

Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies

The Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies (WHS) offers MIT students the opportunity to study the forms, crafts, and traditions of contemporary writing and oral communication. WHS offers undergraduate electives in expository writing, fiction, poetry, nonfiction prose, journalism, rhetoric, professional communication, science writing, and digital communication. Program faculty and lecturers include creative artists, scholars, journalists, and specialists in digital media and communication who create these forms and publish research about them. Our faculty includes joint appointments in Science, Technology, and Society; Physics; Comparative Media Studies (CMS); and Mechanical Engineering.

WHS is organized into four academic groups that work in diverse ways: (1) the core curriculum offers Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Distribution (HASS-D) subjects and electives to MIT undergraduates, including majors, minors, and concentrators; (2) the writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) outreach programs work 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 on-request help to undergraduates and graduate students seeking assistance on their papers, theses, proposals, fellowship and graduate school applications, job talks, and oral presentations; and (4) the one-year graduate SM program in science writing trains a highly select group of students in the art and profession of writing about science and technology for the public.

Program subjects during the past year enrolled 825 students, of whom 7 were majors, 11 were minors, and 77 were concentrators in writing for the HASS-D requirement. Our WAC programs brought writing instruction to 2,193 students in 17 departments and 61 subjects throughout the schools of Science, Engineering, and Architecture and Planning. Our Writing and Communication Center staff assisted 874 undergraduate and graduate students during 3,611 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's new book, *Faux Real: Genuine Leather and 200 Years of Inspired Fakes*, was published by Joseph Henry Press. Professor Kanigel has begun research on a new book project, "On an Irish Island," about scholarly visitors to Ireland's Blasket Islands in the early years of the 20th century and the literary legacy they inspired.

Professor Kenneth Manning continued work on a study of racial issues in the contemporary university.

Robert M. Metcalfe professor of writing James Paradis' volume on Victorian fiction writer, satirist, and evolutionist Samuel Butler, *Samuel Butler, Victorian Against the Grain: A Critical Overview*, is scheduled for publication by the University of Toronto Press in November 2007. His "Photography and Irony: The Samuel Butler Photograph Exhibition at the Tate Britain" appeared in *Victorian Literature and Culture*.

Associate professor Helen Elaine Lee has completed the manuscript of her novel about the lives of prisoners, "Life Without," which is under review by several publishers. Professor Lee is working on a new book series about African American young adults who travel to different places and historical moments in the African diaspora.

Associate professor Junot Diaz's new novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Riverhead Books), is scheduled to appear in September 2007. His short story "Wildwood" appeared in the *New Yorker* (June 11, 2007), and his nonfiction piece "The Alto" was scheduled to appear in July. He is at work on a new novel with the working title "Secret Histories."

Associate professor Thomas Levenson is currently working on a study of Isaac Newton's career, from 1699 to 1727, as master of the Royal Mint in England. Titled "Newton and the Counterfeiter," the book is under contract to Harcourt (US) and Faber and Faber (UK). He is also in the early stages of his next film project, a documentary titled "MIT-24" that will construct a portrait of work at the cutting edge of science and technology as revealed by three sets of researchers in an intertwined narrative over a 24-hour cycle.

Assistant professor Beth Coleman is currently working on a book titled "Virtual World Primer" examining the emergence of the virtual world concept in the 1990s, leading to numerous developments in popular computing environments of today. Her "Anatomy of an Amalgamation" was published in the *Leonardo Journal of Music*, and "Shut Up and Dance: Reflections on Real-Time Synthesis in Machinima Production" was scheduled for publication in the *Machinima Reader* (forthcoming, Stanford University Press).

Adjunct professor Alan Lightman has completed a new novel titled *Ghost*, which will be published by Pantheon in October 2007. His book *The Discoveries: Great Breakthroughs in 20th-century Science* will appear as a vintage paperback.

Adjunct professor Joe Haldeman's new science fiction novel, *The Accidental Time Machine*, which is set at MIT, was scheduled for publication by Ace Books in August 2007. His novella, "The Mars Girl," appeared in the collection *Escape from Earth: Adventures in Space* (Science Fiction Book Club, 2006).

Visiting professor Marcia Bartusiak is working under contract to Pantheon 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 continues work on his monograph "Digital Poetry" (MIT Press). He published a prose-poem chapbook with Pressed Wafer titled *Kevin White* and has another titled *Boston* appearing this fall. These two works will appear with an earlier chapbook as a trilogy of Boston-based prose-poems next spring.

Dr. Mya Poe, director of technical communication, coauthored (with Simpson Garfinkel) "Security and Privacy in the Wireless Composition Classroom" for the collection *Going Wireless: A Critical Exploration of Wireless & Mobile Technologies for Composition Teachers and Scholars*, and her "Writing Beyond Disciplinary Discourse" is scheduled for publication

in an upcoming collection titled *Sustaining Excellence in Communicating Across the Curriculum*. She is currently at work with WHS colleagues Jennifer Craig and Neil Lerner on a new project (under contract to MIT Press), "Writing and Speaking in Science and Engineering: Case Studies from MIT."

Lecturer Erica Funkhouser is working on a new volume of poetry called "Earthly" (Houghton Mifflin), scheduled to appear in the spring of 2008.

Lecturer William Corbett is working on "Opening Day," a new volume of poetry scheduled to be printed in spring 2008 and on an interview with poet August Kleinzahler for the *Paris Review*.

Dr. Steve Strang, director of the Writing and Communication Center, published the second edition of his *Writing Exploratory Essays*. He also published "Staffing a Writing Center with Professional Tutors" in the *Writing Center Director's Resource Book* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates).

Lecturer Neal Lerner published four essays on college writing: "'Laboring Together in the Common Good': The Writing Laboratory at the University of Minnesota General College, circa 1932" in *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*; "Time Warp: Historical Representations of Writing Center Directors" in the *Writing Center Director's Resource Book* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates); "Seeking Knowledge about Writing Centers in Archives, Numbers, and Talk" in *Writing at the Center* (IWCA Press); and "Writing Centers and Instructional Conflict: A Historical View" in *Kansas English*.

Lecturer Ann Snodgrass published poems in *Ploughshares*, *Chelsea*, and *American Letters & Commentary*.

Research associate Philip Alexander is conducting research for a new work on the history of MIT, to be published by MIT Press in connection with the celebration of the 2011 sesquicentennial. He is also advising on and editing Leo Beranek's autobiography—untitled so far—to be published by MIT Press in the spring of 2008.

Academic Programs and Initiatives

WHS continues to provide MIT students with access to writing (and communication) in its many contemporary manifestations—as art form, journalistic and reflective medium, and professional instrument. Although the efforts of WHS have long been anchored in our popular core curriculum and the teaching of our HASS-D and Communication Intensive subjects and electives, we have also changed considerably over the past 10 years in our endeavor to play new collaborative, interdepartmental roles in MIT's wider educational mission to produce world-class scientists, engineers, and professionals and to promote the greater public understanding of science and technology. Recent key initiatives that WHS has supported with its special expertise include (1) the Institute Communication Requirement, (2) the CMS program, and (3) the SM program in science writing.

The Communication Requirement, approved by the MIT faculty in 2000, is an Institute-wide undertaking by the diverse faculties at MIT to integrate writing and oral communication instruction throughout the undergraduate curriculum. The older proficiency-based writing requirement has been replaced with a new one that is instruction based. Recognizing that effective communication is one of the cornerstones of science and engineering, Institute faculty have drawn on the expertise of WHS in three different ways: to provide a series of first-year college communication subjects for entering students determined to need such instruction, to provide a tutoring program to strengthen writing instruction in SHASS subjects, and to collaborate with faculty in integrating communication instruction into departmental majors at MIT. Every undergraduate now takes some form of instruction in writing and speaking each year of his or her four-year program. An assessment of this initiative is currently under way.

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 the core subjects of science and engineering departments throughout the Institute. Dr. Leslie Perelman and Dr. Poe, codirectors of the WAC group, 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. This past academic year, the WAC program staff taught in 61 different science and engineering subjects in 17 departments, reaching nearly 2,200 undergraduate students.

WHS also continues to expand support of CMS undergraduate and graduate programs 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. WHS faculty and lecturers currently working with CMS include Professor Coleman, assistant professor Nick Montfort, Dr. Barrett, and Dr. Ben Miller, all of whom teach a variety of digital media subjects jointly listed in WHS and CMS and provide additional advising and administrative support for CMS students. WHS has also helped initiate a new CMS postdoctoral appointment program that brings in recent media studies graduates to teach and conduct research, and it cosponsored Francisco Espinosa for a second year as a visiting Martin Luther King scholar for AY2007 to teach a seminar in media production and collaborate with graduate CMS students on their research.

The third WHS initiative continues with the now nationally recognized graduate program in science writing, which has graduated five classes and 33 SM students. This year three students won prestigious fellowships or awards. A graduate of our third class, Phil McKenna, received a Middlebury environmental journalism fellowship; he will be reporting on the engineering of ancient irrigation systems in China. A student graduating in September 2007, Will Dowd, received a Jacob Javits fellowship to study creative writing at New York University. A student from our first class, Erico Guizzo, received a \$1,000 Excellence in Technology Journalism Award from the Public Relations Society of America for his ambitious *IEEE Spectrum* article on Brazil's nuclear program. Meanwhile, our graduates hold down positions at *Technology Review*, WGBH's *NOVA*, *Psychology Today*, *Seed*, and the *Boston Globe*, among others, and freelance for a wide

variety of publications. Next year's class exhibits the program's characteristic "two cultures" sensibilities, with members of the class having undergraduate roots in biology and astronomy as well as philosophy and theater arts. Several already have notable experience as science writers. One was awarded an Ida M. Greene MIT fellowship.

Presentations, Service, Grants, and Awards

Professor Kanigel's presentations included "All Shortcomings Have Been Eliminated" at the Business History Conference in Cleveland. This paper focused on the iconic business failure of Du Pont's Corfam, whose story he has told in his new book *Faux Real*. He also moderated the "Making Hard Work Easy: Writing About Science and Other Difficult Things" panel at the American Society of Journalists and Authors conference in New York. He is currently serving on the MIT Press Editorial Committee and the Transportation and Parking Committee.

Professor Lee continues to serve as associate fiction editor of *Callaloo Magazine*. She is a board member of PEN New England, and as a member of its Freedom to Write Committee she helped to organize its annual panel discussion, "Writing on the Walls: American Prison Writing." She was also instrumental in establishing the ongoing PEN New England Prison Writing Program at the Bay State Correctional Center, the Hampshire County House of Correction, and MCI-Framingham. She is a volunteer teacher for the MCI-Framingham workshop and another program at the Bay State Correctional Center, where she has volunteered for the past six years. Professor Lee served her second year on the MIT Faculty Policy Committee, and she was a member of the search committee for the dean of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences. She is now serving on the search committee for the new MIT dean of admissions. She served as a trustee on the MIT Community Service Fund Board and on the Programming Committee of the Program in Women's and Gender Studies. This year she will serve on the Women's Studies steering committee.

Professor Diaz received the prestigious 2007 Rome Prize of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He gave several readings from his work this past year at: the Hay Festival in Cartagena, Colombia (a three-day workshop); the Year of the Book Festival in Bogota (a writing workshop); the Newburyport (Massachusetts) Literary Festival; Knox College (Illinois); Cornell University; Yale University; the Boys Club of Harlem; Penn State University; Central Connecticut State University; Temple University; New York University; the New York Public Library; Hamline University (Minnesota); and Bloomsburg University (Pennsylvania). He continues to serve as the fiction editor of the *Boston Review*, offering extensive support to fledgling fiction writers.

Professor Levenson received the Foundation of the Future's inaugural Walter P. Kistler Science Documentary Film Award for his *NOVA* television series, "Origins: Back to the Beginning." He gave invited lectures on the use of television to communicate science to the public at the National Academy of Sciences and the Koshland Museum in Washington, DC, and at the Beckman Center at the University of California, Irvine. He also gave a colloquium, "The Suddenly Famous Doctor Einstein," to MIT's Department of Physics, and he was invited to participate in the Aspen Institute Science Center's Science and Media Summit this summer.

Professor Coleman received the 2006–2007 American Association of University Women Recognition Award for Emerging Scholars. She gave a number of papers and talks: “Code as Media” at the Society for Literature, Science and the Arts in New York and the Society of Media and Cinema Studies in Vancouver; “Generative Aesthetics” at the Chicago Art Institute and the San Francisco Art Institute; and “Race as Technology” at Brown University. Also, she was a presenter at the Urban Sensing Summit at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Adjunct professor Lightman delivered lectures at the Aspen Forum on Higher Education, the Sigman Xi national meeting, the University of Saskatchewan, the South Carolina Governor’s School for Arts and Humanities, Utah State University, Hastings College (Nebraska), the University of Memphis, and the University of Lethbridge (Canada). He was awarded the 2006 Sigma Xi Award and the John McGovern Award in Science and Society. Professor Lightman is also the founding director of the Harpswell Foundation, a nonprofit organization that recently completed building a dormitory for university women in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Adjunct professor Haldeman was a guest speaker at Semana Negra, Gijon, Spain; at the Clarion Science Fiction Writing Workshop in Michigan; at the World Science Fiction Convention in Los Angeles; at the Open Book Festival in South Bend, IN; at Imagicon, the Swedish National Science Fiction Convention in Stockholm, Sweden; at the World Fantasy Convention in Austin, TX; at an MIT Media in Transition event (conversation with Henry Jenkins); at the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts in Orlando, FL; and at the Florida Film Festival, the Florida Voices Book Fair, and the Florida OASIS Science Fiction Convention.

Visiting professor Bartusiak gave an invited lecture on “Einstein’s Legacy to Astronomy: From Black Holes to the Expanding Universe” at the 209th Meeting of the American Astronomical Society.

Lecturer Funkhouser was awarded a 2007–2008 Guggenheim fellowship.

Dr. Poe served on the MIT Subcommittee on the Communication Requirement. She presented “The Ranking, Sorting, and Reproduction of Identity” at the International Symposium on Genre Studies in Florianopolis, Brazil; “What’s the Achievement Gap Got to Do with Genre?” at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in New York; “Representing Data: Critical Thinking and the Construction of Scientific Visual Arguments” at the International Conference on Writing as Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut; “A Comparative Study of Student Writing for College Admission in the UK and the US” and “Not Just a Test: Race and Power in the Essay Test” at the International Conference of the EARLI Special Interest Group on Writing in Antwerp, Belgium; “The Rhetoric of the Achievement Gap” at the Race and Pedagogy Conference in Seattle; and “English Language Learning Across the Curriculum” at the Liaoning TESOL Symposium in Shenyang, China.

Personnel

Professor Levenson was promoted to tenure at the rank of full professor in the spring of 2007. Assistant professor Anthony Lioi left MIT to take a position as assistant professor of humanities at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City. Dr. Montfort was hired as assistant professor of digital media. The program hired two new WAC lecturers: Lisa Dush and Ben Miller. Dr. Rebecca Faery was reappointed as director of first-year writing, and Neal Lerner was appointed as the new director of training in communication instruction.

Women represent 59 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. Four of our core faculty—an assistant professor, a tenured associate professor, and two full professors—are African Americans. One tenured 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/>.