

Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies

The Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies (PWHS) offers MIT students the opportunity to study the methods, forms and traditions of contemporary writing. Students are taught to write with force, clarity, and creativity in a wide range of forms. Electives are available in expository writing, fiction, poetry, the essay, journalism, rhetoric, biography, writing plays, technical communication, science writing, and digital communication. Our program members include scholars, journalists, and artists who themselves write in these forms, and who publish research in a variety of humanistic fields, both traditional and interdisciplinary. Our faculty includes joint appointments in Science, Technology, and Society; Physics; Comparative Media Studies (CMS); and Mechanical Engineering. Our program members work in one or more the four following curricular groups: the core academic curriculum, made up of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Science distribution (HASS-D) subjects and electives; the writing-across-the-curriculum outreach programs throughout the Institute; the Writing and Communication Center; and the graduate program in science writing. Program subjects during the past year enrolled 1,038 students, of whom 16 were majors, 18 were minors, and 86 were concentrators in writing for the HASS-D requirement. Our writing-across-the-curriculum programs brought writing instruction to more than 2,200 students in departments throughout the Schools of Science, Engineering, and Architecture and Planning. Our Writing and Communication Center staff assisted a total of 737 undergraduate and graduate students for a total of 3,030 visits, providing assistance with reports, papers, oral presentations, applications, and thesis projects. Finally, seven students graduated from our MSc science writing program.

Research and Publications

Professor Robert Kanigel continues research and writing on “Faux Real,” a book about leather, imitation leather, and the boundaries between natural and manmade materials.

Professor Kenneth Manning continues work on his study of the role of African Americans in medicine and on an encyclopedia of African Americans in science, technology, and medicine.

Professor James Paradis published an essay titled “The Butler-Darwin Controversy in the Victorian Periodical Press” in *Science Serialized* by MIT Press and continues work on a study of Samuel Butler and 19th-century science.

Associate professor Helen Elaine Lee continues work on “Life Without,” her novel about prison and prisoners’ lives.

Associate professor Junot Diaz published a sketch “Homecoming, with Turtle” in the June 2004 issue of *The New Yorker*, and he continues work on his novel “Secret Histories.”

Assistant professor Anthony Lioi's essay "The Great Work Begins: Theater as Theurgy in *Angels in America*" will appear in the fall 2004 issue of *Crosscurrents*, and his essay "Of Swamp Dragons: Mud, Megalopolis, and a Future for Ecocriticism" has been accepted to appear in 2005. He is currently working on a study of cosmological crisis and the American essay from 1945 to 2000.

Adjunct professor Alan Lightman published his new novel, *Reunion*, with Pantheon Books in July 2003; has a forthcoming book of photography, *The Heart of the Horse*, to be published by Barnes and Noble in September 2004; and has a new collection of essays on creativity in science, *A Sense of the Mysterious* to be published by Pantheon in January 2005. He published essays in *Daedalus*, the *New York Times Science Times*, and an essay collection titled *Living with the Genie*, which he coedited. He is currently working on a collection of essays titled "Landmark Discoveries in the Sciences."

Adjunct professor Joe Haldeman completed his science fiction novel *Camouflage*, which was serialized in *Analog Magazine* through March, April, and May 2004, and is scheduled for publication by Ace Books in August 2004. He published short stories in *Stars* ("Finding My Shadow"), *Science Fiction and Fantasy Magazine* ("Four Short Stories"), and *Renaissance Faire* ("Diminished Chord"); he published his 2002 American Academy of Arts and Sciences speech, "Colonizing Other Worlds," in *Interstellar Travel and Colonizing Other Worlds*, compiled by Apogee Books in 2003, and published poems in *Absolute Magnitude Magazine* and *Mike Bento's Anthology*.

Visiting professor Marcia Bartusiak completed her fourth book, *Archives of the Universe: A Treasury of Astronomy's Historic Works of Discovery*, which will be published in the fall by Pantheon Books.

Visiting professor Patricia Powell's books *Me Dying Trial* and *A Small Gathering of Bones* were reissued by Beacon Press in 2003.

Senior lecturer Edward Barrett published an experimental trilogy of verse novels titled *Rub Out* with Pressed Wafer Books in 2003 and continues work on a full-length monograph titled "Digital Poetry" for MIT Press.

Lecturer Stephen Alter published his new volume *Elephas Maximus: a Portrait of the Indian Elephant* with Harcourt Books in May 2004. He is currently working on a new anthology of Himalayan folklore related to natural history and environmental issues.

Lecturer William Corbett's edited edition *Just The Thing: Selected Letters of James Schuyler* will be published by Turtle Point Press in November 2004. His poems, reviews, essays, and profiles appeared in the *Boston Phoenix*, *Conjunctions*, *Craft Horizons*, *artUS*, *Art New England*, *Carve*, *artsMEDIA*, *Skanky Possum*, and *Brick*.

Lecturer Ellen Cooney's new novel *Gun Ball Hill*, published by the University Press of New England, appeared on August 1.

Lecturer Rebecca Faery continues her research on captivity narratives in American cultural history and her work on a collection of essays on Vietnam.

Lecturer Christopher Sawyer-Laucanno's third biography, *E.E. Cummings: A Biography*, will be published by Sourcebooks in September 2004.

Lecturer Ann Snodgrass's translation of *The Hippopotamus* by Luciano Erba was published by Guernica Press in 2003.

Lecturer Leslie Perelman's paper "Transforming Assessment and Learning Using Online Tools" appeared in the *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning*, after the paper was presented at the University of Wisconsin in 2003.

Lecturer Karen Boiko's essay "Reading and (Re)Writing Class: Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*" is forthcoming in *Victorian Literature and Culture*.

Lecturer Atissa Banuazizi's paper "Information Status and Pitch Prominence: Variation in the Prosodic Realization of Not-negation in American English" has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Pragmatics*.

Lecturer Elizabeth Fox's essay "Closure and Foreclosure in *The Rainbow*" appeared in *The Rainbow and Women in Love: D.H. Lawrence*, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2004.

Lecturer Neal Lerner's essay "Punishment and Possibility: Representing Writing Centers, 1939–1970" appeared in the fall 2003 issue of *Composition Studies*; his "Writing Center Assessment: Searching for the Proof of Our Effectiveness" appeared in an edited volume *The Center Will Hold: Critical Perspectives on Writing Center Scholarship* published by Utah State University Press in 2003.

Lecturer Mya Poe has two papers forthcoming, "Integrating Technical Writing into a Large Lecture Course" which will be presented with Professor Dennis Freeman at the American Society of Engineering Education conference in 2004, and "Why We Need to Think about Race in Writing Assessment," as part of *College Composition and Communication* in 2004.

Academic Programs and Initiatives

The Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies continues to support three major SHASS initiatives at the Institute: the Communication Requirement, the Comparative Media Studies MS program, and the graduate MS program in science writing.

The communication requirement, which was approved in 2001 by the Faculty, will be in full force this coming academic year with all undergraduate students at MIT. This means that the older proficiency-based writing requirement has now been replaced with a new, instructionally-based requirement: every undergraduate must take some form of instruction in writing and speaking each year of his or her four-year program. Roughly 20 percent of incoming MIT freshmen are now required, on the basis of their performance on the freshman essay evaluation test, to take an expository writing class. Dr. Faery, lecturer and director of First Year Writing, has undertaken a program of redesigning our first-year expository writing curriculum and continues her extensive training program for our first-year writing instructors. This program has been successful in improving the standards and consistency of our expository writing subjects. It has also introduced a variety of attractive new topics as well as the elements of oral communication to the traditional subject matter.

As part of the new communication requirement, we have also revamped and expanded our writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) programs. The object of these outreach programs is to take writing instruction and evaluation into core subjects of science and engineering departments throughout the Institute. Dr. Perelman and Ms. Madeline Brown, our director of WAC and coordinator of writing initiatives, have considerably expanded the WAC teaching efforts of PWHS through every department at the Institute except the Sloan School, and they have experimented extensively with innovative instructional programs. This past academic year, the WAC program staff taught in 45 different science and engineering classes in 15 departments, reaching nearly 2,300 undergraduate students—almost twice as many as they worked with just two years ago. In addition, with the assistance of the dean of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS) and the provost, we have extended writing support to SHASS in our tutoring program. Last year, we had 22 tutors working to enrich writing instruction in 45 different special writing-intensive SHASS subjects designated as Communication Intensive in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CI-H) subjects. The expansions in our WAC program represent a major curricular innovation at MIT and an immense expansion of our work throughout the Institute. It also reveals a considerable new commitment by faculty of all fields at MIT to excellence in the writing and speaking abilities of MIT students.

In preparing for the communication requirement, we have strengthened the Writing and Communication Center. This PWHS facility had visits from 737 undergraduate and graduate students, amounting to more than 3,000 visits. A considerable number of these students (607) visited for help on CI-H subjects, representing a 59 percent increase over last year. Students seeking help with CI-M papers came from Courses 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 21. At the same time, there was a predictable 56 percent decrease in students visiting for help on Phase 2 papers for the waning writing requirement. Many of these students, 58 percent of whom are ESL students, are unable to get enough assistance with their writing and speaking in any other way. Some of these ESL students also made up the 33 percent usage by our graduate students, many of whom make use of the center to get help with thesis writing. Students also use the center to get help with non-course related materials, such as applications, letters, resumés, and statements of teaching philosophy. The center's director Dr. Steven Strang integrated several new

tutoring strategies into the center's activities, including special practice seminars on oral communication, an online center, an online tutor (which accepts writing samples of up to 1,000 words and was consulted 60 times), and an extended hours program in the evenings and on weekends.

The second major initiative of PWHS has been its collaboration with the Foreign Languages and Literatures section and the Literature faculty to support the CMS graduate program. The three sections continue to pool resources, collaborate in developing an interdisciplinary graduate curriculum, share in the advising of graduate students, and jointly govern the policy of CMS. Dr. Barrett, who teaches the writing in digital media subjects in PWHS, taught two subjects taken by CMS students: CMS.950CMS Workshop and 21W.785 Writing in Cyberspace. In addition, the PWHS head was a member of the governing board for CMS, which met regularly throughout the year to set policy and make decisions. Faculty of PWHS will also serve on search, curriculum, and other administrative committees to help run the CMS program. In addition to the PWHS head and Dr. Barrett, PWHS will have three other faculty heavily involved in supporting the efforts of CMS. Professor Lioi has been assisting Professor Henry Jenkins (Literature) in advising graduate students and helping with speakers' arrangements. Our two new junior appointments this year, assistant professors Beth Coleman and Aden Evens, both bring extensive new digital experience in the arts that will expand the offerings and support of CMS. Professor Coleman, a digital artist, who currently has a visiting artist appointment at the Waag Society in Holland and is completing her PhD at New York University, will come to MIT in the spring of 2005 as assistant professor of writing and new media and devote half of her teaching to the CMS program. Professor Evens, who has a new book coming out on the impact of digital culture on contemporary music, will also work closely with CMS.

The PWHS's third major initiative, the graduate program in science writing, has now had two classes of graduate students. Among students from the first, one is now writing for *IEEE Spectrum*, another is helping to produce science documentaries for *NOVA*, a third is shaping her master's thesis into a book, and a fourth has been writing for Fermilab and for astronaut Sally Ride's science club newsletter. Students from the second class are completing their internships at the *Boston Globe*, *New Scientist*, *Technology Review*, and ABC News, among other organizations; their master's theses covered such topics as air crash investigations, side effects of success in combating AIDS, the Iron Hypothesis, lead, SD, and the "Neutrino Capital of the World." A third class of seven students, selected from an applicant pool of 45, has been admitted for this fall. Over the past year, Professor Kanigel, director, has worked with Professor Lightman, Boyce Rensberger (head of the Knight Science Journalism Fellowship Program), lecturer B. D. Colen, Professor Rosalind Williams, and visiting professor Bartusiak. The search for a permanent faculty member culminated in the selection of Thomas Levenson, author of *Einstein in Berlin* and *Measure for Measure*, and producer of science documentaries for *NOVA*.

Service, Grants, and Awards

Professor Kanigel was Krause lecturer at Marietta College in Marietta, OH, during March 2004; won the MIT Class of 1960 Innovation in Education Award for 2003–2004; and was a keynote speaker on the mathematician Ramanujan at the Festival della Scienza, Genoa, Italy, in October 2003.

Adjunct professor Haldeman gave readings at the World Fantasy Convention in New York, October 2003 and at the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts in March 2004; was keynote reader at the UNESCO Antwerp Book Capital celebration in Antwerp, Belgium in May 2004; and was guest of honor at science fiction conventions held in Des Moines, IA, in May 2003, and held in Madison, WI, and Seattle, WA in April 2004.

Adjunct professor Lightman received a distinguished alumnus award from the California Institute of Technology, that institution's highest honor. He also received the 2003 Distinguished Arts and Humanities medal for literature, given by the Germantown Arts Alliance of Tennessee.

Visiting professor Bartusiak was a member of the judging panel for the 2004 National Academy of Sciences communications awards, and she will be an invited participant in the Aspen Institute's Einstein Celebration in August 2004.

Senior lecturer Barrett has given poetry readings at the University of Maryland, the Teachers and Writers Collaborative in New York City, and the Harvard Square Spring Poetry Festival.

Lecturer Alter has received a Fulbright research grant for 2004–2005 from the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia regional research program which will support his work on an anthology of Himalayan folklore.

Lecturer Corbett was appointed director of the CUE Arts Foundation in New York City, and gave poetry readings at the Poetry Project New York and the Southampton Historical Society.

Lecturer Sawyer-Laucanno was an invited guest and one of five poets representing the United States to the 5th Encontro Internacional de Poetas (Fifth International Meeting of Poets) held in Coimbra, Portugal in May 2004.

Lecturer Perelman gave papers on “Validity and Economy Using Large-Scale Online Assessment” at the University of California Office of the President in Oakland, CA; “Online Writing Assessment: Making Evaluations Real and Relevant” at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in San Antonio, TX, held in March 2004; and “Assessing Writing: What Does It Mean and How Do You Do It?” at the Composition and Rhetoric Colloquium held at California State University, in April 2004.

Lecturer Boiko gave a paper on “Natural History and Cultural Values in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*” at the Association for Science, Literature and the Environment in Chichester, England, in July 2004.

Lecturer Jennifer Craig gave papers on “Using Small Informal Groups to Prepare Undergraduate Aerospace Engineering Students for Formal Oral Presentations” at the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) in Nashville, TN, in June 2003; “Analysis of Team Performance and Report Quality in a Sophomore Design-Build Project” at the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics 2004 conference held in Reno, NV, in January 2004; “Strategies for Improving Communication Deliverables in Capstone and Design Projects,” at the ASEE/NE 2004 held in Boston, MA, in April 2004; “The Role of Small Informal Group Communication in Shaping Scientific Discourse Conventions in Undergraduate Aerospace Engineering Students,” at the 7th National Writing Across the Curriculum Conference held in St. Louis, MO, in May 2004; and “Using Teamwork and Communication Skills to Monitor the Effectiveness of Undergraduate Aerospace Engineering Design Projects,” at the ASEE 2004 held in Salt Lake City, UT, in June 2004.

Lecturer Lerner gave papers on “Disconnecting and Reconnecting the Writing Center,” at the Conference on College Composition and Communication held in San Antonio, TX, in March 2004; “Designing the Digital Face of the Center,” at the Northeast Writing Centers Association Annual Conference held in North Andover, MA, in April 2004; and “Writing Biology/Biological Writing,” at the 7th Writing Across the Curriculum Conference held in St. Louis, MO, in May 2004. He is also the coeditor of *The Writing Center Journal*, a board member of the International Writing Centers Association, and a steering committee member of the Northeast Writing Centers Association.

Lecturer Poe gave papers on “Race and American Educational Testing: Using Socially Situated Research to Understand Student Performance on Large Scale Literacy Tests,” at the 11th Annual International Literacy and Education Conference held in Havana, Cuba, in June 2004; “Race and Writing Assessment: Constructions of Identity in a Freshman Placement Exam,” at the 2004 Conference on College Composition and Communication held in San Antonio, TX; “Scientific Discourse and the Process of Making Meaning in Biomedical Research,” at the 2004 Writing Across the Curriculum Conference held at the University of Missouri-Columbia; and “Integrating Technical Writing into a Large Lecture Course,” at the 2004 American Society of Electrical Engineering conference held in Salt Lake City, UT.

Personnel

Professor Lee was promoted to the rank of associate professor with tenure, effective July 2004. The program intends to hire Thomas Levenson, science writer and television documentary producer, as associate professor of science writing in January 2005. Dr. Aden Evens will join the program at the rank of assistant professor of science and technical communication in the fall of 2004. Beth Coleman, who is completing her degree in comparative literature at New York University will be joining the program in January 2005 as assistant professor of writing and new media.

Sixty percent of our total teaching staff and 11 percent of our core faculty are women. Fifteen percent of our total staff and 33 percent of our core faculty are minorities. Two of our core faculty—a tenured associate professor and a full professor—are African Americans.

James Paradis

Program Head

Professor of Scientific and Technical Communication

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