

In Writing

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Microphone in shallow focus. Kane Reinholdtsen

Writing Center Conferences Offer Student Opportunities to Educate and Network

The Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors (FMCWFAMA) has a record of connecting their consultants with professional opportunities through writing center conferences. At conferences, students are invited to attend panel discussions and workshops and even present on research they have done at their own writing centers. One student who has taken full advantage of these opportunities is writing major Teresa Williams. Williams began their time at FMCWFAMA in 2014. Now in their final semester at GVSU, Williams is leaving having attended five writing center conferences and feeling more confident in their professional life post-graduation.

So far this academic year, Williams has presented at two conferences. This past October they presented at the Michigan Writing Center Association (MiWCA) conference in Warren, Michigan. Their panel, "Mother Tongue: Perspectives on Linguistic Discrimination and Inclusion in the Writing Center," is central to the narrative of inclusivity at FMCWFAMA and the writing department. "Stripping students of their native language is harmful," Williams says. It is important to them that every student's native language and dialect of English is validated; that Standard Academic English doesn't hold value over other dialects.

Williams explained that this idea was reinforced by their writing classes, which have helped them understand how people feel about writing and language. While in Intermediate Fiction

Maria McKee

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Workshop, Williams said that they were exposed to a variety of pieces that didn't conform to Standard Academic English. "This taught me that good writing doesn't have to be 'academic,'" they said. They've been able to spread this notion of linguistic inclusivity to the

FMCFWAMA and the GVSU community, Williams has also benefitted from their hard work presenting writing center research. "I get to meet other writers and understand their ways of thinking. I've been able to network with writers and writing programs," Williams says of their experiences. They have even presented in front of the writing center

at Michigan State University, where they one day hope to be a graduate assistant and be a part of the Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing program.

Although students from any major are able to become writing consultants, writing majors notice direct association between what they do in class and what they want to do post-graduation. "As a writing major, you already have some foundational skills for talking about writing. And being a consultant helps you become better at giving feedback," Williams says, encouraging writing students to consider the opportunity. "Conferences provide you the opportunity to go talk about writing with others across the state, region, or country." Through these conferences, Williams has

cultivated professional experience that's prepared them for graduation. Their dedication to the writing major and FMCFWAMA is evident through their impressive record of presentations and research, and Williams will carry these experiences with them post-graduation into their professional life.

New Study Abroad: Writing in Action

Hannah Terry

This fall, the GVSU Writing Department announced its first study abroad program called Writing in Action, a 6-credit program that will launch in Spring 2019. This faculty-led trip, offered by Associate Professor Christopher Toth and WRT Librarian Liaison Hazel McClure, invites students from all majors to apply their writing skills in Cape Town, South Africa. The Writing Department has partnered with African Impact, a non-profit volunteer organization in Africa. The partnership will allow GVSU students to complete an internship with South African



Focus photography of people sitting and writing on notebooks. *The Climate Reality Project*

greater GVSU community through FMCFWAMA, and now to other Michigan universities through their presentation at MiWCA.

Williams didn't stop there, however. This past November, they traveled to Tacoma, Washington to present at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing. Their panel, "If You Build it, They Will Come: Bringing Multimodality to the Writing Center," focused on how to bring multimodal writers to the writing center. This presentation was inspired by two writing courses, Multimodal Composing and Consulting with Writers. For a project in Multimodal Composing, Williams created a video that attempted to reach out to students and encourage them to spend time at FMCFWAMA. This sparked Williams' interest in multimodal writers and creators at GVSU, and how FMCFWAMA could promote their services to all kinds of creators. "We are trained communicators," Williams says. "Even if we haven't been trained in a specific genre, we can tell what's good, what's working, what isn't working."

Beyond the benefits these presentations have had for

non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to address social problems in the country.

During this internship, students will gain experience researching and writing in an international context. The internships will include a variety of writing genres, such as grants, proposals, organizational storytelling, and social media writing. The NGOs that students are set to work with aim to combat social and economic issues facing South Africa.

Beyond coursework, the Writing In Action program includes several field trips so that students understand the rich and troubled history of South Africa. Students can look forward to touring the Cape of Good Hope, Table Mountain, and Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned.

Toth and McClure believe this new program will offer students an opportunity of a lifetime. Students will obtain valuable internship experience while also discovering South Africa's unique culture and history.

"There is no other faculty-led study abroad program that offers an internship credit at GVSU, so students truly have a unique opportunity here with this new program," Toth said.

The faculty directors hope that this program will not only include Writing majors but any student that seeks professional writing, research, and internship experiences in an international context. The program is open to all majors so that students with diverse backgrounds will feed into the overall experience for everyone. GVSU encourages all students to seek a new form of learning through international education, and the Writing Department encourages students to consider Writing in Action as an option.

Toth and McClure split this program into two segments for the 6-week spring semester. For the beginning 2.5 weeks, students will take WRT 380 Writing in International Contexts at GVSU to obtain the writing knowledge and skills needed in their internship abroad. Students will then fly to Cape Town, South Africa to begin their internship with an NGO for the remaining 3.5 weeks.

The application for Writing in Action is due February 1, 2019. To be eligible for this program, students must have taken WRT 150 and have a minimum GPA of 2.0. Participants are also required to bring a laptop. For writing



Nostalgic sunrise in a foreign Beach. *Andrea Mantke*

majors, this study abroad two-course program satisfies six-credits in the major. Majors can use the international internship course as a substitute for the required WRT 490 internship course. The Professional Writing in International Contexts course will satisfy the General Education Issues requirement. After Spring 2019, the program will be offered every other year.

Interested students can find the application at www.gvsu.edu/studyabroad. Scholarships for study abroad programs are available to students as well. Students interested in planning a study abroad should make an appointment at the Padnos International Center or contact Toth or McClure with any questions.

LAMP Program

Emily Reed

The Writing LAMP (Laker Alumni Mentoring Pilot) Program connects current students with GVSU Department of Writing Alumni that are active in the field. The alumni mentors serve as experienced and knowledgeable resources to help navigate the writing degree since they have all already graduated. The program also helps students understand career possibilities in their field, develop community, interact with others outside of professors, roommates, or other peers, and make the transition from college to a career (or graduate school) smooth.

The WRT Lamp program was piloted in Winter 2018 with select junior writing majors who volunteered to

participate. Students enrolled in the program were required to interact with their alumni mentee three times throughout the semester, attend one alumni panel presentation, and complete a brief survey about their experience.

Students were able to interact with their alumni mentees on the phone, through a video call, or in person if the alumni was geographically local. For the first meeting, the interactions generally served as a get to know you session. Future interactions usually focused on the job market (or graduate school), with agendas made and discussed before each meeting.

The number of times a student interacted with their mentor depended on what they discussed and what concerns the student wanted to talk about. Nick Kondyles, one of the program mentees, noted that the program was largely based on the relationship developed between the mentor and mentee and how effort to build the relationship was beneficial in succeeding in the program.

“Although there are guidelines for the program to run smoothly, what is made of the experience is completely up to the mentor and mentee,” Kondyles said.

Part of what made the program such a unique and helpful experience was that it offered guidance from an alum who is immersed in the writing field outside of college. For many of the participants, the mentoring experience was quite eye-opening, especially in situations where it made graduating clearer, offered insight into what



Writing on brown wooden table near white ceramic mug. *Green Chameleon*

to expect and what is out there for a graduated writer.

The program offered a lot of reassurance and opened the student mentees to new possibilities they may not have considered. For example, Emily Zerrenner said that her mentor, Rose White, went overseas after GVSU and finished a graduate program in one year, an idea Emily had not yet considered. Kondyles, on the other hand, was brought by his alumni mentor, Kenny Porter, to Writers Under Thirty events to experience and meet a Grand Rapids writing community.

Although each interaction was different for all of the participants, they were always talking about writing, whether that be career, community, or editing. The WRT LAMP program definitely had a lot to offer these students and prepared them well on what to expect in the professional world while helping them grow in their writing.

This program will be open to all upper-level writing majors in Winter 2019. Students should respond to a call in late November from the Department Chair, Associate Professor Christopher Toth, if they are interested in being paired with an alumni mentor.



Holding cups on tables. *Joshua Ness*

It Can Be Pretty Major to Minor

Laura Thaxton

When I tell others that I'm a Writing Minor and not a major, they all seem so shocked. But you do so much for the Writing Department! they say. You're always going to all of these poetry and author events! they might say. Well, why aren't you a Writing Major? they almost always have to say. The answers that I typically give revolve around the fact that I am, indeed, still a writing student above all. Other times, it might be the mood I'm in that dictates how I might respond to a question ripe with this strange stigma surrounding minors --- an idea that you can't simply balance two areas of study without one taking the most real estate allotted for your passions. Sure, we might not be as intensely studying Writing as if we had it as our majors, but it's able to mold it to what we want it to be.

To earn a minor in Writing, students complete six classes in total. They have some required foundational courses, then are allowed electives such as Writing for the Web, Fiction and other genre workshops, Business Communication, and even Multimodal Composing. Students have the ability to curate their classes for what might most benefit them in a short period of time. Whether that be creative poetry classes, or even magazine writing, Writing students of all kinds are exposed to comprehensive skills that will carry over into their main areas of study.

Something that the Writing minor specifically excels at increasing one's professional abilities for careers that generally have nothing to do with writing at the surface level. Majors such as public relations, nursing, or even in business all utilize writing usually in their job descriptions. Not only does one learn how to strengthen their writing prowess, but also learn how it applies to their major areas of study, and how to balance it.

For example, Psychology major Brooke Burns has her eyes set on becoming an Occupational Therapist. She thought about the idea of having a Writing minor when she first job shadowed for it. "I realized that half the time that you worked patients," said Burns, "nearly the exact amount of time was used to write up reports of what happened." This was something she didn't expect to find in her future career. "The reports have to be perfect and exact... I thought a writing minor would be a great pairing to learn how to do it well." In the future, Burns plans on taking Professional Writing and even Writing with Style to help fulfill some of her requirements.

Senior Steven Karbownik, a fellow writing minor, also sees value in declaring it although he is a Statistics major. "I always knew I enjoyed writing," Karbownik said, "and I figure to at least get a minor would help me become more well-rounded as far as communications." He also pointed out that credit wise, the minor was fairly easy to fit into his schedule. But, when asked if the minor complemented his major, Karbownik stated, "In Stats, you write a lot of reports. You have to communicate all kinds of information effectively." This Statistics major, however, has taken



Group of People inside the Library. Robert Bye

advantage of classes like Intermediate Nonfiction and poetry, where he otherwise wouldn't get the opportunity to do some creative writing as well. "This experience of honing that craft really has benefited me in my major."

Furthermore, pursuing a minor might get you more acquainted with the Writing department and faculty, as it did with Engineering student Allie Gonzales. Gonzales now double majors in both Writing and Engineering. "I use writing in Engineering all of the time," she said. "When coming up with new projects and designs, we need to be able to verbally communicate our ideas as well as writing reports to match." Gonzales, like Karbownik, agrees that a lot of students don't think about the writing required of them in their majors. "Places are more likely to notice you as an engineer if you are able to write and communicate well," adds Gonzales, "Plus technical writing is an important aspect in engineering when it comes to consumers." While Gonzales has taken some technical and professional writing courses, she also enjoys poetry, and is currently taking Advanced Creative Nonfiction.

I'm not alone in this minor stigma, but I have found that I share the exact common ground with these other minors. Although I may study English Literature, I've learned how



Open Book Lot. *Patrick Tomasso*

to deeper appreciate writing as a craft, and not just as a forum. Being involved with the Writing department has also exposed me to different opportunities that I wouldn't otherwise receive through my major. I always considered myself a creative writer, but now I also love document design. Not only does this all brighten up a resume, but you also get a litany of communicative skills to boot, and pieces of writing for a portfolio that could make you stand out from other candidates in a job interview.

So even if you might not be Writing major, think about how writing is incorporated into your current major because chances are you'll be writing still, more than you thought you'd be. Let's end the stigmas that surround minors of any kind – because it can really be pretty major to be a Writing minor.

On Hard Work and Rejection

Andrea Mantke

Daniel Abott studied Writing at Grand Valley State University, becoming part of the graduating class of 2012. When he came in, he was a non-traditional student with no formal experience in writing. Now, after graduating college and working through a Masters of Fine Arts at the Vermont College of Fine arts, he has been published in several literary magazines and has had a fiction novel published by Ig books.

He spoke shortly about this and his experience with writing and obtaining a Writing degree for the Alumni spotlight GVSU site. During this short interview, he was asked what his advice for future writers would be. Which to he responded with his finishing statement, "Do

not romanticize the craft of writing. It is work. Talent is fruitless unless you are willing to make sacrifices and deal with a ton of rejection."

This is one of the most important lessons any writer could learn. Because writing is a form of art, we tend to romanticize it and envision a future of tea and coffee shops, scribbling over a notebook happily. This is not necessarily untrue; however, it doesn't encompass the reality of being a full-time writer. It is important to acknowledge the work that must be put in to writing as a craft to produce something that will be deemed worthy of publication. Even if it is deemed such at some point, we must still be prepared for a lot of failed attempts beforehand.

His words for this article are powerful for aspiring writers. Talent is fruitless unless you work. Talent isn't much unless you hone it. You can only hone talent by putting in work, logging the hours, working and reworking the same piece until it is just right. That is what writing is about. It is not a story magically appearing in the screen before you, it is working for hours to create the story, the world to encompass it, and the characters to drive it. There is much to learn from authors who acknowledge this as Daniel Abott does.



Person writing in a planner. *Thought Catalogue*

Fall Arts Celebration

Andrea Mantke

The fall arts celebration is a collection of events held yearly at Grand Valley. These events fall into one of six categories: art, music, poetry, dance, lecture, and holiday celebration. All of these gatherings are probably very enriching, and students are encouraged to attend all of them. Even so, I feel like there is something special about the poetry event. What this event boils down to is an evening with nationally recognized guest poets eloquently and passionately declaring their pieces to an enraptured audience for a few hours. But it is so much more than that.

I attended this event without any expectations. To be honest, I just chose that event as an excuse to take a cute girl out on a date. I knew I liked poetry, but I didn't think much past that. My date and I arrived slightly early to the event and were received by two people pleasantly indicating to us where the food was. We walked around the reception to find platters of cheese, hummus, mushrooms, and all sorts of other appetizers for the guests. As they begun arriving, we realized we were slightly under-dressed, but we still didn't feel out of place. It simply felt like a very calm, cheerful group of people. We were all there with the sole purpose of enjoying the night.

When the time came, we were all lead to a lecture style room where the crowd sat in silence as the lights were shut off. The evening was inaugurated with some inspiring words and the first poet was presented.

Ellen Bass, an older white woman, stepped up to the podium and talked about her writing and how she'd arrived to her most recent collection of poems. My favorite was her closing piece, *Bad Things Will Happen*. I would comment further on it, but I honestly believe that if anyone is interested in it, they would enjoy reading it more. She spoke of domestic topics with a profound point of view, which also happily surprised me as she touched on her experience on being an older lesbian.

I don't know if this was a conscious choice on the planning of Grand Valley, but both of the speakers at the event were part of a minority group. This, I believe, pushed the event even further. The delicate and sublime art of poetry was grounded by the realness of their experiences and how they relate to the present state of society.

The second poet was Kevin Young. He spoke intensely, giving his pieces a much more heavy tone. And he spoke about growing up as a young black boy in America. His experiences in general, while touching on his experiences with race and expectations of him. Unlike with Ellen Bass,

this was not a topic I have personal experience. There is something about learning of experiences through poetry and art rather than just hearing facts. Stories come alive and they become relatable and real. As though anyone could go through what this young, black, struggling boy did. Because they could, had they somehow been born in



Brown Maple Leaf on Book Ksenia Makagonova

his body.

I am honestly quite thankful to Grand Valley for holding these kinds of events and making them available to students, as it is something I probably wouldn't have been able to afford any other way, and it was an event I would eagerly attend again. Anyone interested in poetry would not only enjoy the celebration, but also learn about the world and themselves through it.

Fall in Krakow

Jennifer Polasek

How did studying abroad influence a GVSU writing students' perspective of cross-cultural communication? By receiving a Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, it gave me opportunities to broaden my perspective of rhetoric. Last semester, I faced many challenges of cross-cultural communication while studying at Jagiellonian University and volunteering at the U.S. Consulate in Krakow, Poland. As a GVSU writing student, I credit most of the success I had abroad to the courses I took within my major.

Prior to going abroad, I had taken Consulting with Writers and Writing in the Global Context: Culture,



Orange and brown falling maple leaves *Autum Roadhaver*

Technology, & Language Practices. The skills I acquired in both of these courses became extremely valuable when trying to communicate around a language barrier. Most of the classes I took at Jagiellonian University were taught by Polish professors who had translated the coursework into English. Even though this was my native language, I still faced difficulties in the courses.

One course in particular, called Polish Gay Literature, consisted of analyzing various translated excerpts from books written by prominent Polish authors who were

either gay or wrote about homosexuality. I was excited to take this course because I thought it would be interesting to see how this topic had evolved in a country that is heavily influenced by religion. The challenge became how to overcome poorly translated work that destroyed the stylistic qualities of the writing. Our professor wanted us to understand the context of the writing compared to its' content. However, since this course was supposed to be about analyzing writing from a literary perspective, I felt inclined to decipher how much the rhetoric of these pieces was affected by the translations. I ended up having many conversations with the professor about how the rhetorical situation of a book changes based on the language it's presented in.

In the majority of my classes abroad, I was one of only a handful of students whose native language was English. One of the main challenges of other international students was being able to communicate effectively in English. I began helping a couple students in different courses revise essays for our final exams. The most difficult part that most students struggled with was dealing with syntax. In other languages, syntax is much more flexible compared to how strictly it's used in English. I ended up bonding with these students over the fact that we were all facing challenges of communicating.

I also strengthened my knowledge of rhetoric by volunteering at the U.S. consulate. I volunteered weekly, presenting at their English Language Club, and to schools that visited the consulate. Since I was interacting with individuals that had varying degrees of English language abilities, I had to make sure my presentations were simplistic and clear. It was also very important that I was conscientious of the words I chose to use because of how they'd come across to an audience of a different culture.

Being a part of GVSU's writing program gave me a great foundation to face my challenges of cross-cultural communication head on while abroad. I don't think I would've been as proficient at tackling these challenges if I didn't possess the skills I acquired in my writing courses. Studying abroad is a great option for writing students because it allows you to put your skills into use.

