

# IN WRITING

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Students at work in the Bellamy Creek Program (photo: Aaron Yore-VanOosterhout)

## Creative Writing at Bellamy Creek: Writing Department Partnership Continues

**Emma Cervantes**

We first heard news of the partnership between GVSU and the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility during the 24-25 academic year, building a bridge for those with fewer opportunities to accomplish something that deserves recognition. The Bellamy Creek class of 2029 is continuing its journey toward a Bachelor of Science degree in Public and Nonprofit Administration, and with the added writing class, they are one step closer to that accomplishment.

This year, the Bellamy Creek Program offered WRT 219: Intro to Creative Writing as an elective for interested students. Affiliate Professor Emma Carlisle, who returned to her Bellamy Creek students for a third semester during this section of WRT 219, said the students were eager to learn more.

“If you can imagine the most engaged student in any class you’ve ever taken and then a room full of 17 of them, that’s what I’ve got,” she said. She added that her students’ distinct life experiences make for “rich creative

writing,” which makes for an enjoyable class. “The work they’re creating is everything I hope for in an introductory course,” she said. “They’re taking risks, trying new things, and writing about interesting human experiences.”

Carlisle, who taught the class of ‘29 previously in WRT 120 and 130, was just as excited as her students at the idea of maintaining their relationship. When an email was sent out asking if anyone was interested in teaching again at Bellamy Creek, Carlisle eagerly volunteered for the job. “It’s my favorite thing in the world,” she said.

When asked what made her so eager to teach at a correctional facility, Carlisle recalled how her service learning course at her graduate school offered mini creative writing classes for incarcerated individuals. There, she learned about the U.S. prison system’s limited educational opportunities. For this reason, she is always on the lookout for opportunities to teach in prisons and help in any way she can.

*SEE BELLAMY CREEK ON PAGE 3*

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# WRT Department Prepares 25th Anniversary Celebration

Annelise Racely



WRT Faculty Plan 25th Anniversary Celebration (photo: Annelise Racely)

This fall marks the 25th anniversary of the GVSU Writing Department.

For Department Chair Amy Ferdinandt Stolley and Assistant Department Chair Kylie Jacobsen, the milestone creates a moment to pause and recognize the people who have shaped the Writing Department into what it is today: dedicated faculty, passionate students, and alumni telling stories across industries. As they reflected on the Writing Department's journey, both spoke with visible excitement about how far it has come and how much possibility still lies ahead.

When the Writing Department separated from the English Department in 2001, it did so with intention. Ultimately, the split laid the groundwork for what would become one of approximately thirty standalone Writing Departments in the country; a place centered not only on studying texts, but on creating them.

The Writing and English Departments have what Stolley calls “shared DNA,” but the difference lies in focus. “The text is the shared object,” she explained, “but what we do and how we study it is significantly different.” Writing emphasizes production and process, inviting students to practice across genres, experiment with voice, and

understand writing as both art and career. That distinction, Stolley noted, allows students to see writing not just as something to interpret, but as something to actively shape.

That emphasis has evolved thoughtfully over time. As Jacobsen described, the program shifted in 2010 to a modular structure, often described as a “choose your own adventure.” Students build pathways through publishing, editing, digital skills, and professional and creative writing. The result, Jacobsen shared, is graduates who are strong writers and adaptable communicators prepared to tell meaningful stories in a range of fields.

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*“Writing... allows people to understand what it means to be human and to participate thoughtfully in their communities.”*

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Upcoming plans for the 25th Anniversary reflect both celebration and forward momentum. Jacobsen and Professor Christopher Toth are developing a “living archive” exhibit featuring 25 artifacts—one representing each year—alongside highlights from student publications

such as *InWriting*, *fishladder*, and *A Guide to First-Year Writing at Grand Valley State University*. Alumni stories will also be featured, honoring the many writers who continue to shape the Writing Department's legacy.

Looking toward the next 25 years, Stolley hopes this period will be remembered as a time of grounding and clarity. In a world shaped by political shifts and the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence, she emphasized the importance of rooting the curriculum in core values: ethical engagement, human expression, and care for students. Writing, she said, allows people to understand what it means to be human and to participate thoughtfully in their communities. Those values, she believes, will help the department “keep our feet on the ground” as it continues to grow.

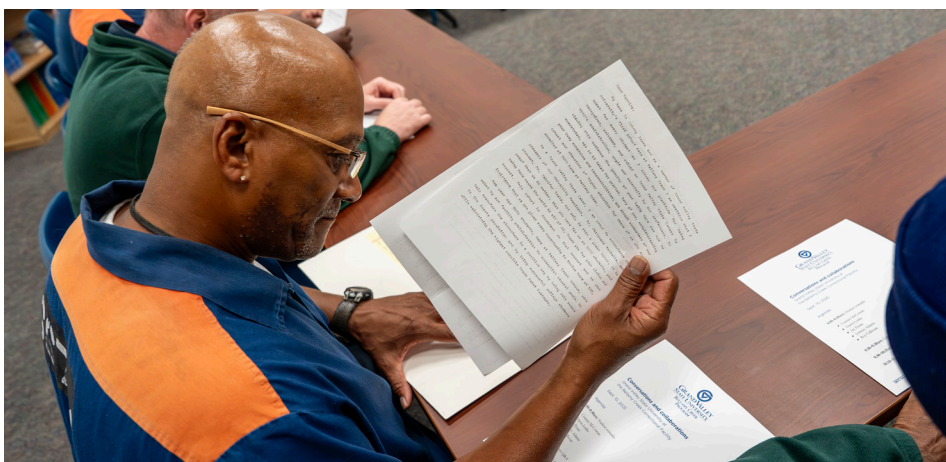
At 25 years, the focus shifts toward what comes next: a future shaped by a community committed to moving the Writing Department forward with intention, guided by passion, care, and a shared belief in the power of writing.

**Save the Date!**

**Join us for a  
Celebration  
of the Writing  
Department's 25th  
Anniversary!**

**October 2,  
2026**

**More details  
coming soon!**



Bellamy Creek Students (photo: Aaron Yore-VanOosterhout)

## Bellamy Creek Continued from page 1

“I wanted to do something to help people who are in a system that largely keeps people in that system and doesn’t offer as much opportunity for growth and change and learning,” Carlisle said.

Students who have previously taken WRT 219 on the Valley campus would quickly recognize the techniques and skills at work in the Bellamy Creek creative writing classroom as no different than their own. And now, with the addition of Securebooks, which are corrections-approved laptops, the writing and revising processes are increasingly streamlined.

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***“[This] class, especially with where they’re set up with those computers now... is in a position to make [a writing experience] almost exactly as it is on campus.”***

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Students could only handwrite assignments last year, which was a challenge, given that first-year writing includes research and revision. Carlisle states how the access to computers not only makes for a more facile learning experience, but is one step closer to mirroring a traditional

college experience. “I think this class, especially with where they’re set up with those computers now... is in a position to make [a writing experience] almost exactly as it is on campus.”

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***“The work they’re creating is everything I hope for in an introductory course... They’re taking risks, trying new things, and writing about interesting human experiences.”***

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As WRT 219 signals a continued collaboration between the Writing Department and the Bellamy Creek Program, Associate Professor and Department Chair Amy Stolley reflected back to Carlisle’s students’ final portfolio presentations at the conclusion of WRT 130: Strategies in Writing - Stretch II. “I thought it was really excellent and the students were really thoughtful and engaged, and they produced great writing about really interesting subjects, and that was really exciting to see,” she said. “I feel like they were proving something to themselves by doing the work. And proving to themselves that they could do it. And that what they had to say matters and it has value.”

Carlisle shared similar sentiments, adding, “It’s really rewarding because I know that these students really



Bellamy Creek Students (photo: Aaron Yore-VanOosterhout)

value the education they’re getting.” Further proof comes from how well the class is being received by the students, and their desire to continue working alongside Carlisle even after the conclusion of WRT 130 in Winter 2025. Carlisle’s WRT 219 course has allowed them to do just that.

“The only things that are like not getting super positive feedback are like my weird assignment instructions,” Carlisle joked, “but that’s something I’m super used to.”

The Bellamy Creek Program is still in its pilot phase, Stolley explains. “They are only working with one class of students,” she said. Though in its novice years, it appears to have great potential for success, much like its students.



Bellamy Creek Students (photo: Aaron Yore-VanOosterhout)

# Web Accessibility: Zsuzsanna Palmer Translates WCAG

Sofia Pratt



Associate Professor Zsuzsanna Palmer  
(photo: Zsuzsanna Palmer)

The world revolves around online content, and one of the most important aspects of online content is accessibility. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) were created to make sure that everyone, regardless of ability, can access what they need.

The WCAG are a set of rules for website designers that define how to make web content more accessible to people with visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning, and neurological disabilities. These ever-evolving guidelines were created in 1999 by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), and Associate Professor Zsuzsanna Palmer joined W3C's efforts last year when she began translating the guidelines into Hungarian.

Before Palmer's work on the project, the WCAG Hungarian translation had not been updated since 2008. As the WCAG have evolved considerably since then, an updated Hungarian translation was much needed. And, the translation is a win both for users with diverse accessibility needs, and the Hungarian legal system. If a user is unable to complete a necessary action on a website due to designer's failure to adhere to the accessibility guidelines, the case could go to lawsuit.

Palmer first became aware of this opportunity during her sabbatical work with a Hungarian nonprofit localizing the content of the JAWS (Job Access With Speech) software. It was through her conversations with employees of this organization that she was inspired to do more. "I mentioned to them that I really appreciate how they helped me connect with users of the software, and I would also like to contribute to that cause of wider accessibility," Palmer said.

Born and raised in Hungary, Palmer is a native Hungarian speaker who started learning English after high school. Even as a fluent speaker of both languages, translating the WCAG was more of an adjustment than Palmer had expected, but she was excited to learn.

"The familiar, everyday language is different than the professional language," Palmer said. "I have never worked in a professional context in Hungary. It felt like, wow, this is my very first meeting in Hungarian."

There was a lot of research involved in making sure the translation was accurate. Many terms do not have a direct translation, so Palmer regularly looked through other websites, checked with experts at W3C's Hungarian office, and used tools ranging from machine translations to dictionary translations. On top of translating language, Palmer was also tasked with writing the translation in HTML code so that it could be easily transferred to the website where it now resides.

Throughout the translation process, readability was key. "The text has a lot of terminology, but at the same time, it's trying to speak the language of whoever creates web content," she said. "It's trying to be understandable for everyone."

She started the translation back in May 2025, and it is still being finalized. With over 40 pages of words and code, the process was long but valuable. "The whole process was very much a learning

experience for me, and a humbling experience," Palmer said. "This is my area of specialty, but even there, you can go so much deeper. I just really enjoyed the process of working with people on something that can be helpful for users with different abilities."

Through Palmer's hard work, the WCAG will be able to reach even more people around the world, and continue making the web accessible for all.

## Debevec-McKenney Named a 2025 Essential Read Emma Cervantes

Late last year, Assistant Professor Sasha Debevec-McKenney received news her first book, *Joy is My Middle Name*, was recognized as one of The New Yorker's "Essential Reads of 2025."

Composed between 2017 and 2023, Debevec-McKenney's debut collection features poems exploring topics that range from race, womanhood, consumerism, and beyond.

"My book is sort of weird and funny and full of narrative poems, and I don't know how often that sort of thing gets recognized in the poetry world," she said. "But I'm glad it did." She is a poet first, so having this recognition came as a pleasant surprise for Debevec-McKenney, who said she was "extremely honored."

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*"My book is sort of weird and funny and full of narrative poems, and I don't know how often that sort of thing gets recognized."*

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"I don't remember who I told first," Debevec-McKenney said. "Convincing myself it was real was hard enough."

When it comes to writing poems, Debevec-McKenney does not have plans to stop anytime soon.

# Stolley, Mulally, & Hulst Publish on FYW Self Placement at GVSU

*Annelise Racely*

GVSU's Writing Department has long held a position of notable distinction within the field of rhetoric and composition. That legacy was recently reaffirmed with the publication of a new article by Associate Professor of Writing and Department Chair Amy Ferdinandt Stolley, Senior Affiliate Professor Dauvan Mulally, and Senior Affiliate Professor Craig Hulst.

The article, titled "Everything Old is New Again: Reconsidering DSP Amid the Changing Academic Landscape at Grand Valley State University," appears in a special issue of the *Journal of Writing Assessment* (18.1, 2025) focused on student self-placement in writing courses. Their article responds to ongoing shifts in higher education, asking how Directed Self-Placement (DSP) can remain effective amid changing student needs, institutional expectations, and post-pandemic learning environments.

The article explores the history and current evolution of DSP, a program designed to help students select their

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*"DSP guides students through reflective modules that ask them to evaluate their writing experiences, confidence, and goals."*

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own first-year writing courses. While many universities across the country rely on standardized exams or timed essays to "place" students, GVSU operates on a different philosophy. As Stolley explained, "We trust students to make the best choice for their own academic journey." Rather than relying on a single test score, DSP guides students through reflective modules that ask them to evaluate their writing experiences, confidence, and goals before choosing the course that best fits their needs. For many students, this

process becomes their first opportunity to reflect critically on themselves as writers.

This publication is particularly exciting because GVSU is the official birthplace of DSP. Nearly thirty years ago, the process was developed right here in Allendale by earlier writing program administrators, and it has since shaped writing programs at institutions nationwide. While DSP was created in the 1990s, Stolley, Mulally, and Hulst built on that legacy by examining how the model continues to evolve today. By allowing students to reflect on their own writing experiences and confidence levels, GVSU empowers them to take agency over their education from day one.

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*"By allowing students to reflect on their own writing experiences and confidence levels, GVSU empowers them to take agency over their own education from day one."*

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In their research, Stolley, Mulally, and Hulst examine how this "elegant" foundation has survived decades of institutional change. They address how the program has adapted to modern challenges, including shifting admissions standards, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student confidence, and a renewed commitment to equity and access.

As the "Home of DSP," GVSU continues to prove that putting the power of choice in students' hands is not just a historical milestone, but a vital, living practice. This latest scholarship ensures that GVSU remains at the forefront of the national conversation regarding how we support and welcome new writers into the university community.

## Department 25th Anniversary Logo Contest Winner: Kelsie Manor



**Kelsie Manor** is a senior Writing Major. Manor's design is inspired by Lady Justice, who symbolizes the balance between two essential things, often depicted with a sword in one hand and a balanced scale in the other.

In this design, "she holds a pencil which outlines the fabric of her own dress to symbolize forging our Writing identity and perception of ourselves. In the other hand, she holds an open book above her head. This represents the importance of recognizing every writer before us, placing their work on a platform for us to find a foundation from."

## “Read Everything, Read Broadly”: Jane Zwart at the Writers Series

Hannah Ritchey



Associate Professor Beth Peterson with Jane Zwart (photo: Hannah Ritchey)

Jane Zwart, poetry enthusiast and professor of English at Calvin University, visited GVSU on February 17 to give a craft talk and reading as part of the Grand Valley Writers Series. Zwart enlightened students and faculty in attendance with new insight on metaphors, pacing techniques, and revision strategies.

To begin her craft talk, Zwart voiced a three-line poem titled “Separation” by W.S. Merwin. Recognizing the power of a metaphor in just three lines, she invited students to interpret the poem’s meaning, and discussed how the technique worked in the author’s and audience’s favor. Within the first few minutes of Zwart’s presentation, the dimensions and layers of a metaphor were clearly displayed for the viewers.

Zwart also provided each audience member with a copy of a poem called “Double Dutch” by Gregory Dardlo, encouraging partakers to engage in an activity: interpreting the differing angles of metaphors. Not only did the audience discover the varying styles of metaphors used by Dardlo, but they gained hands-on writing experience with these different

metaphorical techniques guided by prompts provided by Zwart herself. Embedding creative collaboration into the GVSU Writers Series event was a memorable learning experience for the participants, widening and creating new perspectives for how to approach and interpret metaphors.

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***“Within the first few minutes of Zwart’s presentation, the dimensions... of metaphor were clearly displayed.”***

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Zwart recently released her first poetry collection, titled *Oddest & Oldest & Saddest & Best*, which she graciously read from. Poems featured in Zwart’s reading included “YMCA,” “All my life I was a bride married to amazement,” “Stay tender somehow,” and others. Receiving positive press for her new poetry publication, Zwart advised young writers to “read everything, and read broadly.”

As the Writing Series event came to conclusion, the audience was invited  
SEE JANE ZWART ON PAGE 10

## An Internship Close to Home

Inayah Hakeem

As writing students, securing an internship can feel like one of the most daunting steps before graduation. It can sometimes be difficult for writing students to find opportunities that match their interests, fit their packed courseloads, and align with the Writing Department’s program parameters. Visiting Professor Lisa McNeilley has a solution for this. As an alternative, based on GVSU’s campus, through her freelance writing and editing business Writer’s Alley, LLC, Professor McNeilley offers Writing Majors an opportunity to work as a freelance editor while earning internship credit required for graduation.

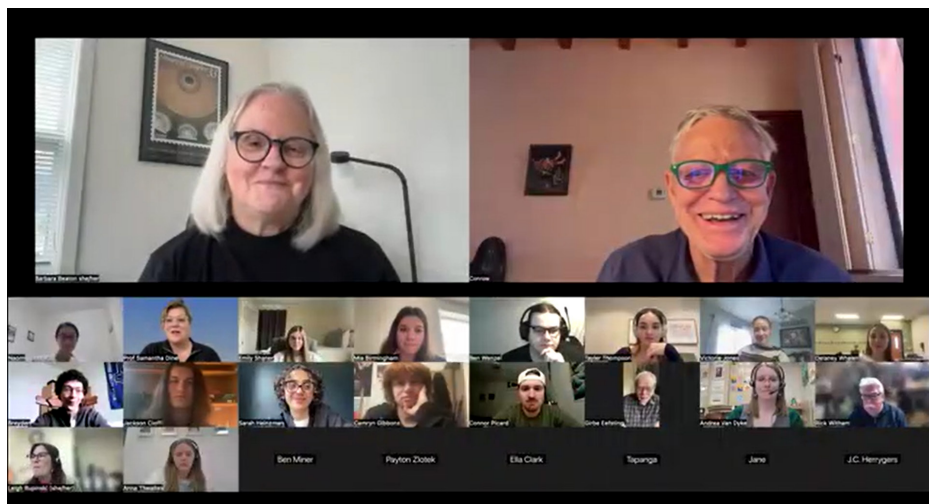
While the internship is unpaid, students receive academic credit through WRT 490: Writing Internship and gain firsthand experience working in the writing and editing industry. The opportunity is particularly valuable for students interested in freelancing or who want to explore the endless writing-related career options. Students interested in applying need to be enrolled in WRT 490 simultaneously and can contact McNeilley directly with a writing sample and a brief explanation of their career goals.

Through the program, students work with real clients, edit manuscripts and learn how writing skills operate within a professional setting. McNeilley originally developed the internship after noticing that many students had difficulty finding feasible internship placements. Having previously worked closely with writing students in other contexts, she recognized that her freelance business could provide meaningful professional experience for students while also meeting their graduation requirements.

“I thought, I know how to help interns, and I know a lot of students who are  
SEE WRITER’S ALLEY ON PAGE 11

# WRT 200 Revives *Captain Crisis* Catalog After 50 Years

Kallie Crouch



Former GVSU student Barbara Beaton (left) and professor Bob Conrow (right) with Affiliate Professor Samantha Dine's WRT 200 class (photo: Kallie Crouch)

Affiliate Professor Samantha Dine's WRT 200: Introduction to Professional Writing course has always been interested in the interplay between text and design when it comes to getting information to the right audiences. This semester, Dine's WRT 200 students are taking on a new challenge: updating and modernizing the *Captain Crisis* catalog, a community resource first pioneered by students and faculty in GVSU's William James College (WJC) in the 1970s and an example of functional—and fun—design meeting real community need.

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***“By and large, students kept choosing the *Captain Crisis* materials when they had a choice... They loved the fun and absurdity, but also the function.”***

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“I’ve been doing a similar project in the course for the past couple of years where students were able to pick any type of archival artifact,” Dine said. “By and large, students kept choosing

the *Captain Crisis* materials when they had a choice, and it was wildly popular. They just loved the fun and absurdity, but also the function.”

On Thursday, March 19, four of the creative minds behind the 1976 edition of *Captain Crisis* joined Dine and her students to discuss their work on the catalog, changing technologies, and the role of art and writing in community activism.

Produced by students and faculty in WJC, an interdisciplinary college consisting of program concentrations, rather than majors, *Captain Crisis* was a survival guide available for students and communities around GVSU. The catalog was, in many ways, a response to the political and socioeconomic climate of the 1970s. Against the backdrop of the Vietnam War and what Bob Conrow, who led the *Captain Crisis* course beginning in 1972, called the “democratization of media,” *Captain Crisis* addressed the needs its creators saw in their communities—namely, accessible information about area resources. But, unlike most guidebooks, *Captain Crisis* reached local audiences through storytelling.

The creators of *Captain Crisis* wanted,

as Conrow explained, to “make the invisible visible.” Inspired by Stewart Brand’s *Whole Earth Catalog*, a counterculture magazine that offered readers resources for self-education, Conrow and his students wanted to create something for the community from the community.

Fifty years later, Dine felt it was only natural to revisit the project. “In many ways, the social and political environment facing Gen Z students today echoes the uncertainty and complexity of the 1970s, making the original project feel newly relevant,” Dine said. “At the same time, we’re seeing a changing and increasingly diverse student population at GVSU, along with a growing need for connection, clarity, and accessible guidance.”

Conrow and his students designed the original *Captain Crisis* as a tool for community action. Barbara Beaton, a student at WJC with an Arts and Medias concentration, took the



*Captain Crisis* catalog cover page, 1976 edition (photo: Samantha Dine)

SEE CAPTAIN CRISIS ON PAGE 10

# Good Design, Good Art: Donald Quist on Nonfiction and Fiction at the Writers Series

*Sofia Ellis*

On Tuesday, April 7, essayist and fiction writer Donald Quist visited campus for the GVSU Writers Series. Quist has published both essay and story collections, and in addition to being widely published, he has also received several awards for his work.

Quist's visit began with a reading, during which he shared excerpts from three of his books. In the following Q&A, Quist explained what compels him to write in each respective genre: he chooses to closely examine different aspects of life through nonfiction, but explores the *what ifs* through fiction. Although it is difficult to have great success across genres professionally, Quist stated that both genres are of equal importance to him.

“Genre hinders you,” he said.

During his craft talk, Quist discussed other ways in which constraints are problematic for writers. His presentation, “Designing Narrative,” used examples of landscape architecture to draw parallels between designing architecture and writing.

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**“Genre hinders you.”**

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His first focus was the misconception of art and design as completely separate entities. Quist defined art as the intersection of creativity and technical skill, where design is planning to create something with functionality and solutions at the forefront of its intention. However, he noted that expression is not traditionally considered to be an objective of design. According to Quist, though, there is a clear intersection between design and art that is necessary for both successful architecture and successful writing.



*Donald Quist speaking at the GVSU Writers Series (photo: Sofia Ellis)*

“In wildly successful art and design, the experience of the artifact created is central to its achievement,” Quist said. When considering the functionality of an architectural design, the user is the most important component. Writing works in the same way.

“In good design, like good art, emotionality is present,” he said. User-centered design is often perceived in a clinical light, but Quist adds that emotion is key. Much like a good architect, writers must think about how what they make will help someone.

For writers, designing is not explicitly visual, composed instead through diction and sentence structure. Centering design around the user, or reader, is determined by the way that a writer pieces together ideas through particular word choice

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**“In good design, like good art, emotionality is present.”**

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and arrangement.

“We focus on how it feels, how it is inhabited,” Quist said, explaining the difference between using the word

“stone” vs. “stony.” Through word choice, writers create specificity, something which Quist claims makes something more interesting and memorable for readers.

Quist invited those in attendance to participate in a writing exercise which explored specificity as a means of making more interesting writing centered around the reader's

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**“We focus on how it [our writing] feels, how it is inhabited.”**

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experience. This exercise was intended to mirror an excerpt from the introduction to Toni Morrison's *Sula*. The introduction includes highly descriptive exposition to deeply immerse the reader in the setting of the book. Attendees participated by mimicking that style of writing to explore a setting of their own creation. The talk concluded with the sharing of these pieces, and a piece of advice from Quist: “You're only ever gonna become a better writer than the day before.”

# WRT Department Goes to 90th Annual ABC Conference

Sofia Pratt



From left to right: Samantha Dine, Ethan Gould, Kylie Jacobsen, and Chris Toth at the 90th Annual International ABC Conference (photo: Kylie Jacobsen)

From October 15-18, 2025, the Association for Business Communication (ABC) held its 90th Annual International Conference in Long Beach, California. The ABC is an international organization that supports the advancement of business communication research, education, and practice. The annual conference is a chance for its global network of professionals, educators, and researchers to attend several days filled with workshops, panels, and research presentations.

This year, four of GVSU's own were in attendance: Professors Christopher Toth, Associate Professor and Assistant Department Chair Kylie Jacobsen, Affiliate Professor Samantha Dine, and Biomedical Sciences student, Ethan Gould. For Jacobsen and Gould, it was their first time at the conference, while Toth and Dine have roles within the organization and had attended before.

Toth joined the ABC around 2006. At the time, he was teaching Business Communications, so the ABC was a perfect fit for his interests. "It's like the premiere organization for instructors of business

communications," Toth said.

In January 2025, Toth became Vice President of the ABC. Despite how much busier his schedule was in his newfound role, he enjoyed the conference just as much as in earlier years. "It's really nice to connect with colleagues who are teaching the same subject as me at other universities across the country and the world," he said.

Dine serves as the Committee Chair for the Rhetoric Special Interest Group (SIG), a group of ABC members focused on research and pedagogy involving rhetoric. The group hosted a panel at this year's conference, where Dine presented.

Dine asked Jacobsen this past year if she would also like to propose a topic to present. Jacobsen agreed and began working on her presentation about the impact of the "LinkedInfluencer."

Her presentation discussed how LinkedIn is shifting from a professional networking site to a content platform. "It becomes a very rhetorical act to mediate your professional and personal life online," Jacobsen said, "especially on a site like LinkedIn where your livelihood could depend on your ability

to connect with the right people in the right way."

While working on this project, she was also teaching WRT 350: Business Communication. Gould was a student in her class, and after expressing interest in joining her research, they agreed to work together. Once October rolled around, they attended the conference to present their research at the panel.

Leading up to the conference, Gould gained skills in research methodology, data analysis, presentation skills, and organization, while the conference itself was a chance for him to experience networking and presenting.

"It was an incredible experience," Gould said. "My favorite parts were presenting and doing the actual research. And I enjoyed talking to all the people there."

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*"My favorite takeaway was the community of like-minded scholars."*

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Jacobsen also enjoyed her time there. "I learned several new techniques for teaching parts of the business communication class I teach," Jacobsen said, "but my favorite takeaway was the community of like-minded scholars that I was able to reconnect with during and in between sessions."

For any students interested in getting involved with the ABC and benefiting from their network and resources, there are several ways to do so. Doing a research project like Jacobsen and Gould is one way, as well as joining the student competition offered every year for undergraduates. There are also resources on the website (<https://www.businesscommunication.org/home>) that students can check out.

## Captain Crisis

Continued from page 7

Captain Crisis class in time for the 1976 edition. “Something that informed our thinking was that the knowledge we were trying to share would empower people,” she said.

“By going out and experiencing these various services in the community ourselves and then writing about them, then putting them into the caricature of Captain Crisis, it was a way of making the invisible visible,” Conrow said. Or, taking information otherwise difficult to find and making it accessible for viewers in quick page-by-page snapshots.

*“By going out and experiencing these various services... and then writing about them... it was a way of making the invisible visible.”*

In revisiting the project, Dine and her students are committed to this vision. “The primary goal of the project has been to create a guide that is truly by students and for students, centered on the issues and challenges that feel

## Community



### Captain Crisis Confronts City Hall

The Captain found himself burning with a citizen's sense of responsibility and determined that the only way to alleviate his dismay was to raise issues at a City Meeting. Besides the City Commission Meeting, he thought there might be some other boards, commissions, etc., that would deal more specifically in certain areas. Investigation of the matter brought him to the point of tears ... there are 33 regulatory boards and commissions existing in the City government from which he was forced to choose. Since he felt that no one should be forced to deal with such a problem, he decided to

list a few he found suited his needs the best!

● **Community Concerns:**  
Community Relations Commission - fourth Thursday, 3:30 P.M. - City Hall, Room 905.

Public Recreation Board - second Monday, 12:00 (except July and August) - YMCA, or Board of Education, or Library

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Captain Crisis '76 catalog page (photo: Samantha Dine)

most pressing today,” she said. “From the beginning, I wanted students to have a strong sense of agency in shaping the guide, making rhetorical, content, and design decisions that reflect both their own experiences and the needs of their peers.”

In reflecting on her experience with *Captain Crisis*, Beaton also felt like the project was so much more than a classroom assignment. She explained, “We thought of our audience as ourselves and people like us, and [thought] about what we wanted to know how to find [it] out. What were our needs? What were our interests? What were our concerns? What were the problems we encountered in our lives that we needed information for?” Using their experiences as members of a community facing those same issues, they paired resources on workers’ rights, accessible food options, healthcare, and more with the voice of *Captain Crisis*.

*“Students are identifying new kinds of challenges, particularly those shaped by current social, cultural, and technological contexts.”*

Working on *Captain Crisis* in 2026 means updating existing resources, but Dine says the project has expanded beyond the scope of the 1976 catalog. “Students are identifying new kinds of challenges, particularly those shaped by current social, cultural, and technological contexts, and working to make those experiences visible and actionable for readers,” she said. “In that sense, the 2026 *Captain Crisis* team is not just updating information, but reimagining what counts as a ‘crisis’ for today’s students.” That means inventing characters that reflect these new challenges, like Broke Ben and Academic Angela, to add to the



Mock-up of one of several new *Captain Crisis* characters (photo: Victoria Jones)

*Captain Crisis* cast.

For Dine, the revival of *Captain Crisis* is also a return to the spirit of WJC’s participatory education. “I also hoped to recreate some of the spirit of the original WJC project by giving students the freedom to explore, question, and express what matters most to them within this format.”

## Jane Zwart

Continued from page 6

to ask Zwart about curiosities like publishing, literature preferences, and revision tools. In many cases where poets struggle to see the last line of a

*“Zwart advised young writers to “read everything, and read broadly.”*

poem, Zwart confessed to the audience that she often writes past the true ending of a poem, calling this the “provisional resting place.” To answer the inquiry of “how to know when the poem feels done,” Zwart shared that she performs a line test, erasing each line one by one.

## Writers Alley

### Continued from page 6

Writing Majors,” McNeilley explained. “This could give them an opportunity to see how the business operates.”

The internship is designed to help students build a realistic understanding of freelance editorial work. While strong writing and editing skills are essential, McNeilley emphasizes that client management often becomes the most challenging and valuable skill interns develop.

“Students often think they can rely solely on writing and editing,” McNeilley shared, “but client management plays a heavier role than they expect.”

Her interns work directly with clients to edit manuscripts, provide developmental feedback, and communicate about revisions. These interactions require interns to balance honesty with sensitivity, particularly when clients may have unrealistic expectations about their work or the process itself.

“Clients are not always good at evaluating the quality of their own writing,” McNeilley noted. “Interns have to learn how to help them see where they need to make changes without offending or discouraging them.”

To support interns through this process, McNeilley provides mentorship and guidance through weekly meetings. She also developed resources and preparation documents to help students navigate client interactions professionally. The internship is intentionally structured to give students autonomy. McNeilley strongly believes that learning comes from experience rather than instruction alone and notes that, “The best way to learn is through doing.”

For writing major Robert Parsons, who interned with Writer’s Alley from August to December 2025, the experience offered a glimpse into professional editorial work. He explained how the experience

helped him build realistic professional expectations for managing clients and his own workload. During the internship, Parsons spent much of his time working one-on-one with clients to edit manuscripts as well as scheduling meetings, managing communication, and organizing the client’s workflow. Despite a demanding semester, Parsons found the experience rewarding. “It was the first time I felt like a professional,” he said.

McNeilley’s broader belief in the importance of writing beyond the classroom is what brought Writer’s Alley to GVSU writing students. Before returning to teaching, she ran her writing-consulting business full-time, helping writers refine their work and express their ideas more clearly. She views writing as a form of personal expression closely tied to the ability to think clearly and articulate one’s experiences, and believes that helping someone improve their writing can be transformative. Although she ultimately returned to teaching because she missed working with students, offering the Writer’s Alley internship allows her to continue supporting writers while also preparing students for professional careers beyond graduation. Being back in the classroom, she explained, enables her to make that impact on a larger scale.

Students interested in the internship program can contact Professor McNeilley at [mneilis@gvsu.edu](mailto:mneilis@gvsu.edu).

## New Faculty Profile: Part-Time Faculty William-Gerdes McClain Breyden Cantu

Part-Time Faculty William Gerdes-McClain joined the department this fall as a first-year writing professor.

While originally from Northern Indiana, Gerdes-McClain spent the past eight years living in Columbus, Georgia, before moving back to the Midwest.

According to Gerdes-McClain, writing has come naturally to him.

As a graduate student, he worked as a writing tutor. “[It’s] work that I really enjoyed,” he explained. “Without that experience, I wouldn’t have had the nerve to try teaching.”

Gerdes-McClain said he was drawn to GVSU because his wife, Rebecca Gerdes-McClain, accepted a position here, also as a member of the Writing Department. He simply “tagged along.” Overall, Gerdes-McClain says, “I continued with [teaching], because I found that it’s pretty rewarding work.”

As an instructor, Gerdes-McClain believes the main value of attending college, especially writing courses, is the exposure to new ways of thinking. He tries to focus his courses on the opportunities to engage with differing perspectives.

“Even expressing your own perspective effectively requires a person to think carefully about who they’re talking to and where that person is coming from,” he said. He stresses the importance of peer review and collaboration as a way for writers to build confidence.

When it comes to his own writing process, Gerdes-McClain is more reflective and slower-paced. “I compose very slowly,” he said. “Maybe sometimes only a single sentence in a day or two, because I kind of do revision in my head as I’m writing.” He also emphasized the role of his readers, “because hearing what they take away from my draft, and solving the problems they notice, helps me think of things I wouldn’t have by myself.”

And while his journey to teaching was accidental, he found the work immensely rewarding. “Everyone does have something worthwhile to say,” he said. “It’s so much harder than it seems... to find those things and articulate them in a way that will actually mean anything to anyone else, for a number of reasons. And it is intimidating, because not everyone will be into what you’re offering.” He adds, “But it’s cool. I mean, I think it’s cool.”

# Letter From the Editor

*Kallie Crouch*



*Kallie Crouch (photo: Kallie Crouch)*

Five years ago, I walked onto GVSU's campus as a freshman at the tail end of the COVID-19 pandemic with a nearly lifelong love for writing but no idea what I wanted to do. Somewhere along the way, I guess I decided, *why not do it all?*

Now, in Winter 2026, my stint as Editor of *InWriting*—my first Writing Department extracurricular—is coming to an end, with my final semester at GVSU following in Fall 2026. With that transition comes a lot of lasts—my last writing courses, my last time at the Student Reading Series (SRS), my last time leading mentor groups at the Writing Center. And while those goodbyes are bittersweet, there is also no doubt that they have been some of the defining moments of my life so far.

If you asked freshman Kallie if she could imagine herself where I am today, the answer would be a resounding no, and that's because I would not be here without the dozens of people who gave me the little pushes I needed along the way. First, it was Rick Iadonisi, my first-year writing professor, who encouraged me to apply to the Writing Center. Then, when I started taking writing classes my sophomore year,

it was my writing faculty and peers. Since then, it's been my fellow Writing Consultants, classmates, and friends who pulled me through late nights staring at my computer, trying to crank out just one more paragraph or line.

That said, I owe my thanks first and foremost to Professor Iadonisi for seeing my potential, and to Patrick Johnson and Meredith Fedewa for pushing me far beyond what I imagined was possible. Thank you to every student who took a chance and booked an appointment with me at the Writing Center—there are over 600 of you now, and each of you has played a role in making me the writer and professional I am today. And to Lisa Gullo, thank you for those tear-filled conversations behind the scenes because, wow, we really do work with some of the best people, don't we?

More than anywhere else, the Writing Department has been like a home for me. Thank you, Todd Kaneko, for pushing me to write better, weirder poems. Thank you, Beth Peterson, for helping me become a more curious and inventive writer of nonfiction. Thank you, Chris Haven, for sharing book recommendations and all of your support as an advisor. Thank you, Kylie Jacobsen, for being such an amazing *InWriting* advisor, and for Zsuzsanna Palmer for your guidance when I first took the reins this fall.

To Arianna Bevier, my outstanding Assistant Editor, you are going to do amazing things. It was such a pleasure working with you this year, and I am endlessly grateful for all of your patience and dedication behind the scenes. It's no exaggeration to say *InWriting* would not be possible without you.

And, to any first-year Writing Majors reading this now, I hope flipping through this edition of *InWriting* has shown you just how much the Writing Department can offer. If you take anything away, take this piece of unsolicited advice: Submit that poem, go to that reading, ask that question, write that essay. You never know what might happen.

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Winter 2026

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