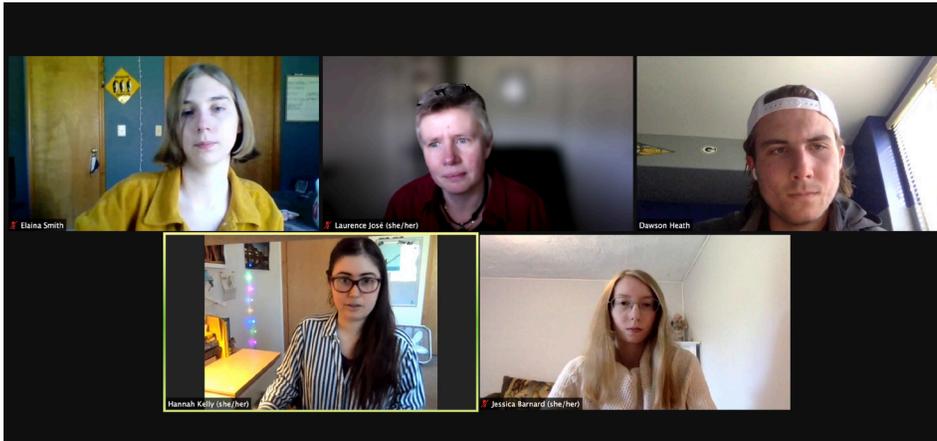


IN WRITING

Grand Valley Writing Department | Winter 2021 | Vol. 15.1

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An OPW e-board meeting via Zoom (photo: Laurence Jose)

Writing Clubs Adapt to Pandemic Times

Elaina Smith

There's no doubt that life looks different this year for GVSU students. Most classes are now being held online, and the same is happening for student organizations. Because of this, club leaders have had to accommodate their organizations to fit the digital setting, which includes finding ways to make meetings and events happen over Zoom so that students could still participate while remaining safe. *Fishladder* and the Organization of Professional Writers are two Writing Department organizations that have adapted to the challenges of meeting in the age of COVID-19.

Prior to the pandemic, both clubs met mostly in person. *Fishladder*, GVSU's literary journal that publishes art and writing from students, only meets a few times a year: once for an all-staff meeting, and then each genre group has their own meetings to decide which pieces will be published in the journal. Because these meetings

are discussion-based, Editor-in-Chief Amanda Pszczolkowski envisioned the transition to be smooth, noting that everything essentially stayed the same online. She stated that Zoom meetings might make discussions "a little more clunky than an in-person conversation would be, but I think at this point everyone is getting used to the norms of talking over Zoom."

The Organization of Professional Writers (OPW) is a writing club that organizes networking events and fireside chats with alumni and other professionals. While some of their previous guest speakers gave talks through video calls, most of these events happened in person prior to the pandemic. Now, OPW continues to host events and bi-weekly meetings, but it is all online. Co-President Hannah Kelly says: "While [the transition] is not ideal, I think we've made the most of it, and we

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The Realities of Writing

Lidia Vesterfelt



Colin Rafferty (photo: Colin Rafferty)

When most people think of a writer, they imagine someone who spends most, if not all, of their time in the act of putting words down on the page. This stereotypical figure usually writes in fancy notebooks with expensive pens, and they do not struggle to write for “it comes naturally” to them. At the second GV Writers Series event this year, essayist Colin Rafferty proved all of these stereotypes wrong by talking to students and faculty about the realities of writing.

As he sat at his desk in Richmond, VA over Zoom, Rafferty read several essays from his new book *Execute the Office*. Each essay is devoted to a different United States President. According to Rafferty, the purpose of *Execute the Office* was to “mess around with what nonfiction could be.” It is clear that he was able to achieve this; the essays are a brilliant combination of history and humanity, and they carry a modern conversational tone

with important figures of the past. Writing these essays wasn’t an easy process for Rafferty, and he willingly conveyed this to his audience of enraptured listeners. Rafferty joked that writing a presidential essay about Donald Trump was like “nailing jello to a wall . . . messy and hard to do.” Other famous presidents such as Arthur and Washington were also hard to write, some of them even requiring full rewrites before they were published.

“Always leave space to be surprised in the act of writing.”

After reading his essays, Rafferty answered questions and described his

experiences as a writer, which were also honest and realistic. Originally, the essayist did try to write every single day; however, this didn’t work out. Now, instead of trying to plan a time to write, he steals time whenever he can. While he’s prepared with a notebook and pen, they are nothing fancy. Rafferty explained that he doesn’t like writing in special notebooks because they’re too nice and he doesn’t want to ruin them, which generated many knowing smiles and nods of agreement across the Zoom screen.

Rafferty also acknowledged the isolation that can come from being a writer. “Writing is a lonely thing,” he explained. Sometimes writers have to make sacrifices such as turning down a night out with friends or avoiding the internet in order to get work done. On top of this, nonfiction writing especially involves a lot of fact-checking and potentially “depressing reading.” However, these drawbacks don’t keep Rafferty from trying to be the best writer he can be. “Always leave space to be surprised in the act of writing,” he advised.

Rafferty’s honesty about the realities of writing is extremely important, especially considering the current state of the world. With the coronavirus pandemic making most work virtual, creativity for many has been difficult and has sometimes even halted. Rafferty reminds us that even if we aren’t writing every single day or are struggling with the loneliness that our job brings, we aren’t failures; we are simply pushing through the obstacles that come from being a writer. Although writing is not an easy task, great things can come of it, and we can bond through the struggles as much as we can bond through the success.

Looking for Poetry in All the Right Places

Chiara Nicholas



“

We don't see a lot of portraits of marriage in the longer term . . . What if we get to the 'I don't want you to touch me' phase?

”

Rebecca Hazelton (photo: Rebecca Hazelton)

“You can find poetry anywhere,” poet Rebecca Hazelton reflected, in response to a student’s question during the Q&A portion of her craft talk for the GVSU Writers Series during the Winter 2021 semester. This is clearly true for Hazelton who strongly voiced her love for “deep Wikipedia dives” where she finds much of the inspiration for her quirky voice and style of poetry.

Hazelton is an accomplished poet, editor, writer, and critic with her work currently published in magazines such as *POETRY*, *The New Yorker*, and *Boston Review*. Although Hazelton has a non-conventional style and a whimsical way of writing, her poetry is incredibly thought-provoking and touches on many important issues in today’s society. A majority of the poems she shared

during the reading were from her latest book, *Gloss*, which was published in 2019. She is currently working on yet another book of poetry (her seventh) which investigates the husband’s role in a contemporary marriage.

“Sometimes creativity lags, but it will come back with new inspiration and perhaps an even stronger voice than ever.”

Observing relationships in a realistic sense, rather than the

traditional sappy love poems, is a theme in Hazelton’s poetry. As she says, “We don’t see a lot of portraits of marriage in the longer term . . . What if we get to the ‘I don’t want you to touch me’ phase?” In her poem, “Self Portrait as the Good Wife,” Hazelton uses the unusual setting of a law firm to compare romantic relationships to those of associates and partners. One of the most profound insights from this poem is the comparison of withholding evidence in a court to not understanding the subtext of a romantic partner’s words.

Hazelton’s poetry reading was followed with a craft talk in which she answered various questions from GVSU faculty and students, and provided insights about writing. In response to where she likes to write, Hazelton believes that the best place to write is in any space that a writer can make their own and feel comfortable in. Another question asked was about her writing routine. To this, Hazelton provided encouragement and shared that she may sit down and try to write for a couple hours, but the first half hour might be some really bad stuff. That’s okay. In fact, it’s normal. All “bad” writing will eventually lead to a great idea and/or a polished piece.

Another difficult truth she has had to accept as a writer is that she is not writing much this year because she feels the need to process what is happening before she writes about it. With the weekly changes and adaptations due to COVID-19, Hazelton stresses the need for self-care and to not worry if you are not currently writing. It is a reminder to us, as writers, that sometimes the creativity lags, but it will come back with new inspiration and perhaps an even stronger voice than ever.

A UX Designer's Advice for Current Writing Students

Dawson Heath



“
Certifications can be a less intense alternative to a rigorous graduate school program.
 ”

Matt Russell (photo: Matt Russell)

As Writing majors, one of the questions we get the most is, “What are you planning on doing with your degree?” One career most people may not think of is user experience (UX) design. On November 20, 2020, I had the pleasure of running a Q&A session through GVSU’s Organization for Professional Writers (OPW) with Matt Russell, a GVSU Writing alumnus who is a UX designer based in Chicago. I opted to participate in the Writing Department’s Laker Alumni Mentoring Pilot (LAMP) program, which focuses on providing mentorship for current students, and was paired up with Matt as my mentor. Throughout the duration of the LAMP Program, he gave me lots of great advice and helped me realize that the variety the Writing major provides students allows them to have autonomy in pursuing a career.

During the Q&A session, we learned about Matt’s impressive academic and professional career.

He completed his undergraduate degree at GVSU and was one of the founding members of OPW. This was back when there were two tracks within the Writing Department: professional and creative writing. After GVSU, Matt attended graduate school at Clemson in a program focused on professional communication and design. He began his professional career working on UX projects for IHG, a multinational hotel company, and now works for Boston Consulting Group (BCG), one of the world’s three largest consulting firms by revenue. BCG is also considered one of the most prestigious consulting firms in the world.

Matt was a gracious interviewee and provided a ton of incredibly insightful advice for current students about graduate school, hunting for jobs, and the limitless possibilities of the Writing major. Regarding graduate school and whether or not one should attend, Matt said that

students should remember there are certifications available, (at least for UX) and that certifications can be a more flexible and less intense alternative to a rigorous graduate school program.

Hunting for jobs is intimidating, especially coming right out of college. Matt’s biggest piece of advice for finding and capitalizing on job opportunities was to always have portfolios updated and ready to send. The same goes for LinkedIn, resumes, and cover letters—it is important to be able to adapt quickly when an opportunity presents itself. It will take a significant amount of work and time to get these resources ready, but once you do, it will make job hunting easier. Something I hadn’t considered until our conversation was the importance of keeping up with professional relationships. Staying in touch with old professors or colleagues is a good thing because if an opportunity becomes available, they may reach out to you to see if you’re interested.

As Writing majors, we’re familiar with the rhetorical triangle and the importance of understanding and justifying the decisions we make when communicating. Matt stressed the importance of this skill, as well as its wide application to so many different career fields and situations. It’s important to recognize the value of the skills we hone throughout our journey in the Writing major.

If you’re interested in more events like this, reach out to OPW about opportunities to participate in this organization, and check out the blog site at:

<https://opw.departmentofwriting.org/>.

Intercultural Competence Badge and Increasing Student Awareness

Katherine Arnold



Assistant Professor Andrea Riley-Mukavetz
(photo: Andrea Riley-Mukavetz)

What does it mean to learn how to interact with cultures, personalities, and opinions different from your own? For many, it isn't always an easy feat to understand how we can navigate a world of differences where everyone has their own experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives. In fact, it is for this very purpose that the subject of intercultural competence has become so important for people to not only use, but to fundamentally understand.

The Writing Department and Integrative, Religious, and Intercultural Studies Department (IRIS) have come together to provide a chance for students to earn the Intercultural Competence Badge, which leads students through important discussions about how to navigate a world full of intercultural moments and challenges.

Assistant Professor of IRIS and Program Coordinator of the badge, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, believes the importance and significance behind intercultural competence is trying to understand those different from ourselves. "I think of intercultural competence as a set of practices and belief systems that are used to tend to communities, think about liberation and justice work, and also to think about how to communicate effectively, intentionally, and thoughtfully in diverse settings," Riley-Mukavetz explained.

The Intercultural Competence Badge program was initially instated a few years ago, and students are able to earn a badge or certificate depending on the level of credits they can fit into their schedules. The badge curriculum was just updated this year to include ITC 100: Introduction to Intercultural Competence, WRT 354: Writing in the Global Context, and ITC 490: Practicum in Intercultural Competence.

"When we think about cultural competency, it is fundamentally about how we engage, listen, and work with people, so it is suited to pretty much any student. Any job that interacts with communities can benefit from this intentional focus on how to communicate well and thoughtfully," said Riley-Mukavetz.

When she imagined this program, she took the time to think about not only the students who are required or recommended to take it, such as nursing, law, and allied health majors, but also other areas of study like writing, marketing, and business management. "Many majors can benefit from thinking about how to best represent their brand and be

culturally appropriate in their work," Riley-Mukavetz explained. "The goal is to have folks think about how to best use it for their personal and professional roles. We ask students how they are going to make it the most useful and meaningful for them." Many students are able to incorporate intercultural competence into their own professional plan no matter what major they are studying. In terms of writing, intercultural competence provides a better understanding of audience and encourages respect for other cultures. For any profession, this respect and knowledge will contribute to a skillset based on communication and professionalism.

"I think of intercultural competence as a set of practices and belief systems that are used to tend to communities"

One student who successfully completed the certificate program last Fall is Gregory Goodwine, a senior at GVSU majoring in Allied Health Sciences with a minor in Environmental Sustainability Studies. His interest in the program arose from his work in the health and environment fields, which would benefit greatly from an understanding of other communities. "To me, intercultural competence is knowledge about other people's lives; whether we are talking about sexual orientation, gender, religion, class, or

SEE BADGE ON PAGE 11

New Faculty Profile: Brandon Rushton

Jessica Sroczyński



“

No matter what field you are working in, the way to contribute something is through writing.

”

Brandon Rushton (photo: Tupelo Press)

Visiting Professor Brandon Rushton grew up on the Eastside of Michigan, where he attended Saginaw Valley State University. Like many undergraduates, Rushton was unsure of where he wanted to go from there. At the time, he surely could not imagine he would end up at the “rival valley” GVSU; what he was sure of, however, was that he wanted to spend the rest of his life in a classroom. So, he set out to achieve just that. In pursuing this goal, Rushton’s passion for writing took over, and the uncertainty of his future slowly faded as he allowed his writing to pave a clearer path for him ahead.

Rushton spent his undergrad years writing all of the time, and ultimately ended up at the University of South Carolina, where he earned his MFA with a focus in poetry. He then taught first year writing courses and poetry workshops at the College of Charleston. There, Rushton spent much of his time wandering the city, and found himself struck by the proliferation of construction, development, and tourism initiatives. He wondered why it was that

architects built the buildings he saw in the ways that they did. It was this kind of deliberation that led to the creation of Rushton’s poetry manuscript, *The Air in the Air Behind It*.

By looking at the development and proliferation happening in that community, he found that while things are often built under the guise of newness, they are really only ever built for development’s sake. What Rushton sought out to do was “build a sense of newness” with language, to create openness instead of closing one in. He earned the Tupelo Press Berkshire Award for his work, with judge Bin Ramke describing it as, “a book of consolations, open and inviting and yet as mysterious as fog, and as nurturing to a parched landscape.”

At Charleston, in addition to finding inspiration for his poetry manuscript, Rushton learned of the Writing Department here at GVSU. While previously familiar with GVSU, he was unfamiliar with the University’s Writing Department. After being away from Michigan for so long, joining GVSU felt like coming

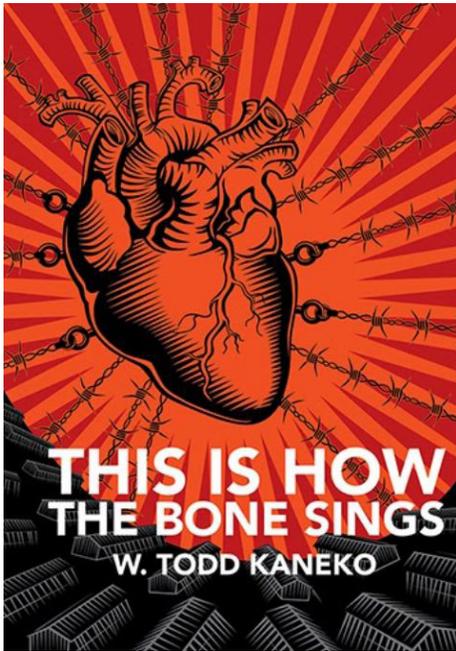
home. “It felt like a dream come true to come back and be able to continue doing what I love.” He now teaches WRT 150: Strategies in Writing where he encourages his students to try to contribute something new.

To help his students with their contributions, Rushton creates situational writing prompts which his students are asked to respond to in a way that incorporates their own experiences. As individuals, every student has something unique to bring to the table, or in this case, the paper. Rushton urges his students to convey their individuality through writing, because writing is a way for anyone to contribute something that no one else has. Most WRT 150 students are a part of other fields, and so Rushton encourages them to contribute in ways related to the fields they are going into. “I always tell them, ‘no matter what field you are working in, the way that you contribute something is through writing.’” Even if nothing is developed by the end of their time in the classroom, students leave with a goal on the horizon to develop something significant.

Rushton found his motivation as a writer in an old letter from the poet Robert Frost, and it is the same advice that he gives to undergraduate students who want to make writing their life. Frost’s letter states that, “If you are going deeply into poetry, give your whole self to it . . . if it is to be your life, make everything else subordinate to it.” Rushton believes this holds true for any sort of writing, “If you are to be a writer, you have to make everything else subordinate to it.” He tells students that writing requires a weird sort of faith, and if they stay true to it, things will come their way.

Remembrance: New Publications from Associate Professor W. Todd Kaneko

Kailey Parkins



Associate Professor W. Todd Kaneko's new book (photo: W. Todd Kaneko)

Associate Professor W. Todd Kaneko has a passion - teaching. At GVSU, he teaches a variety of courses, including Introduction to Creative Writing, Intermediate and Advanced Fiction and Poetry classes, as well as courses in style. He is the current faculty advisor for the In the Margins poetry club and the *fishladder* Student Journal of Art and Writing. However, Kaneko has another passion - poetry.

Over the years, Kaneko has written many poetry manuscripts, such as *The Dead Wrestler Elegies*, and he has also co-written with Associate Professor Amarak Huey, including *Poetry: A Writers' Guide and Anthology*. Today, he has a new poetry manuscript titled *This is How the Bone Sings*. "The poems in *This is How the Bone Sings* are centered on my family's incarceration at a concentration camp in Idaho during World War II." He goes on to describe the specifics. "It was called Minidoka, and my father and his parents were imprisoned there for pretty much the

duration of America's involvement in the war. The book is about the trauma of internment that trickles down through generations."

During the Winter 2021 GVSU Writer's Series, Kaneko, along with Associate Professor Chris Haven, read excerpts from their newest works and provided some insight into their manuscripts and chosen excerpts. Kaneko chose five poems and a flash essay to read, each one more chilling than the last. In order, they were titled "Minidoka was a Concentration Camp in Idaho," "Cattle Mutilation," "Rocket's Red Glare," "The Bees are a Metaphor for Everything," "Our Flag was Still There," and lastly, his flash essay, "Say it for Sour Patch Kids."

"[Writing] taps you on the shoulder and says 'hey, you better pay attention to me, because I'll be gone in a minute.'"

The meaning and effect of the poems are difficult to explain to those who were not there to hear them first-hand, but if there is one quote from Kaneko that embodies the feeling, it's this: "Poems are like ghosts, they haunt us. That is how writing feels to me - it taps you on the shoulder and says 'hey, you better pay attention to me because I'll be gone in a minute.'" That is exactly what the reading felt like — if you don't hang on to every word, if you falter in your listening for even a second, the ghost will disappear and you will feel chills

resonating in your soul. But unlike your peers, you will have missed the theme; the purpose of these poems, which is, in a word, remembrance. Kaneko writes his poems so that the world does not forget the tragedy of Japanese internment, and so he can pass the knowledge of his second-hand experience on to his sons, who can perhaps find the answers he has yet to discover. "The book hasn't helped me discover an answer," he states, "but it poses the questions for my sons when they are old enough to read these poems." In addition to this, Kaneko also hopes the impact of his manuscript will be significant. He states, "I hope the book tells them something about the human experience of incarceration and the effects that has on a family. I hope it tells them something about empathy."

This poetry manuscript is not his first, and it certainly won't be his last. That being said, there is definitely some advice and insight he can provide to aspiring writers. Kaneko offers this advice to his students: "I'd say take your time, and by that I mean it's your time to take. There's all sorts of pressure from everywhere to write something good, to publish a book or produce something to validate all the work and worry you put into your writing. Different people work on different timelines. If you want to publish, then do it when the work is ready. Work on mastering your craft, read as much as possible, and learn your markets."

Kaneko has done just that, and through his many years of writing, experimenting, and perfecting his craft, he has published many of his works, which have received well-deserved praise. For aspiring

SEE KANEKO ON PAGE 12

New Faculty Profile: Maggie Goss

Anna Evangelista



Maggie Goss (photo: Maggie Goss)

Active learning is an ability that Affiliate Professor Maggie Goss finds to be of great importance while teaching her writing students. In her first year at GVSU, she has taught WRT 350: SWS Business Communication and WRT 354: Writing in the Global Context. In both of these courses, she encourages her students to actively learn the material she teaches, all while helping them see why active learning is so important. She realizes that writing is not an innate skill; it needs to be learned as students are exposed to new genres.

The concepts that Goss keeps in mind while teaching are based on her three part theory about learning in writing classes. She believes that writing needs to be process-centered, metacognitive, and transferrable. So in order to have the most personal success in writing classes, students would benefit from keeping a mindset of writing as a recursive process, reflecting on the choices made so they can improve, and taking what they have learned in classes and applying it to their own work.

This time of change due to COVID-19 has helped Goss realize what is truly important to helping her students learn. As she had to cut some assignments to

move her classes online, she notes that it has made her teaching practices and assignments even more productive, because now there can be more focus on certain course topics, leading to a richer understanding. She feels that this should be seen as an opportunity to grow, rather than a constraint.

Goss is not only impressed by the work ethic of her students, but also their resilience. With all the different commitments and responsibilities that GVSU students take on, she commends how well they are doing, especially during the difficult climate caused by COVID-19. She wants to encourage her students and provide ways for them to do their best in her class amidst all the challenges. In her own words, “I am really trying to focus on teaching the classes to the best of my ability and helping support my students, because I think that everybody needs a little bit of extra support right now.”

One way Goss does this is by dedicating time for breakout rooms in her Zoom classes and using peer revision so that students can be actively engaged. She also creates connections through icebreakers at the beginning of class, holiday decorations behind her during Zoom calls, and fun anecdotes about her life as she adjusts to teaching at GVSU. Her students encourage her in her first year just as she encourages them.

In her time in the Writing Department, Professor Goss has had very welcoming and supportive experiences. She says that the faculty has really helped her feel prepared for her courses even in a time where there isn't very much in-person communication. Moving forward in the Writing Department, she says the program is working very well and she plans to collaborate with the faculty to help build and develop the curriculum in writing classes, along with adapting it as the current educational wants

and needs of students change. When asked what she loves about this path and about teaching writing, Professor Goss explains, “[Writing] is not just something we're doing in class because we have to, but that this is something we can really use in our careers, or in other classes, or in other situations.” Writing has an applicability to it that she wants her students to utilize as they progress forward in their lives.

Explore new ideas!

Consider signing up for special topic WRT 180 one-credit courses:

FALL 2021

- *Social Justice Poetry*
- *Usability Testing*
- *Fake News and the Art of Disinformation*

WINTER 2022

- *Food and Writing*
- *Writing for User Experience*

One Story at a Time: New Publications from Associate Professor Chris Haven

Elaina Smith

Associate Professor Chris Haven's debut collection of short stories, *Nesting Habits of Flightless Birds*, was released on October 15, 2020, through Tailwinds Press.

Prior to putting the manuscript together, Haven never envisioned these stories to appear in the same book. Rather than writing pieces that were meant to fit into a collective work, he just wrote one story at a time, some of them appearing together only in his MFA thesis. Haven is a versatile writer, and spends a lot of time writing and submitting short stories, poems, and pieces of flash fiction; however, he envisioned that his first publication would be a novel. According to Haven, the advice for fiction writers, generally, is to "sell a novel first, then maybe some short stories." However, unable to find an agent for his latest novel, he turned to Duotrope to see which distinguished small presses were accepting short story collections. Before he submitted the book, Haven worried that the stories wouldn't fit together in a way that made sense for a collection, but he didn't let that stop him. "Don't say no to yourself," Haven said, referring to the submission process. "Make [the editors] say no."

When it came to selecting a title for the book, Haven had a couple of different options. He could use one of the story titles from the collection, or he could come up with a new title. Although there were a few stories he felt could have been the title, he didn't feel like any of them quite captured the essence of the book. "The title had a bigger job in this collection because the connection between stories wasn't self-evident," he explained. This is true; the stories in *Nesting Habits of Flightless Birds* are different from each

other thematically, but each one deals with character mystery and explores what it means to be human.

Expanding on the concept of humanity, he chose the title by taking two lines that appeared in the book and putting them together: "nesting habits" and "flightless birds." Haven views "flightless birds" as people and "nesting habits" as the routines we go through to feel human and find our place in the world. Together, they make a title that serves as a commentary on the human condition.

"There's an ideal situation, and if it doesn't follow that, there's the perception that something must be wrong."

In addition to *Nesting Habits of Flightless Birds*, Haven also released a book of poems, *Bone Seeker*, on March 25, 2021. As we all know, 2020 and 2021 have been exceptionally strange years, but when asked about how it felt to release books in the pandemic, Haven said it felt normal to him. Since these are his first publications, this is the only circumstance he's published books under so far, and doesn't know the process in any other way. His feelings on releasing books during a global health crisis prompted him to reflect on the different ways we're processing the situation. "There's an ideal situation, and if it doesn't follow that, there's the perception that something must be wrong," he said, referring to the in-person book releases authors



Chris Haven (photo: Chris Haven)

had up until this past year. Haven explained that every book launch is different and happens in different circumstances. He also acknowledges that there are things that wouldn't have been possible in a normal situation. For example, many people got to tune into his virtual book launch who might have otherwise not been able to make it, including friends from San Francisco, family members in Kansas, and a former student in Germany. Although we are living in uncertain times, Haven has managed to keep an optimistic point of view.

During the faculty reading titled "Art in a Time of Crisis," with Associate Professor Todd Kaneko, he discussed keeping his creativity alive during the pandemic. During this reading, Haven mentioned that he views creativity as doing other things besides "getting work done." For

SEE HAVEN ON PAGE 12

Investing in Place with Scott Blackwood

Anna Evangelista

“

I would urge people to fight for their aesthetics . . . if you know it's good and you care enough about it

”



Scott Blackwood (photo: Scott Blackwood)

Scott Blackwood's enthusiastic and devoted discussion of places and characters he has constructed showed just how much his writing could be described as “a fabric that you're building.” While attending GVSU's last Writer's Series event of the semester, a fiction Craft Talk and a Fiction Reading and Q&A for Blackwood's work, it became increasingly apparent that he is a writer who invests in broadening his mindset in order to see and understand what he wants to write about, and what the best way to put it into writing is.

With two novels, a story collection, and two narrative nonfiction books, Blackwood's writing has been widely recognized. His novel *See How Small* was named a Texas Book of the Decade by *The Texas Observer*, his novel *We Agreed To Meet Just Here* won the AWP Prize, *In the Shadow of Our House* was featured in *The New York Times*, and Volume I of *The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records Volumes I & II* was nominated in 2015 for a Grammy Award. Each of these were discussed with attendees over Zoom.

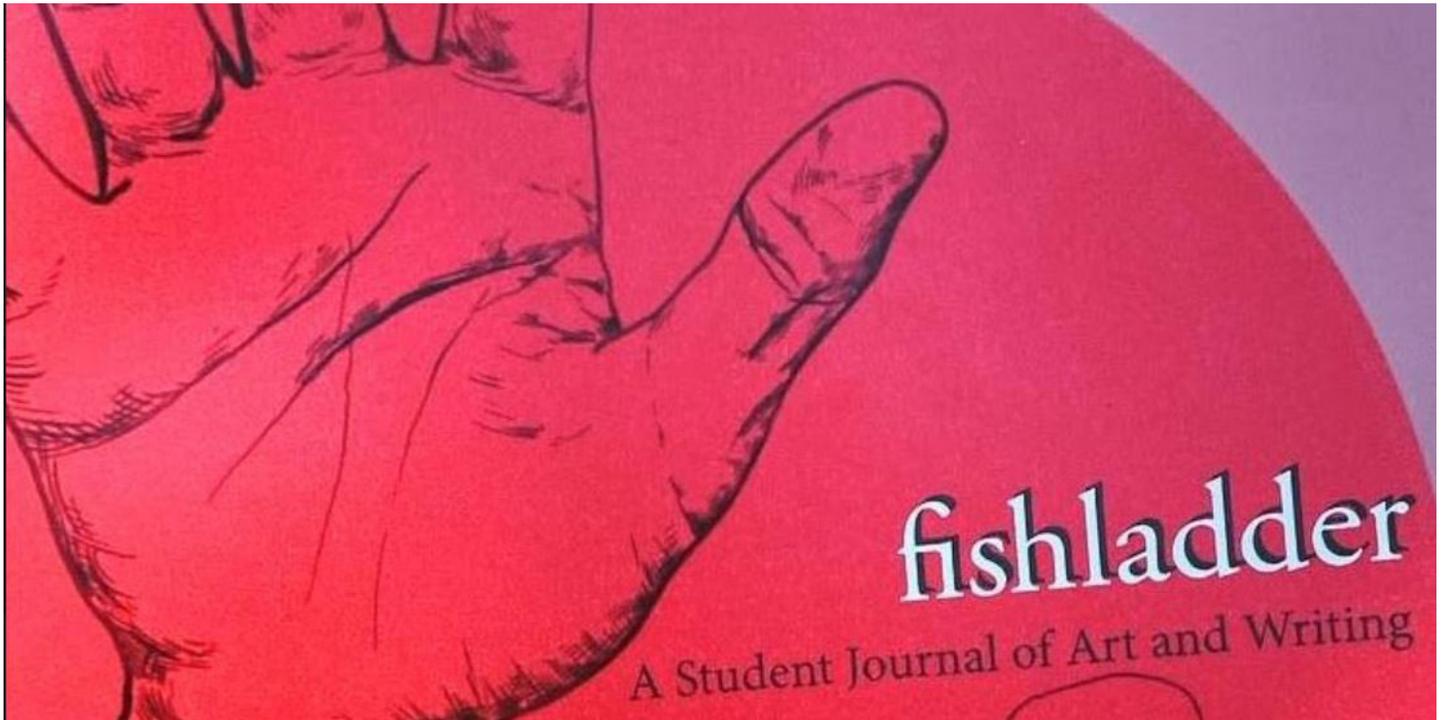
Place is translated into fiction and character in Blackwood's writing. This means that in order for the story and those in it to be developed the way he has in mind, Blackwood's writing always starts with understanding the place. The most influential cities in his work are Chicago, IL and Austin, TX. Blackwood says that in order to create such a landscape in your head, one needs to “absorb a significant amount of place.” He does this by taking time to explore and interact with the area and people around him, by reading new types of work to open his imagination and gain new perspectives on what he sees, and by being immersed and invested in understanding the story and people he wants to represent. All of these things are especially important to Blackwood's writing because it often deals with grief. It is his goal to never sensationalize the experiences he puts into words, but to empathize with the characters. While listening to him read from his work, one can easily hear the purpose to the lyricism in his words. The events, feelings, and imagery Blackwood writes about are

gracefully specific and allow the reader to visualize and feel the struggles of the characters.

During the event, Blackwood made many points that many of the attending writers could relate to. When working on improving a new piece, he found that, “it's invariable that you're going to come to a splinter point, where things don't go the way you planned them.” For him, this is when it is important to approach a piece of writing in new ways in order to get rid of preconceptions, and to view the topic from a new perspective. He also emphasized the confidence writers should have in what they have created. Just as most writers have experienced, Blackwood has been told to change a part of his work he felt was what made the whole piece unique. In a situation like this, he says, “I would urge people to fight for their aesthetics . . . if you know it's good and you care enough about it . . .” showing the importance of being proud of one's work, especially when, as Blackwood's own writing, every aspect is thought out in such detail.

WRITING CLUBS

Continued from page 1



Cover of the Spring 2020 edition of *fishladder* (photo: Amanda Pszczolkowski)

have tried to do our best to make it as personable as possible.”

Making the transition from in-person to online meetings isn’t always a smooth process. For *fishladder*, the biggest change was the application process. Normally, students who were interested in working on the journal would fill out paper applications and turn them into the Writing Department office. However, as a safety measure, they were done completely online this year and current staff members had to make sure the website was up-to-date and ready to accept applications. According to Pszczolkowski, the transition was otherwise smooth. “I’m really grateful that the only big thing we’re losing this year is food,” she says, reflecting on how editors used to bring snacks to staff meetings, something that unfortunately cannot be translated to a video call.

For OPW, getting the word out

about events seemed to be the hardest part of the transition. While the club often uses their social media pages to advertise events, Kelly has noticed that there aren’t as many opportunities to spread information by word-of-mouth. “There’s less talk before online classes between peers because of how Zoom courses work,” she says, “so there’s less opportunity to say, ‘Oh hey, are you going to that OPW Fireside Chat this week?’”

On the plus side, being completely online has made some aspects of running an organization simpler. For *fishladder*, the submission process has been easier, and the members of OPW have had an easier time connecting with professionals in a virtual setting versus a physical one. Both Kelly and Pszczolkowski noted that not having to find physical spaces for meetings has been a huge burden off their shoulders; reserving a room in the library, Kirkhof, or any other building on campus takes a bit more effort than simply sending

out a Zoom link.

To see just how successful the online transition process has been, make sure to keep an eye open for OPW’s upcoming events!

BADGE

Continued from page 5

anything that involves privilege and how these systems operate,” he said. “This program is a way to start lifelong learning and seek out ways of understanding other people’s experiences.”

Goodwine stressed the importance of taking the first step in branching out of your comfort zone, which can be hard for many undergraduate students. “Don’t be intimidated!” he said. “A lot of these conversations can be hard, but if you come in with an open mindset, it’s a great opportunity to increase your

awareness of diversity and inclusion in the world today.”

This program can be useful to students of all ages and backgrounds; it has been for Jen Parmenter, a returning student to GVSU studying Integrative Studies through the LEADS program. While she is required to take several ITC, she still felt the importance of the content matter after taking the first course in the badge program, ITC 100. “What it comes down to is being mindful of the other people you will be encountering in the world, whether they are in your workspace or community,” she said. “I think that a lot of people don’t necessarily know what to do with that type of situation and the different struggles that other people face. These classes really bring that into focus for me.”

“There are always communities you can try to make a difference in.”

Her positive experience was impacted by living abroad as a child, but also by coming back to school to a classroom space that was open, respectful, and insightful. “Intercultural competence is both an awareness of how the things we say and do have an impact on other people, and an understanding of where privilege comes into the situation and how we can use it properly. But it is also a good way to start to look for ways you can make a change. There are always communities you can try to make a difference in,” Jen said.

While not every student will have the same experience, the idea of learning about others is significant in so many ways. “Students leave

this program knowing exactly what it means to be culturally competent in their own area of focus, with the added benefit of a language of cultural competency. It is one of those phrases that can feel generic and broad,” Riley-Mukavetz explained. “Afterwards, they are able to say this is what it looks like and this is how I practice it.”

KANEKO

Continued from page 7

writers, reaching out to Associate Professor Todd Kaneko - whether that be through email or taking part in his many writing classes - could very well lead you down a path of success. To find out more about *This is How the Bone Sings*, Kaneko’s website is a good place to start. Searching his name on the GVSU website will bring any interested individuals to his website link, where you can purchase his poetry manuscript and check out his other incredible works of writing.

HAVEN

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example, he has been trying to take care of his creativity through engaging with sports and music. He believes music works to restore the idea of community, something that has become scarce over the past year, and it can help us lament. According to Haven, “A lamentation is needed to restore or even replenish creativity.”

Chris Haven’s books, *Nesting Habits of Flightless Birds* and *Bone Seeker* are available for purchase online, including on Bookshop.com, and locally through Schuler Books.

INWRITING

Winter 2021

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