

Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies

The Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies (WHS) teaches MIT students the techniques, forms, and traditions of contemporary writing, media, and communication. WHS offers three undergraduate options leading to the Bachelor of Science in Writing: Creative Writing, Science Writing, and Digital Media. The [Concentration in Writing](#) establishes a course of study in fiction, prose nonfiction (including rhetoric), science writing, or digital media, offering engineering and science majors an opportunity to develop abilities that will play a key role in their professional careers. The [Minor in Writing](#) gives students the opportunity to work in one of the program's three areas while also exploring offerings from the program's core curriculum. Program faculty and lecturers include creative artists, scholars, journalists, and specialists in digital media and communication. Some of our faculty have joint appointments in Science, Technology, and Society; Physics; and Comparative Media Studies.

WHS is organized into four academic groups that work in diverse ways at MIT: (1) the core curriculum offers Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences distribution (HASS-D) subjects and electives to undergraduates, including majors, minors, and concentrators; (2) the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) outreach program works collaboratively throughout the Institute to bring communication instruction to undergraduate majors in every school and department at MIT; (3) the Writing and Communication Center provides help on request to undergraduates, graduate students, and all other members of the MIT community on papers, theses, proposals, fellowship and graduate school applications, job talks, and oral presentations; and (4) the one-year Graduate Program in Science Writing trains a highly selected group of students in the art and profession of writing about science and technology for the general public.

During the past year, 922 students enrolled in WHS subjects. These students included 14 majors, 19 minors, and 93 concentrators in writing for the HASS-D requirement. Our WAC programs brought writing instruction to almost 4,000 students in 30 departments and 100 subjects throughout the Schools of Science, Engineering, HASS, and Architecture and Planning. Our Writing and Communication Center staff assisted more than 1,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Finally, seven students graduated from the Graduate Program in Science Writing. There were 59 applicants for the Class of '11, and seven outstanding students were admitted.

Research and Publications

Assistant professor Vivek Bald published an article, "Overlapping Diasporas, Multiracial Lives: South Asian Muslims in U.S. Communities of Color, 1880–1950" in *Black Routes to Islam*, edited by Manning Marable and Hisham Aidi, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Assistant professor Beth Coleman published three articles: "GeoFilm," in *X: Mark of Collaboration*, *Arkitip* no. 0053X, December 2009; "Using Sensor Inputs to Affect Virtual and Real Environments," in *IEEE Pervasive Computing*, vol. 8, no. 3, July–Sept. 2009; and "Race as Technology," in *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1 70, 2009.

Associate professor Helen Elaine Lee has placed for publication three excerpts from her novel *Life Without: "Alphabet,"* in *Prairie Schooner*, forthcoming; "Pomegranate," in *Solstice Literary Magazine*, forthcoming; and "This Kind of Red," in *Best African American Fiction*, edited by Gerald Early, Bantam Books, 2009.

Professor Thomas Levenson published his book *Newton and the Counterfeiter*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (US); other editions were published by Faber & Faber (UK) and Audible (US audio). Editions in Greece and Japan are under contract. He also published several articles expanding on material in this book: on Newton at the Mint in *BBC History Magazine*; on Newton's mint career and its implications for modern finance in the *Sunday Times*; on counterfeiting and its history in the *Daily Telegraph*; on financial regulation seen through Newton's story at CNN.com; on Newton's faith in *Killing The Buddha*; and an article on the writing process at Whatever.com. He also continues his blog, *The Inverse Square Blog*.

Professor Kenneth Manning published an article, "Reflections on E. E. Just, Black Apollo of Science, and the Experiences of African-American Scientists," in *Molecular Reproduction and Development*, vol. 76, issue 10, 2009.

Associate professor Nick Montfort has copublished with Ian Bogost the book *Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System*, MIT Press, Platform Studies series. He has also published two articles, "Portal of Ivory, Passage of Horn," in *Well Played 1.0: Video Games, Value, and Meaning*, edited by Drew Davidson, ETC Press, 2009; and, with Ian Bogost, "Random and Raster: Display Technologies and the Development of Videogames," in *The IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* vol. 31, no. 3, July–September 2009.

Professor James Paradis has published a review of Ralph O'Connor's *The Earth on Show*, in *Isis*, fall 2009.

Marcia Bartusiak, adjunct professor in the Graduate Program in Science Writing, published eight articles explicating various current scientific matters to the general public, in *Natural History*, *Discover*, *Technology Review*, *Sky and Telescope*, and *The Washington Post*.

Edward Barrett, senior lecturer, contracted with MIT Press for *Building Mobile Experience*.

Rebecca Faery, director of first year writing, led a workshop on "Writing Teachers Writing: Deepening Our Passion for Our Own Writing," at the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication.

Suzanne Lane, associate director of WAC, published a review article, "Breaking New Ground: How the Landscape of Antebellum Science Shaped the Founding of MIT," in *Technology Review*.

Neal Lerner, assistant director of WAC, published a book titled *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory*, and an article on archival research. He coauthored two books, one on genome refactoring as a scientific process and as a teaching tool; and, with Jennifer Craig and

Mya Poe, *Learning to Communicate in Science and Engineering: Case Studies from MIT*, MIT Press. He published an introduction to a list of theses on writing centers.

Leslie Perelman, director of WAC, published two articles on assessment and maintenance of cross-disciplinary writing curricula. He coedited a volume of honorary essays for Edward M. White on writing assessment.

Mya Poe, assistant director of technical training, coauthored a book with Neal Lerner and Jennifer Craig, *Learning to Communicate in Science and Engineering: Case Studies from MIT*, MIT Press. She published a peer-reviewed article and three peer-reviewed book chapters on aspects of writing instruction as influenced by language and racial characteristics, and on new methods of scientific writing.

Jennifer Craig coauthored a paper with Mya Poe “Professional communication education in a global context: a collaboration between MIT, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Mexico, and Universidad de Quintana Roo, Mexico,” in *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, forthcoming.

Contributions to MIT through Academic Programs and Initiatives

WHS continues to provide instruction and support in writing and communication in its many contemporary manifestations—as journalistic and reflective medium, professional instrument, and art form. Key initiatives that WHS has supported include: (1) the Institute’s Communication Requirement, (2) the Comparative Media Studies (CMS) program, and (3) the Graduate Program in Science Writing, leading to a master of science.

As part of the new Communication Requirement, WHS has revamped and expanded its WAC programs. The object of these outreach programs is to take communication instruction and evaluation into core subjects in science and engineering departments throughout the Institute. Directors Leslie Perelman and Suzanne Lane have expanded the WAC teaching efforts of WHS in every department at the Institute, including the Sloan School of Management, and they have experimented extensively with innovative instructional approaches.

WHS also continues to expand its support of the CMS undergraduate and graduate programs in collaboration with the Foreign Languages and Literatures Section and the Literature Faculty. WHS faculty and lecturers currently working with CMS include associate professor Nick Montfort, assistant professor Beth Coleman, and senior lecturer Edward Barrett, who teach a variety of digital media subjects jointly listed in WHS and CMS and provide additional advising and administrative support for CMS students.

The third WHS initiative continues with the Graduate Program in Science Writing, which has graduated nine classes and a total of 54 SM students. Our graduates hold positions at *IEEE Spectrum*, *Technology Review*, public television station WGBH’s *Nova*, *Psychology Today*, *Seed*, and the *Boston Globe*, among others, and freelance for a wide variety of publications. Books published by two of our alumni received very positive reviews: *Superdove* by Courtney Humphries ’04 and *The Restless Earth: Rocks and Minerals*

by Selby Cull '06. One of our most recent graduates has signed a book contract, and another received a Fulbright fellowship to continue her thesis research in Russia.

Presentations, Grants, and Awards

Professor Vivek Bald gave an invited lecture/screening in October 2009, "Mutinous Archaeologies: Films from the Dub and Punk Archives," for the Artists on Film Series, New York University Program in Asian/Pacific/American Studies. He was a finalist for the American Studies Association's 2009–2010 Ralph Henry Gabriel Dissertation Prize for "Hands Across the Water: Indian Sailors, Peddlers, and Radicals in the U.S., 1890–1965."

Professor Beth Coleman received D'Arbeloff and Dean's fund support of her first-year focus subject, Investigating Gender and Technology, in conjunction with the Program in Women's and Gender Studies (WGS). She gave a GeoFilm presentation at the PICNIC festival in Amsterdam.

Professor Robert Kanigel gave a presentation on John Millington Synge at the Blascaod Mor Commemoration 2009, Blasket Centre, Dun Chaoin, County Kerry, Ireland, entitled "Visitors to the Blaskets and Their Influence."

Professor Helen Elaine Lee was a finalist for the American Academy of Arts and Letters Rome Prize.

Professor Thomas Levenson made several public presentations based on his recent book *Newton and the Counterfeiter*, including one to the MIT Corporation in October 2009 entitled, "Isaac Newton, Scientific Detective." He gave several other presentations that month, including "Newton and the Counterfeiter," at the WHS Writers Series; "Isaac Newton: Detective," at Labyrinth Books, Princeton NJ; and "Isaac Newton: Mathematician, Physicist, Alchemist...Cop?" at California Institute of Technology. He also presented "The History of Science and Popular Media" at the History of Science Society annual meeting, in Phoenix Arizona, in November 2009. *Newton and the Counterfeiter* appeared on the "best-of" lists of the *Sunday Times*, *Library Journal*, and *New York Magazine*.

Professor Nick Montfort gave a series of invited talks: "Think Inside the Box: Platform Studies," with Ian Bogost, at the Center for Computer Games and Virtual Worlds, University of California, Irvine, December 2009; "Events to Natural Language in the IF System Curveship," at the Workshop on the Situated Understanding of Intention, University of Pennsylvania, July 2009; and "Interactive Fiction: Virtual Reality You Read," at the AXIOM Gallery, Boston, July 2009.

He also made a number of conference presentations: "The ppg256 Series of Minimal Poetry Generators" "Platform Studies: Frequently Questioned Answers," with Ian Bogost, and "Shaping Stories and Building Worlds on Interactive Fiction Platforms," with Alex Mitchell, all at Digital Arts and Culture conference, UC Irvine, December 2009; "Reading Function, Code, and Platform," at The Network as a Space and Medium for Interdisciplinary Art Practice conference, Bergen, Norway, November 2009; "Computing

Language and Poetry,” at the Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present, Knoxville, Tennessee, October 2009; and “Poetry Generation at the Lower Extreme,” at the &Now Festival of Innovative Writing and the Literary Arts, Buffalo, New York, October 2009. He also participated in several readings and exhibitions: “Five Uneasy Pieces,” at Digital Arts and Culture, UC Irvine, December 2009; “A Reading from *Implementation, Mystery House Taken Over, Book and Volume, and ppg256*” at The Internet as Playground and Factory, The New School, New York, November 2009; and “Small Machines Making Words,” at The Network as a Space and Medium for Interdisciplinary Art Practice, Bergen, Norway, November 2009. The exhibition *Grand Text Auto*, at the Krannert Art Museum at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which displayed the cutting-edge work of the blog collaboratively written by Montfort, Mary Flanagan, Michael Mateas, Scott Rettberg, Andrew Stern, and Noah Wardrip-Fruin, ran from April through July 2009.

Marcia Bartusiak was an invited panelist at the Women in Physics conference at Yale University. She delivered talks to various science and astronomical meetings and festivals across the country. Six of these were based on her book *The Day We Found the Universe*. She received the Klumpke-Roberts Award of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, for “outstanding contributions to the public understanding and appreciation of astronomy,” and the Distinguished Alumni Award from Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia.

Rebecca Faery received a Levitan Prize for Teaching Excellence.

Suzanne Lane presented conference talks at the Conference on College Composition and Communication and the Writing Across the Curriculum 2010 Conference. She was a joint recipient with Neal Lerner and others of an Alumni Class Funds Grant for “Stories to Tell, Skills to Build: Using Video to Improve Communication Instruction.”

Neal Lerner gave a half-dozen invited lectures at colleges and universities on the writing process and writing centers in the university environment. He presented a paper at the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication. He gave the keynote address at the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association. He received, with Suzanne Lane and others, an Alumni Class Funds Grant for “Using Video to Improve Communication Instruction.” He also received an Honorable Mention from the Council of Writing Program Administrators Best Book Award for *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory*, 2009.

Leslie Perelman delivered papers on various aspects of writing assessment and metaphor for the annual meetings of the Conference on College Composition and Communication and for the Rhetoric Society of America. He conducted a workshop on writing assessment for the University of California, Davis. He was a panel member for the Convention of the Modern Language Association.

Mya Poe made four conference presentations on the influence of race and national variations on writing, at the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication Convention, the Ivy Plus Writing Consortium, the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing Conference in Coventry, England,

and the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing/Association canadienne de redactologie Conference in Ottawa. She taught workshops on race and writing and on the technology of writing at Columbia University and the University of Connecticut as well as an Independent Activities Period (IAP) workshop for MIT faculty in January 2010. Along with principal investigator Clark Colton and collaborators Lisa Dush and Jane Kokernak, she received a grant from MIT Alumni Class Funds for the project Integrating Collaborative Technologies in Chemical Engineering Projects Laboratory.

Steve Strang, director of the Writing and Communication Center, was awarded a Levitan Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Jennifer Craig, lecturer II, presented a paper at the WAC Conference: "Creating a Transnational WAC Model: Sharing WAC Across National Borders." She organized a panel discussion and presented a paper at the Asociación Nacional Universitaria de Profesores de Inglés in Zihuatenejo, Mexico: "MIT-Mexico Transnational Communication Research: Professional Communication in a Global Context."

Andrea Walsh, lecturer II, presented a paper at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. She made a series of presentations and workshops for the social science faculty at Winchester High School.

Service to the Institute

Professor Vivek Bald served as concentration advisor during AY2010.

Professor Beth Coleman participated in the CMS Advisory Committee and Curriculum Committee, and served on the WGS Curriculum Committee. She held a residency at Centre International d'Accueil et d'Echanges des Récollets, Paris.

Professor Robert Kanigel was a member of the Committee on the Undergraduate Program's Subcommittee on the HASS Requirement, and belonged to professional organizations, including the Boston Biography Group, the National Association of Science Writers, and the Society for the History of Technology.

Professor Helen Elaine Lee's served as major advisor to WHS, and participated in the SHASS Oversight Committee and the WGS Program Committee and Steering Committee. She served as a board member of the Faculty Newsletter, and was the originator and editor of its "Arts & Humanities @ MIT" feature. Her service to professional organizations included working as a board member and assistant chair for PEN New England, and as director of the PEN New England Freedom to Write Committee's Prison Creative Writing Program.

Professor Thomas Levenson's service to WHS included headship of the Graduate Program in Science Writing. Institute service included membership in the Institute-wide Planning Task Force, created in response to the financial crisis, and its Revenue Enhancement working group.

Professor Kenneth Manning's service to the program included chairing several search committees, as well as tenure and promotion committees. His outside professional service included serving as a judge for the Watson Davis and Helen Miles Davis Prize for the History of Science Society, and organizing and chairing a session entitled "How Should We Write the History of Science?" at the annual History of Science Society meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, in November 2009.

Professor Nick Montfort continued to coordinate the Purple Blurb digital writing series that he founded at MIT; he served on the search committee for a CMS tenured hire in the fall of 2009; and he acted as concentration advisor. He was a series editor for Platform Studies and a reviewer for The MIT Press. His outside professional service included continuing to serve on the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory steering committee; continuing to act as director of the Electronic Literature Organization; and serving on the committee for *Networked: a (networked_book) about (networked_art)*, a project funded by the National Endowment for the Arts published in July 2009.

Professor James Paradis served as head of WHS. His Institute service included working extensively last year—and for more than a decade—with the CMS program in an advisory capacity on its governing board, and serving on the CMS curriculum, committee, and administrative committees. He also served on the SHASS Equal Opportunity Committee.

Marcia Bartusiak served as a judge for the Gemant Award of the American Institute of Physics, and for the Ilona Karmel Writing Prizes for the Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies. She developed a new undergraduate subject, 21W.732 Science Writing and New Media.

Ed Barrett was appointed director of undergraduate studies in CMS, where he is also chair of the Curriculum Committee. He is a faculty mentor for the research project EventHive, sponsored by the Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology. Barrett also served on the MIT Council for the Arts.

Mia Consalvo, visiting associate professor, is president of the Association of Internet Researchers, and the Game Studies Track chair of the Foundations of Digital Games Conference. She taught an IAP workshop on textual analysis.

Rebecca Faery served as a judge for the Norman Mailer/National Council of Teachers of English contest in creative nonfiction, summer 2009 and summer 2010. She served on MIT's Stellar Advisory Board and on the WHS Writing Council.

Suzanne Lane served on the HASS Overview Committee. She directed the WAC IAP Workshops for Faculty Series and led three of the workshops.

Neal Lerner served on the WHS Writing Council, the WAC Council, and the Faculty Subcommittee on the Communication Requirement. He was one of eight invited communication consultants for an National Science Foundation-funded joint project

conducted by Miami University of Ohio and North Carolina State University: “Incorporating Communication Skills Throughout the Computer Science and Software Engineering Curricula.” He served as a conference proposal reviewer for several professional organizations, and as a manuscript reviewer for the journals *College English*; *College, Composition, and Communication*; and *Composition Studies*; as well as for Utah State University Press.

Mya Poe served as a judge for the Ilona Karmel Writing Prize Competition, and on the Language Editorial Board of the *Journal of Writing Research*. She also served as a Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) stage 1 reviewer and on the conference’s Outstanding Book Award Selection and Diversity committees (cochairing the latter), and was a facilitator of its EngiComm Special Interest Group.

Steven Strang served on the WHS Writing Council. For the 27th year, he is head instructor and teacher of the Humanities subject for the Office of Minority Education’s Interphase Program. He also mentors students through that office’s Mentor Advocate Program.

Andrea Walsh served as a freshman advisor, and as chair for the Women’s and Gender Studies Louis Kampf Writing Prize Committee. She served as a judge in the Ilona Karmel Writing Prize Competition, as editor of MIT’s online student magazine *Angles* 2009, and was a reader for the freshman essay evaluation.

Personnel

Thomas Levenson will become the head of WHS effective July 1, 2010; James Paradis will become interim head of CMS for AY2011. Douglas A. Harrell has been hired as an associate professor without tenure starting AY2011. Adjunct professor Marcia Bartusiak will become the executive director of the Graduate Program in Science Writing starting July 1, 2010. Lecturers Karen Boiko, Mary Caulfield, Jennifer Craig, and Marilee Ogren will be promoted to lecturer II starting July 1, 2010. WHS welcomed its first Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, Amaranth Borsuk.

Women represent 64 percent of our total teaching staff and 20 percent of our core faculty. Members of minority groups comprise 12 percent of our total staff and 60 percent of our core faculty. Four of our core faculty—an assistant professor, an untenured associate professor, a tenured associate professor, and one full professor—are African American. One assistant professor is Indian American. One full professor is Dominican American.

James Paradis
Program Head
Professor of Scientific and Technical Communication

More information about the Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies can be found at <http://writing.mit.edu/>.