD developed into a fun, fast-paced journal with spontaneous submission calls for writers to send in their work. Through both HOBART and HAD, Burch has created places for any writer to have their work seen, heard, and published. His story can inspire anyone interested in the publishing world, especially knowing that his experiences as a literary editor inspired him to write as well.

*“...an inspiration
for writers to harness
obsessions and create
something out of them...”*

“I love the act of [writing], I love being part of this community of other writers,” Burch said. Burch has published a few different forms of writing, including his collection of short stories, “Backswing: Stories”, and his most recent book, Year of the Buffalo. His key to finding inspiration for writing comes from “harnessing

things you know you’re obsessed about.”

Burch’s personal passions and interests fueled the process of creating his published works, and he advises other writers to pursue their passions, find inspiration from unexpected places, and try something different.

“Sometimes writing against things is interesting and helpful, too,” Burch said. He described how writers can “be inspired by something that frustrates you or that you want to write against.” Burch encouraged writers to step outside of the box and break expectations for the sake of impressions. Ultimately, he would do what others don’t expect. “It’s a really strong impulse to want to give stories to friends, workshop mates, or whoever to impress them.” Instead, he says to “try something new, weird, and different.”

Burch’s journey in the writing scene is an inspiration for writers to harness their obsessions and create something out of them, to be inspired by others and their own passions, and to step out of their comfort zone when writing becomes difficult.

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“It’s a really strong impulse to want to give stories to friends, workshop mates, or whoever to impress them... [instead] try something new, weird, and different.” -Aaron Burch

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Fiction/Editing Writer Series Event with Aaron Burch (photo: Kylie Jacobsen)

New Faculty Profile: Suzette Bristol

Kailey Parkins



Visiting Professor Suzette Bristol
(photo: Suzette Bristol)

As a Michigan native, Visiting Professor Suzette Bristol has spent a lot of time in the wondrous beauty of the Great Lakes state, attending high school in both Wyandotte and Nashville. After joining the U.S. Army immediately after graduating high school, Bristol decided to pursue her passion: teaching. She began her college education at 30 years old, receiving her BA in English at Wayne State University, her MA in English at Central Michigan University, and her Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Writing Studies also at Wayne State University.

When asked what prompted her to become a professor, Bristol replied, “I love helping students find their voices through writing.” This is indicative of her time spent during her BA as the President of the Wayne Writers’ Forum. This creative writing club produced a chapbook of student writing, where her passion for helping writers originally sparked. Bristol said, “I often find that students lack confidence and believe they are not good writers, but on the contrary, they have all the skills necessary to succeed—they just need someone to guide them.”

While mainly teaching WRT 150: Strategies in Writing here at GVSU, Bristol also focuses on bringing inclusive teaching to her classroom and promoting anti-racist pedagogy in her writing. “It is important to me that we, as instructors, always attempt to stay fluid in our approaches to teaching and keep in mind that no two students are alike.” In addition, Bristol also discussed her passions, specifically clothing in the context of identity and rhetoric. She is currently researching its use in regard to Medieval Literature, examining how clothing spoke for women in the Middle Ages and how clothing can be part of the process of forming an identity. In regards to inclusivity, Bristol said, “It is the heart of my research.”

Bristol has done many Humanities talks at Wayne State University, created tutorials regarding how to teach online, and participated in a few conferences. While she hasn’t had the chance to participate in any GVSU events yet, Bristol said, “This job posting for this position came at a perfect time for me—I feel that teaching at GVSU is broadening my pedagogical approach to teaching, and I will be forever grateful that this position opened at the right time.” Bristol continued, saying that she is excited for the students she will meet and have the pleasure of teaching.

Her advice to writing students is to, “be persistent with your practice, and never stop calling what you do ‘practice’ because no one is ever finished learning.” Bristol ended by emphasizing the importance of taking the time to focus on your skills and being confident in what you do, something that every writing student at GVSU is sure to gain encouragement from.

Celebrating *fishladder*’s 20th Anniversary

Lilly Crossley

fishladder is an annual student-run journal at GVSU, and this year it is celebrating its 20th anniversary. GVSU students can submit their works of fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, art, and photography to be considered for publication in the journal. Professor Todd Kaneko, *fishladder*’s faculty advisor of three years, says, “*fishladder* is a good first step for an undergraduate writer or artist toward getting your work in front of the eyes of a public audience.”

Staff members, who are also GVSU students, work together in groups of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and art, and read the submissions that correlate with their genre. Meetings are then held by each group to discuss which entries will be published in the journal. There are many editorial roles, such as editor-in-chief, assistant editor, and layout editor, along with an editor and assistant editor in each genre group. These editors work on the layout and design, and the final product is published in April of the same academic year. “Working with students is my favorite thing about working on *fishladder*. I like helping them get started editing and articulating their editorial visions. It’s exciting and cool to see people grow into their positions and grow as editors,” says Kaneko. *fishladder* is a wonderful opportunity to engage in collaborative work, and it encourages all the different voices of GVSU’s community to be heard.

Here’s to another 20 years!

To Minor or Not To Minor

Mark Lavish

The deliberation a student puts into deciding their major is often astronomical, but what about their minor? Students will typically pursue careers based on their major, but their minor can be just as important in deciding the field they will go into. For writing majors, a well-chosen minor can have a significant impact in expanding one's degree and career path as well as in expanding one's understanding of themselves and their relationship with writing.

One reason to choose a minor is simply to fulfill career requirements. Many employers, including those in the writing industry, prefer to hire a candidate with experience in a related industry. Technical writers are often hired because of their expertise in the fields they are writing about. For example, somebody writing in the computer science industry would preferably have a minor in computer science—at the very least, they should have programming experience.

When I first enrolled at GVSU, I was majoring in psychology with a minor in writing purely because of my interest in psychology as a discipline. After completing two years, I was no longer interested in the practical application of psychology, but I was still interested in the industry as a whole. My writing minor became my foremost passion and career choice—technical writing in particular—leading to my now writing major. Being knowledgeable of psychology provided me with the opportunity to work toward a career in technical writing in a psychological institution. Because of my major-minor switch, I feel more confident entering the psychology industry while emphasizing writing.

For many students, however, their minor was chosen via trial by fire, such as Maddie C., a sophomore writing major who is minoring in

anthropology. Maddie began as an anthropology major with a minor in writing since she was interested in the biological side of the discipline; however, once she got to the cultural side, her interest shifted.

"I was not having that," Maddie chuckled shamelessly. Having to interview people—particularly to research various cultures—was not her strong suit. Now, as a writing major, her experience with shifting her major has helped refine that career path. She now knows that she is not interested in journalism, but that is probably something she could have learned the hard way without her brief stint in anthropology. If anything, she is more drawn to writing and its possibilities than ever before. "I see myself doing [writing] for the rest of my life," Maddie commented.

Since she had already completed a handful of anthropology credits, Maddie decided that she would swap her major and minor. Fortunately,

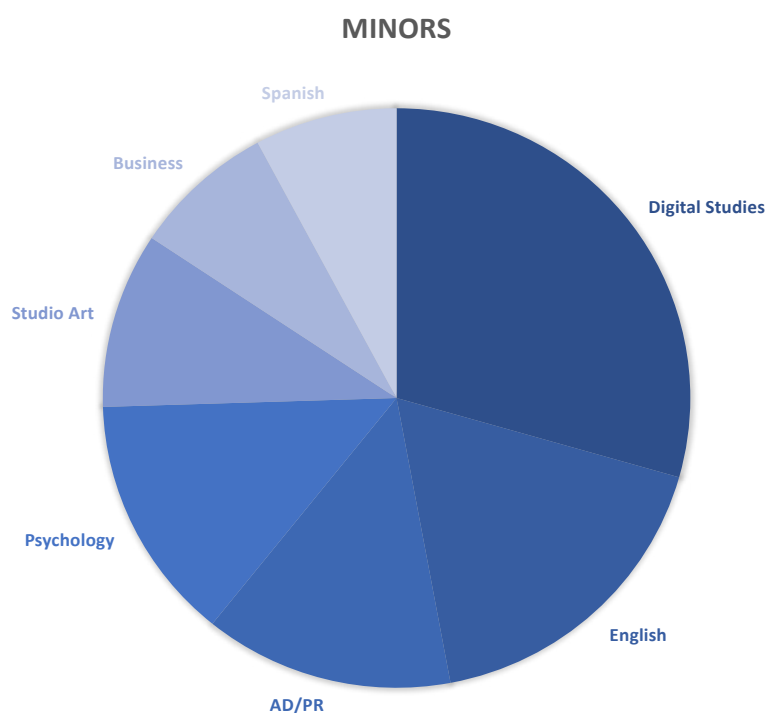
anthropology is a discipline that requires storytelling in order to convey findings, so writing is innately built into the field. Now, she only has elective credits to fulfill for her minor, allowing her to focus mostly on writing classes, which is her true passion.

In the same vein, junior Megan V. began as a finance major with a writing minor, later swapping the two after experiencing a glimpse into her future by working as a financial advisor when she was a sophomore.

"Talking about finances is stressful," Megan bluntly stated. "And when people aren't happy with my advice, I don't respond well to that."

Fortunately, Megan discovered shortly thereafter that writing is a big factor for her own happiness—and it has already proven to be better money. She has been working as a freelance writer via Upwork, a service for freelancers in fields such as

SEE TO MINOR... ON PAGE 12



A breakdown of minors declared by Writing majors. Chart excludes any minors that 3 or fewer Writing majors declared (design: Torianna Marasco)

Popular Minors for Writing Majors at GVSU

Torianna Marasco and Alora Bowers

Writing is an expansive major with several directions to go in. Choosing a minor in one field or another can lead students onto a path of their own within or relating to writing. These minors can help them pursue their career of choice by providing more about their interest.

As of fall 2022, there were a total of 148 writing majors, and 83 have declared at least one minor. The most popular minors include Digital Studies, English, Advertising and Public Relations, Psychology, and Studio Art. Some of the InWriting staff conducted a survey asking writing majors with declared minors to provide insight on their choice of a minor. Students who replied are studying in several different fields as well as writing. Along with the top three chosen minors for writing majors, below are quotes from students with an array of minors.

DIGITAL STUDIES

"I chose digital studies because we live in an increasingly digital age. I think that being able to analyze different platforms and content is an important part of being able to write for specific audiences..."

- Abbie Scott

"I came to Grand Valley because I really liked the digital studies program. I always knew that was what I wanted my minor to be; it wasn't until later freshman year that I declared a writing major."

- Rebecca Damuth

"...being a Digital Studies minor has made me a more ethical, digitally literate, and conscious writer. I can examine structures such as search engines and algorithms for biases, understand and represent ethical data, and write using a wide array of digital tools."

- Audrey Kelly

"I feel like the skills I've learned from my digital studies courses have helped me adapt well to learning how to write online..."

- Hannah Applebee

ENGLISH

"My English minor has actually helped me better understand the nuances of writing styles and techniques...I believe that by learning more about English I will become a better writer." - Macey Dykema

"Having the background into how to do close readings, grammar, the foundations of what English even is, will be beneficial to editing books and picking which manuscripts have the greatest potential."

- Ashley Rhein

"...as a writer, it is important to understand how our works will be looked at by our readers and the different ways they will analyze our stories."

- Holly Derylo

OTHER

"...my philosophy minor. Developing critical tools for approaching myself and the world in an open-minded way is allowing me to write in a newly transcendent freeing way...viewing [writing] through an advanced philosophical lens will seemingly bring me closer to my source of creativity."

- Carol Miller (Philosophy minor)

"I was uncertain of where I wanted to go with my degree; either going into graphic design or writing. I realized that I would find writing more fulfilling as a job, so I set that as my major."

- Katherine Heil (Studio Art minor)

"With my nonprofit administration minor, I want to learn all the information on how to be in a nonprofit to help those without the resources they need...Maybe I will combine my writing major and nonprofit administration minor knowledge and become a grant writer."

- Heather Doll (Nonprofit Administration minor)

"I think this can go hand in hand with writing because I can write about what I capture. Or if I need pictures for an article I can get high quality pictures of my own."

- Caleb Maser (Photography minor)

AD/PR

"The end goal is to become an author, and with the rise in technology being a way to promote books and such, I believe having advertising and public relational skills will be very beneficial."

- Lilly Crossley

"...part of what I want to do is help public relations agencies cultivate the right voice to fit not only the company, but the clientele they choose to work with."

- Kaitlin Ambuehl

New Faculty Profile: Andrew Collard

Joi Mays



Andrew Collard (photo: andrewcollard.com)

In GVSU's Writing Department, there is no shortage of professors who strive to provide professional insight and guidance about writing to their students. Visiting Professor Andrew Collard is one of many writing professors who aim to do just that. Although this is his first year here at GVSU, Collard is already making a splash in the broad Laker community.

Collard is a Michigan native whose love for writing has always stuck with him. "I started writing my own lyrics when I was a little kid and that continued into high school," Collard said. "It just felt really natural to move on to poetry." Poetry remains the professor's genre of choice when it comes to writing. It has become a habit for him, something that he has done to fill in his downtime from back in high school to when he worked the front desk at a hospital and especially now. His love for poetry has carried him from an undergraduate degree in English to a recently earned Ph.D. in Poetry, both from Western Michigan University.

Determined to stay close to his home in Grand Rapids, Collard came to GVSU to teach WRT 150: Strategies in Writing. This course is

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With the seventy-five different students he teaches, he sees seventy-five different learning styles, stories to listen to, and ways to empower.

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where students transition from high school-level writing to college-level writing, a change that is anxiety-inducing for those who are going through it. Collard navigates this worry with his classes by emphasizing and encouraging students' individual perspectives and their developing journey with the writing process. He places a large value on having the opportunity to help students develop their own writing practices. "To be able to work on the process is really rewarding," Collard said. This investment in the students' process influences his interest in the unique perspectives each of his students has on writing. With the seventy-five different students he teaches, he sees seventy-five different learning styles, stories to listen to, and ways to empower.

"To [Collard], writing is something that can be greatly enriched through collaboration..."

Something that Collard invests in, both in and outside of his classes, is the power of collaboration in writing.

To him, writing is something that can be greatly enriched through collaboration with peers, mentors, and mentees. He knows that if people feel inclined to write, whichever genre that may be, they should feel free to be open to talking about their work with the people around them. "Writing is thought of as an act of solitude instead of an act of community," he said, "I don't ever really think that we're writing in isolation."

Keep an eye out for Professor Collard's debut poetry collection: *Sprawl*. *Sprawl* is a Hollis Summers poetry prize-winning collection that takes place predominantly in the Metro Detroit area with themes of single fatherhood, economic disparity, and how history haunts and lingers as one grows up. Published by Ohio University Press, the collection will be out in March 2023.

FACULTY'S WORK

Continued from page 2

are two out of the several faculty members who are working on amazing things outside of the classroom. Rushton stressed that writers cannot force the creation of content and that everyone has their own timeframe to accomplish things as "there's no time limit." Mukherjee urges young writers to simply write a book, and, "if it's not good, to write another one." If you want to be a writer, Mukherjee advises not to "wait for someday," but rather to make the time and start your journey by reading and writing now. Both professors urge the GVSU writing community to reach out to others in the community, especially faculty, who are filled with intelligent individuals that each have valuable and unique experiences to learn from and understand.

Taking Control of Your Creativity with Self-publishing

Alora Bowers

Self-publishing is lightly touched on in the Writing Department's curriculum, however, for aspiring published authors, self-publishing is often a popular option. It is an alternative to sending manuscripts to a "slush pile" of entries for publishing companies or hoping to get an agent, and instead taking things into your own hands. This includes Kimberly Burnham and Van Allen Plexico, who spoke at a Writer's Series Event about self-publishing in October.

Kimberly Burnham, Ph.D. (Integrative Medicine) is a poet whose writing focuses on health and wellness. Her latest work of fiction is *The Red Sunflower Diaries, Why Everyone Should Garden and Share Seed*. Like this novel, most of her books are self-published.

Another author who believes in the power of self-publishing is Van Allen Plexico, a professor of Political Science and History at Southwestern Illinois College. He focuses on writing pulp, a genre about "fast pacing, colorful characters, and colorful action." Plexico's frequently asked self-publishing question is how much money goes into self-publishing a book. He shared that in reality, he pays almost nothing at all.

About 20 years ago, there became a shift in self-publishing with the advent of publishing on demand—meaning books were not getting printed unless already ordered. "That way everything you earn through sales is yours," Plexico explained. He shared that even getting artwork done can be low cost by being in communities dedicated to self-publishing novels within a specific genre.

When discussing potential disadvantages to self-publishing, Burnham shared there were almost none. "The only disadvantage is that you have a little better edge

of getting into physical brick and mortar stores and if you want your book to be translated and distributed internationally, there could be some advantages in traditional publishing." However, she went on to explain that if you self-publish in English on Amazon, then your book is still available internationally.

Something that often causes people to draw away from self-publishing is the possibility of losing out on the promotional opportunities that a publishing company provides. Regardless, Plexico stated, "Bigger publishers are publishing a lot of things at the same time and you're losing a fraction of their operation, whereas you're gaining all of yours." Burnham added, "Traditional publishers don't actually do that much for you in terms of promotion, you mostly have to do it yourself anyway."

Online communities are a huge part of self-publishing and can be used to lower production costs, get reviews and feedback for your work, and help with promoting your book once it's been published. However, being online isn't entirely necessary.

Burnham shared how she promotes her books out in the real world, "You can think about offline groups that are related to your book." Since her latest book is related to gardening, she has gone to garden stores and shops and asked if they would carry her book. "The most important thing is for people to see your book. That's how it can make its way into the world," she said.

Also discussed were getting from the final manuscript to the physically published book, finding self-publishing groups and a community, and more. Anyone who is interested in publishing would benefit from watching the entire panel. The full recorded virtual panel on self-publishing is available through the Writing Department at: <https://www.gvsu.edu/writing/gv-writers-series-zoom-recording-100.htm>

"Online communities are a huge part of self-publishing...[but] aren't entirely necessary."



Van Allen Plexico (photo: Van Allen Plexico)



Kimberly Burnham (photo: Kimberly Burnham)

New Faculty Profile: James Champion

Jacob Roberts



Visiting Professor James Champion
(photo: Jacob Roberts)

Visiting Professor James Champion is one of GVSU's newest faculty currently working as a member in the Writing Department. Professor Champion earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Writing at Central Michigan University. Previously working as a high school English teacher before coming to GVSU, Professor Champion explained that his reasoning for leaving was because "there was a complete disconnect from administrations. Something [he hasn't] felt here."

Upon his arrival, Professor Champion has been warmly welcomed by fellow staff members and students. He stated, "Everyone in the department is really nice and I feel that they respond very well to collaboration. They are also very empathetic, and I was surprised at how fast other professors would email me back on questions I had." He further elaborated by explaining, "It

is so much easier to walk across the hall and knock on my neighbor's door and chat with them. Rather than high school where everything feels rushed."

Professor Champion is currently teaching WRT 120 and 130: Strategies in Writing (Stretch I and II), which is something that caught his eye and convinced him to visit GVSU. He explained, "GVSU's approach to beginning writing, to me, is new. I don't think I've seen that at any other college." He later went on to say, "It seems to be really helpful for students who are unfamiliar with college writing and for students who work part-time jobs. It adds a more human dimension to teaching writing."

"...first-year writing students come in expecting to be lectured at, so it's hard for them...to talk to each other and to me."

He appreciates GVSU's new and creative approach to bringing incoming freshmen up to college speeds and standards while also allowing for a more creative approach that interests the students more. Professor Champion stated, "I try to emphasize community, collaboration, group work, and group activities." He claimed it is something that works to try and ease the freshmen into college-level writing. "I think that first-year writing students come in expecting to be lectured at, so it's hard for them to get over that expectation and talk to each other and me."

Compared to his former high school students, he also appreciates

the maturity and professional approaches that the university's freshmen have given him so far, commenting, "In general, it is much easier to teach students who care a little more about their education." Professor Champion has a more open approach to his teachings, often allowing for more creative freedom for freshmen to become more involved and invested in their works. "I think that students feel that college writing is boring and it's hard for them to see that writing can be fun and interesting sometimes," he said.

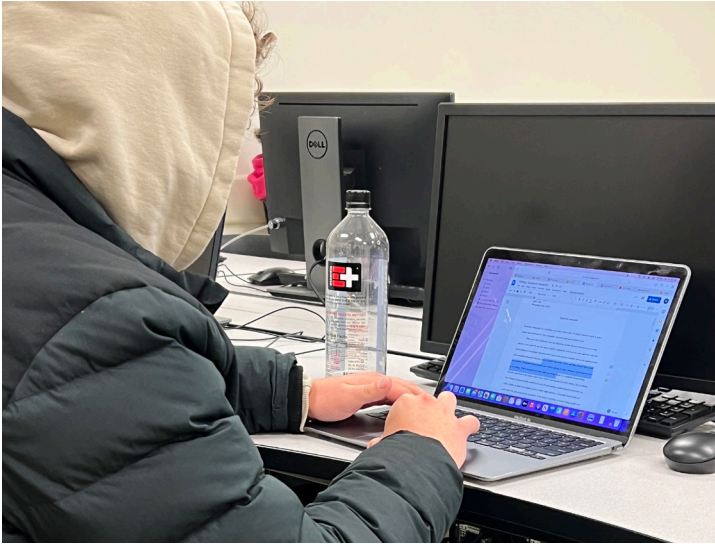
In addition to being a GVSU Visiting Professor, Champion also practices his own writing outside of the classroom, including different published works of poetry. One example is his work can be seen in the South Florida Poetry Journal. His poem is called "Inventing the Veil," which was published in tandem with other poets to create the theme of "Just Say Gay."

Champion explained that the poem was written during time he set aside for writing. He said, "On the morning I wrote 'Inventing the Veil' I just felt like I got lucky, like the lines were already written in me and I just had to locate them and transfer them onto paper." While reading a lot of Robin Robertson at the time, Champion feels that may have helped shape the writing as well. "I normally try to start with an image, this poem was different in that way" he concluded.

The link to the "Just Say Gay" project can be found below.
<https://www.southfloridapoetryjournal.com/just-say-gay.html>

Increased Enrollment in WRT 120

Bailey Wochholz



“

More students are finding that they would prefer to complete their first-year writing requirement over two semesters, [WRT 120 and 130], rather than the single-semester course, WRT 150.

”

WRT 120 student reworking their paper in class (photo: Alora Bowers)

For a first-year college student, especially one who is fresh out of high school, it can be difficult to know what is expected and how to feel confident enough to succeed in college. As such, GVSU's Writing Department has seen an unprecedented increase in enrollment in WRT 120: Strategies in Writing (Stretch I) for Fall 2022, the first stretch of a two-course alternative to WRT 150: Strategies in Writing. A greater number of students have begun to see it as an appealing alternative for completing their writing requirements.

Associate Professor Amy Ferdinandt Stolley, GVSU's Director of First-Year Writing, worked closely with the creation of WRT 120 and 130. The classes first launched in the Fall 2020 semester. Since then, they have seen an increase in demand, resulting in the addition of more class sections. “We know that learning has been disrupted for students in the last three years, with COVID and remote schooling,” Stolley said. “I think students feel like they didn't get what they needed out of high school and want more time to finish their writing requirements.”

More students are finding that they would prefer to complete their first-year writing requirements over two semesters, rather than the single-semester course, WRT 150. WRT 120 has offered students an opportunity to work at a relaxed pace, giving them more time to receive help based on their individual needs. This includes support from faculty, the Writing Center, and research consultants. Additionally, smaller class sizes allow for the experience to be more individualized.

Stolley explained that surveys have been conducted over the past two years of students' experiences with the new courses. “A very large majority of students report that they're satisfied—that they're happy with the two-course sequences rather than the one.” In addition to that, students also mention that they have gained skills and confidence in their writing.

Before the introduction of these new courses, students who did not feel prepared for college-level writing would begin with WRT 098, a class that was intended to prepare students for WRT 150, but the credits did not count towards graduation. Like

many of GVSU's departments, the Writing Department has adopted the policy that students deserve to earn college credit for their effort, so 0-level courses are being phased out.

Students who still need to complete their first-year writing requirements should take into consideration which option would be best suited to them. WRT 150 is a one-semester, four-credit course that is focused on teaching students the academic research and writing skills that they will need in order to be successful in college. WRT 120 and 130 take the WRT 150 curriculum and stretch it over two semesters. They are each worth three credits. Both WRT 150 and 130 will expect students to turn in a portfolio of polished papers at the end of the semester. The registration page under My Banner will offer more detailed information on the differences between these courses.

Regardless of the student's choice of how they want to complete their writing requirement, GVSU's Writing Center is an invaluable resource. It is located in Lake Ontario Hall Room 120.

BACK TO NATURE

Continued from page 1

INT 100 is an introductory class designed to introduce students to the value of liberal education and the critical thinking skills it offers. The combination course, Back to Nature, is taught jointly by Professors Dauvan Mulally and Darien Ripple. They each handle their side of the class individually: Mulally teaches WRT 120 and Ripple teaches the INT 100 material. In addition to the typical content in each half, the classes are enhanced by the addition of supplemental instruction on the topics of stress management and environmental awareness.

Throughout the Fall 2022 semester, Professor Mulally introduced her students to the concepts of yoga, mindfulness, and Shinrin-Yoku—the Japanese practice of forest bathing. Students are also introduced to ecological literacy and stewardship. Professor Mulally said, “it’s really important for this age group...statistics show we’re more detached from nature than ever before.”

Mulally brought in experts in environmentalism to visit her class such as personnel from GVSU’s Office of Sustainability Practices, the Annis Water Resources Institute, local PFAS activists, and the Environmental and Climate Justice Specialist with the City of Grand Rapids. Her WRT 120 class also volunteered at the SAP (Sustainable Agricultural Project) for Make a Difference Day harvesting food for a local urban farm and learning about sustainable farming practices. They also had Allysa Babcock, Aramark’s Sustainability Manager come to talk about campus waste.

In addition to the first-year writing skills taught to all college freshmen, Back to Nature introduces students to the importance of relaxation, self-care, and environmental awareness. In an age where our bodies, our minds, and

our planet are all being overloaded by the rigor of modern life, these areas of knowledge have never been more important. In many ways, Back to Nature feels less like an introduction to college life than it does like an introduction to just...adult life, where you have to be able to communicate, take care of yourself, and watch out for the things that are important to you. It sounds like an excellent class; the kind everybody should surely consider taking.

TO MINOR...

Continued from page 6

writing and computer programming to promote their services. Through Upwork, Megan has experienced technical writing work by writing testing questions for various universities. Without her experience as a financial advisor, Megan might not have pursued writing as a career.

Sometimes, it takes trial and error to find that certain majors are better as minors and vice versa, depending on the person. However, that is surely not to say it is a waste of time. In my case, I still plan to pursue a career in the psychology industry as a technical writer. Like Maddie, she not only learned that she wants to be a writer, which is a broad discipline in itself, but she was able to narrow it down based on her background in anthropology. And for Megan, although finance has little to do with her writing major, she has been able to experience actual, practical work in both finance and writing. Whichever major or minor one chooses, the experience gained is what matters.

***fishladder* Submissions
of Fiction, Non-fiction,
Poetry, and Art are Due
by Dec. 16**

INWRITING

Fall 2022

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