

Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies

The Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies (WHS) 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, playwriting, 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 of the four following curricular groups: (1) the core academic curriculum, made up of Humanities and Social Sciences Distribution (HASS-D) subjects and electives; (2) the writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) outreach programs throughout the Institute; (3) the Writing and Communication Center; and (4) the graduate program in science writing.

Program subjects during the past year enrolled 825 students, of whom 7 were majors, 10 were minors, and 44 were concentrators in writing. Our WAC programs brought writing instruction to 2,482 students in 18 departments and 53 subjects throughout the schools of Science, Engineering, and Architecture and Planning. Our Writing and Communication Center staff assisted 852 undergraduate and graduate students during 3,643 visits, providing assistance with reports, papers, oral presentations, applications, and thesis projects. Finally, six students graduated from our SM science writing program.

Research and Publications

Professor Robert Kanigel completed the draft of his new book, *Faux Real: An Alchemy of Leather*, and submitted it to his publisher, Joseph Henry Press. His essay "The Science Essay" appeared in *A Field Guide for Science Writers* (Oxford University Press), and his address at the annual mathematics and culture conference in Venice last year was translated and appeared as "Un saggio su Ramanujan" in the edited volume *Matematica e Cultura 2006* (Springer-Verlag).

Kenneth Manning, Thomas Meloy professor of rhetoric and the history of science, continues work on his study of the historical role of African Americans in American medicine and on a study of African American careers in science.

James Paradis, Robert M. Metcalfe professor of writing, has edited "Samuel Butler, Victorian Against the Grain: A Critical Overview," a collection of essays on the Victorian neo-Lamarckian writer. He has submitted the book to the University of Toronto Press, where it is under review.

Associate professor Helen Elaine Lee completed the draft of her new novel, "Life Without: A Novel in Fragments," a work that weaves together the lives of African Americans in the prison system.

Associate professor Junot Diaz has submitted his new novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, to his publisher, Riverhead Books. He is at work on a new project on the 1938 baseball series that took place in the Dominican Republic and was sponsored by the dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo.

Associate professor Thomas Levenson is currently working on a study of Isaac Newton's career as master of the Royal Mint in England from 1699 to 1727. His account of the proposed construction of the world's largest telescope, "The New Planet Machine," appeared as the cover story of *Discover* in February.

Assistant professor Anthony Lioi's study of the American environmental essay, "Enchanting the World: Ideas of Order in the American Environmental Essay, 1945–2000," is under consideration at Cornell University Press. His essay "An End to Cosmic Loneliness: The Essays of Alice Walker as Abolitionist Enchantment" is forthcoming in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, and "Of Swamp Dragons: Mud, Megalopolis, and a Future for Ecocriticism" will appear this fall as the lead essay in a volume titled *Coming into Contact: New Essays on Ecocritical Theory and Practice* (University of Georgia Press). He has completed and submitted for consideration two additional essays, "'We Lay Open All His Bowells': Richard Ligon, Ecocriticism, and the Affect of Empire" and "Spectral Analysis: Essaying the Spirit in Anzaldua's 'Entering into the Serpent.'"

Assistant professor Beth Coleman is currently working on two projects, a book on race and technology and a monograph on game play in digital work.

Adjunct professor Alan Lightman published a history of 20th-century science titled *The Discoveries* (Pantheon).

Adjunct professor Joe Haldeman published a war stories collection titled *A Separate War and Other Stories* (Ace Books). He also published a number of stories, including "Expedition With Recipes," "Foreclosure," "Civil Disobedience," "Angel of Light," and "Complete Sentence," in various periodicals, including *Fantasy & Science Fiction* and *Cosmos*. His poems "Old Twentieth: A Century Full of Years," "god is dead short live god," "The Future of Sex," and "January Fires" also appeared in various periodicals and collections.

Visiting professor Marcia Bartusiak is working under contract with Knopf on a new book, *Cosmos Firma: The Day We Found the Universe*, which will cover the period from 1900 to 1930 when the modern understanding of the universe was completely transformed.

Senior lecturer Edward Barrett is working on a monograph titled "Digital Poetry" for MIT Press. Also, he published *Or Current Resident* and *Foldem* (Pressed Wafer).

Director of technical communication Mya Poe published “The Four Myths of Writing: Changing Science and Engineering Students’ Preconceptions about Writing and Science” in the *International Journal of Learning*. She is also coauthor of a study titled “Security and Privacy in the Wireless Composition Classroom,” which is under consideration at Hampton Press, and she contributed to a National Science Foundation grant proposal for the 2006 Biomedical Optics Summer Institute at MIT.

Research associate Philip Alexander is conducting research for a new work on the history of MIT. He is cowriting and editing for publication the memoirs of Walter Rosenblith, former MIT provost, and Leo Beranek, former MIT professor and cofounder of Bolt Beranek and Newman. He completed the writing and editorial work for authors Julius Stratton and Loretta Mannix’s *Mind and Hand: The Birth of MIT* (MIT Press, 2005).

Lecturer Erica Funkhouser’s essay “Singing in Dark Times” appeared in the autumn 2005 issue of *Harvard Review*. Her short story “Snapper” appeared in the *Massachusetts Review*, and her poems “Charles Street, Late November” and “Words for Winter” appeared in *Sou’wester* magazine.

Lecturer William Corbett’s edited edition *Letters of James Schuyler to Frank O’Hara* will be published by Turtle Point Press in September 2006. He also published poems, reviews, and criticism in *artsMEDIA*, *artscope*, *Pressed Wafer*, *Foldemup*, *Hanging Loose*, *Brooklyn Rail*, and *Boston Phoenix*.

Rebecca Faery, director of first-year writing, continues work on a collection of essays on Vietnam.

Lecturer Ann Snodgrass published a chapbook of poems titled *No Description of the World* (Finishing Line Press). She also published a poem, “After ‘Ad Ora Incerta,’” in the *Harvard Review* and two translations from the Italian of Luciano Erva in *Field Magazine*.

Academic Programs and Initiatives

WHS continues to sponsor or support three major initiatives of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS): (1) the Communication Requirement, (2) the CMS master’s program, and (3) the master’s program in science writing.

The Communication Requirement, approved by the MIT faculty in 2000, has been in full force for two years now, replacing the older, proficiency-based, writing requirement with a new, instruction-based, requirement. Every undergraduate takes some form of instruction in writing and speaking each year of his or her four-year program. In addition, roughly one-third of incoming MIT freshmen were required this past year, on the basis of their performance on the Freshman Essay Evaluation test, to take an expository writing class. The Institute is currently developing an assessment program for reviewing and strengthening the overall impact of the Communication Requirement.

As part of the new Communication Requirement, WHS has also revamped and expanded its WAC programs. The object of these outreach programs is to take writing instruction and evaluation into the core subjects within science and engineering

departments throughout the Institute. Dr. Leslie Perelman, director of Writing Across the Curriculum, and Dr. Poe have considerably expanded the WAC teaching efforts of WHS through every department at the Institute (except the Sloan School of Management), and they have experimented extensively with innovative instructional programs. This past academic year, the WAC program staff taught in 53 different science and engineering subjects in 18 departments, reaching 2,480 undergraduate students. This constitutes a major expansion of the teaching of communication in the majors throughout MIT. Part of this expansion has included the development of an extensive communication tutoring program in SHASS, which is headed by Kathleen MacArthur, coordinator of writing initiatives.

WHS continues to expand its support of the CMS graduate program in collaboration with the Foreign Languages and Literatures section and the Literature faculty. The three sections 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 of digital media subjects in WHS, taught two subjects taken by CMS students: CMS.950 The CMS Workshop and 21W.785 Writing in Cyberspace. This coming year, he will expand the basic required digital production laboratory, CMS.950, into a two-term subject. Professor Coleman teaches 21W.784 Becoming Digital; CMS.845 Interactive and Non-Linear Narrative: Theory and Practice; and the general introductory undergraduate CMS subject, CMS.400. WHS faculty also continue to serve on search, curriculum, and other administrative committees to help run CMS. In addition, WHS has initiated a new CMS postdoctoral appointment that will bring in a recent PhD in media studies to teach and conduct research, and the program is cosponsoring Francisco Espinosa as a Martin Luther King Jr. visiting scholar for AY2007 to teach a seminar in media production and collaborate with graduate CMS students on their research.

The Graduate Program in Science Writing, now entering its fifth year, has graduated 25 students since its inception. Within that short time, our former students have already gotten positions at the *Boston Globe*, *Technology Review*, *NOVA*, the *IEEE Spectrum*, *Psychology Today*, the *Toronto Star*, the Harvard Stem Cell Institute, and the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. This year two graduates signed publishing contracts to research and write their own books—a first for the program. The latest class completed theses on a wide range of topics, including the geology of Boston, buffalo management in Yellowstone National Park, Poincaré's conjecture in mathematics, and geriatric mental health. These students afterward widened the program's network of internships by working at such respected publications as *Discover*, *Seed*, and *Sky & Telescope*.

The program's next class is composed of seven students chosen from a record applicant pool of 71. They include a former editor at Blackwell Publishing, a Peace Corps veteran, and the past editor-in-chief of the Ithaca College student newspaper. Matching the achievement of the previous year's class, two of the new students were awarded MIT fellowships (this time, the Ida M. Greene and John A. Lyons fellowships). Meanwhile, program faculty continue to produce important work. Over the past year Professor Lightman released a new book (*The Discoveries*), Professor Kanigel completed his most recent manuscript (*Faux Real*), and visiting professor Bartusiak and Professor Levenson each started work on new book projects (*Cosmos Firma* and *Newton and the Counterfeiter*,

respectively). Boyce Rensberger, director of the Knight Science Journalism Fellowship Program and a program lecturer, is beginning research on a scientific biography of biologist Jacques Loeb. Three faculty members this year earned distinguished honors. Professor Lightman received Sigma Xi's John P. McGovern Science and Society Award; Professor Bartusiak was named the 2006 recipient of the American Institute of Physics' Andrew W. Gemant Award for her significant contributions to the cultural, artistic, and humanistic dimensions of physics; and Professor Levenson was awarded the National Academies Communications Award for producing and writing the PBS series *Origins: Back to the Beginning*.

Service, Grants, and Awards

Professor Kanigel gave the keynote address at a joint meeting of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars and the Northwest Independent Scholars Association in Portland, OR.

Professor Lee continues as associate fiction editor of *Callaloo Magazine*. She also continues her volunteer teaching of a fiction workshop at the Bay State Correctional Institute in Norfolk, MA. Professor Lee served on the MIT Faculty Policy Committee and is a member of the search committee for a new dean of SHASS.

Professor Diaz continues to serve as the fiction editor of the *Boston Review*. He serves on the Board of Advisors and Faculty for the Voices of Our Nation Summer Writing Program at the University of San Francisco and on the Board of Associates of the Afro-Latino Research and Resource Project at Queen's College of the City University of New York. At MIT, he served this past year as a faculty advisor for the Freshman Arts Seminar Advising Program. He gave readings at the University of South Florida, Pine Manor College, and Harvard Children's Hospital.

Professor Levenson received the National Academies Communications Award for his NOVA television series, "Origins: Back to the Beginning." He lectured on "Einstein in Berlin" at the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C., and gave two seminars and a public lecture at Occidental University on writing biography, writing popular science, and "The Big Bang on Television: Filming the Unseeable." He was the featured speaker on the NPR program *Speaking of Faith*, "Einstein and the Mind of God."

Professor Lightman received the 2006 McGovern Award of Sigma Xi for Science and Society. He was awarded an honorary doctorate of humanities from the University of Maryland and an honorary doctorate of art from the Memphis College of Art in May 2006.

Professor Lioi served as manuscript reader for *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*; the *Religious Studies Review*; *College Composition and Communication*; and *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*. He presented papers on "Dance Mix for the Devil's Party: Heretical Unions in Feminist Theory and Practice" at Rutgers University; "Echoes of the Ainur: Cosmological Environmentalism in *The Lord of the Rings*" at a meeting of the Modern Language Association; "Whiteness and Composition Anthologies: What Is to Be Done?" at a

meeting of the National Conference on Race and Pedagogy; and “Hayao Miyazaki and Environmental Apocalypse” at the Cool Japan Symposium at MIT.

Professor Coleman received the 2006–2007 American Association of University Women Emerging Scholar Award. She served on the MIT Steering Committee for the Program in Women’s Studies.

Visiting professor Bartusiak was named the 2006 winner of the Andrew W. Gemant Award of the American Institute of Physics for significant contributions to the cultural, artistic, and humanistic dimensions of physics.

Professor Haldeman won his fourth Nebula Award for the best science fiction novel of 2005, *Camouflage*. The same novel also won the James Tiptree Award for gender issues in science fiction and fantasy.

Dr. Barrett gave the keynote address, “The Future of Digital Media,” as well as the keynote lecture, “Sociomedia and Children’s Educational Computing,” at the Design IT International Conference in Tokyo, Japan. He also gave a distinguished artist lecture on “Digital Media” and a poetry reading at the Kelley Writer’s House at the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Poe served on the MIT Subcommittee on the Communication Requirement. She presented papers on “Designing Online Writing Assessments” at the Conference on Writing, Teaching, and Technology at the University of Massachusetts; “Writing Beyond Disciplinary Discourse” at the American University in Cairo, Egypt; “Assessing the Synthesis of Problem-Based Learning and Writing Instruction in a Biomedical Engineering Course” at the Biomedical Society of America meeting in Baltimore; “Writing to Professional Audiences in the Sciences” at the Harvard-MIT BioMatrix Roundtable; and “Successful Scientific Presentations: How to Translate Your Data into Written and Oral Presentations” at Tufts University.

Lecturer Jennifer Craig gave a paper on “Teaching Undergraduate Aerospace Engineering Students to Reason about Complex Design Choices” at the American Society for Engineering Education conference in Chicago. She was also selected to participate in a national research mentoring program funded by the National Science Foundation and administered by the Colorado School of Mines.

Lecturer Neal Lerner gave papers on “Better Research, Better Writing” at the University of Kansas Institutional Research and Academic Career Development Award conference; “Making the Case for Writing Center Research” at the Southeastern Writing Centers Association annual conference in Chapel Hill, NC; “Writing Science/Science Writing” at the Marquette University Department of Biological Sciences Colloquium Series in Milwaukee; “The Secret Origins of Writing Centers” at the University of Wisconsin Writing Colloquium Series; “Revitalizing the Lab Report” at the Eighth International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference at Clemson University; “A Workshop for New Writing Center Directors” at the Southeastern Writing Center Association annual conference in Chapel Hill; and “Tutoring the Case-Western Shooter” at the International

Writing Centers Association/National Conference on Peer Tutoring and Writing in Minneapolis. Dr. Lerner also gave faculty development workshops on communication across the science curriculum, teaching with writing, and faculty-tutor collaboration at Louisiana State University, Marquette University, and MIT.

Dr. MacArthur presented a paper on “Shifting Gears: From Doctoral Candidate and Lecturer to WAC Administrator” at the Eighth International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference at Clemson University.

Personnel

Professor Diaz was granted tenure in the spring of 2006. Assistant professor Aden Evens left MIT to take a position as assistant professor of English at Dartmouth College. There was no new faculty hiring in WHS this year.

Women represent 54 percent of our total teaching staff and 17 percent of our core faculty. Minority representatives make up 12 percent of our total staff and 42 percent of our core faculty. Three of our senior faculty—a tenured associate professor, a full professor, and an assistant professor—are African Americans. One associate 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://web.mit.edu/humanistic/www/>.