

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 selected group of students in the art and profession of writing about science and technology for the public.

Program subjects during the past year enrolled 809 students, of whom 6 were majors, 16 were minors, and 86 were concentrators in writing for the HASS-D requirement. Our WAC programs brought writing instruction to 3,985 students in 29 departments and 104 subjects throughout the schools of Science, Engineering, HASS, and Architecture and Planning. Our Writing and Communication Center staff assisted 954 undergraduate and graduate students with reports, papers, oral presentations, applications, and thesis projects. Finally, 6 students graduated from our SM science writing program.

Research and Publications

Professor Junot Díaz's new novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, was published in December 2007 by Riverhead Books.

Professor Robert Kanigel's book *The Man Who Knew Infinity* was translated into Thai and published by Matichon in 2007. A new audio version is now available from Blackstone Audio. *Faux Real: Genuine Leather and 200 Years of Inspired Fakes*, published last year, was named a Scientific American Book Club alternate selection.

Professor James Paradis' edited volume, *Samuel Butler, Victorian Against the Grain*, was published in December 2007 by the University of Toronto Press.

Three of the interrelated stories in Professor Helen Elaine Lee's novel *Life Without* have been published or accepted for publication. "Alphabet" will appear in *Prairie Schooner*;

“Back in the Day” will appear in *Callaloo*; and the title story, “Life Without,” was published in *Hanging Loose* 92.

Nick Montfort, assistant professor in digital media, published “Obfuscated Code” in *Software Studies* (MIT Press, 2008) and “Riddle Machines: The History and Nature of Interactive Fiction” in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies* (Basil Blackwell, 2007). Dr. Montfort also published “Playing to Solve Savoir-Faire” in *Videogame/Player/Text* (Manchester University Press, 2007) and “Narrative and Digital Media” in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). Montfort’s published poems include “Poem” in *In Medias Res* (Spring 2008); “He did, eh?” in *UpRightDown* 1 (February 2008); and “Troper/Schematorium,” “I Icing Sing,” and “Reflections” in *XConnect: Writers of the Information Age* 9. Among Dr. Montfort’s current projects are “Grand Text Auto,” a group blog about computer narrative, poetry, games, and art; “Ream/Rame,” a multimedia edition of Ream with a French translation/adaptation; and “The Session,” a scenario for the StoryBox interactive performance stage. His latest research project with Alex Mitchell, “Tools for Telling: How Game Development Systems Shape Interactive Storytelling” is sponsored by the Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab.

In fall 2008, assistant professor Beth Coleman published the article “Race as Technology” in *Camera Obscura*.

Joe Haldeman’s novel *Marsbound, Ace* will be released in August 2008 by Easton Press. The novel was serialized in *ANALOG Magazine* (January through April 2008). Haldeman held a residency at the Eastern Frontier Foundation on Norton Island, Maine, in July 2008.

Visiting professor Marcia Bartusiak completed her book *Cosmos Firma: The Day We Found the Universe*, which will be published by Pantheon Books in spring 2009.

Senior lecturer Edward Barrett published two books of poetry: *Kevin White* (2007) and *Bosston* (2008).

Bill Corbett, director of student writing activities, published three books of poetry during the 2007–2008 academic year: *Opening Day* (Hanging Loose Press), *The Whalen Poem* (Bootstrap Press), and *Poems On Occasion* (Pressed Wafer Press).

In fall 2007 Rebecca Faery, director of first-year writing, published an essay titled “R&R” in a special issue of *Kalliope: A Journal of Women’s Literature and Art* on women and war.

Neal Lerner, director of training in writing across the curriculum, published four essays on college writing: “Drawing to Learn Science: Legacies of Agassiz” in the *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, “Laboratory Lessons for Writing and Science” in *Written Communication*, “Rejecting the Remedial Brand: The Rise and Fall of the Dartmouth Writing Clinic” in *College Composition and Communication*, and “Situated Learning in the Writing Center” in *Marginal Words, Marginal Work? Tutoring the Academy in the Work of Writing Centers* (Hampton Press).

Dr. Mya Poe, director of technical communication, published two essays in 2007: “Writing Beyond Disciplinary Discourse: Power and Politics in the Teaching of Scientific Writing” in *Sustaining Excellence in ‘Communicating Across the Curriculum’: Cross-institutional Experiences and Best Practices* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing) and “Uptake and Racial Stereotypes in Writing Assessments” in the proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Genre Studies.

The Boston Public Library selected images from B.D. Colen’s documentary photographic project “Alone Together” of riders on the Boston T for inclusion in its permanent photography collection.

In April 2008, Shariann Lewitt’s new novel, *Succubus in the City*, was published by Del Rey (an imprint of Random House). Lewitt published the book under the name Nina Harper.

In fall 2007, lecturer Andrea Walsh published “Everyday Justice: Teaching about Antebellum Women’s Rights Activism in America” in *Pursuing Justice: Online Journal*.

Lecturer Mary Zoll published “Evaluating Writing Efficiently and Consistently” in the *Journal of the American Medical Writers Association* in December 2007. In 2008, her article “A Manifestation” appeared in *Birds*, a journal published by the British Museum Press.

Lecturer Kate Delaney published two articles in 2007: “Exhibiting Leadership: Definitions and Displays of Leadership in Presidential and Other Museums” in *Who’s the Boss? Leadership and Democratic Culture in America* (Hans Krabbendam and Wil Verhoeven, eds.; VU University Press, Amsterdam) and “After the Wall: Jewish Identity and Post-Cold-War Writing” in *Walking on a Trail of Words* (Jadwiga Maszewska and Zbigniew Maszewski, eds.; Lodz University Press, Lodz, Poland).

Technical instructor Ann Snodgrass published a book called *Three Stations* (Guernica Press, Toronto). The book features translations from the Italian of Antonella Anedda. In 2007–2008 Snodgrass also published poems in *The Literary Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Chelsea*, and *Ploughshares*.

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 WHS efforts 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 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 Institute 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 the 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 was completed in spring 2008.

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 of science and engineering departments throughout the Institute. Dr. Leslie Perelman and Dr. Suzanne Lane, directors 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.

WHS also continues to expand its 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 assistant professors Coleman and Montfort, Dr. Barrett, and Dr. Miller, who all 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 six classes of SM students. Although this program is relatively recent, it has now graduated 40 students. Our graduates hold down positions at *IEEE Spectrum*, *Technology Review*, WGBH's *NOVA*, *Psychology Today*, *Seed*, and the *Boston Globe*, among others, and freelance for a wide variety of publications.

Presentations, Service, Grants, and Awards

For his new novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Professor Junot Díaz received the 2008 Pulitzer Prize, the John Sargent Sr. First Novel Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the Anisfield-Wolf Prize. On December 6 Professor Díaz presented a talk, "Home and Away," at the PEN Literature and Immigration Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. Díaz also participated in the Crossing Border Festival in The Hague in November. He was a visiting writer at Northwestern University in Illinois during the first half of November and participated in the Voices Workshop at the University of San Francisco in summer 2007. He gave readings at Northeastern Illinois University, Northeastern University in Massachusetts, the New York Public Library, and the Harlem Boys' Club.

In spring 2008 Rob Kanigel received a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation fellowship for his research on his next book, "On an Irish Island" (working title), about a small island off the west coast of Ireland, the Great Blasket, the setting for a story of love and friendship and literature and language in the early years of the 20th century. During the 2007–2008 academic year Professor Kanigel delivered several talks on his latest book, *Faux Real: Genuine Leather and 200 Years of Inspired Fakes*: at the MIT Writers Series; at the Fall Lecture Series of the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, DE; and at the annual members meeting of the Leather Industries of America in Jacksonville, FL. In October 2007, Kanigel presented a talk on science writing, "Making Hard Work Easy," at the O.M. Stewart Colloquium of the Physics Department at the University of Missouri. He also delivered a talk, "Writing to Learn, Learning to Write," at the brown bag discussion of the Campus Writing Program, University of Missouri. Kanigel continues to serve on the MIT Press Editorial Board and the MIT Transportation and Parking Committee.

In September 2007, Dr. Nick Montfort founded the Purple Blurb Digital Writing Series at MIT. He is the key organizer of the series. Montfort continues as a vice president of the Electronic Literature Organization, founded in 2004, and a reviewer at the MIT Press and for *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*. Dr. Montfort delivered seven talks during the 2007–2008 academic year. He presented "A 256-Character Program to Generate Poems" at the University of California, Irvine, and the University of California, Los Angeles, in May 2008. In April 2008 Montfort presented "Imaginative, Aesthetic, Executable Writing," which focused on exploring relations between creative writing practices and software engineering, at the NSF Workshop at the Center for Literary Computing, West Virginia University. In March 2008, Montfort gave a talk at the Université du Québec in Montreal on "Narrative Variation for Interactive Fiction." At the University of Baltimore in December 2007, he presented "The Atari VCS: Games and the Platform." In November 2007, together with Michael Mateas, Montfort presented "Hammurabi's Code" at the meeting of the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts in Portland, ME. Also in November 2007, he gave a talk on "Ordering Events in Interactive Fiction Narratives" at the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence Fall Symposium in Arlington, VA. In September 2007, Fox Harrell presented, on behalf of Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost, "Platform Studies: Computing and Creativity on the VCS, MPC, and Wii" at Digital Arts and Culture 2007 (perthDAC) in Perth, Australia.

During AY2007–2008, assistant professor Beth Coleman gave three presentations: "Virtual Worlds and X-Reality" at Stanford University; "Hello Avatar! Virtual Communities and Networked Subjects," with Drs. Henry Jenkins and Steve Lerman, at a meeting of the MIT Alumni Association; and "Black Aesthetics, Black Time," at the meeting of the Modern Language Association in Chicago. Coleman also received an MIT Alumni Class of 1972 Fund for Educational Innovation award for her project "Transmedia Storytelling."

In May 2008, Marcia Bartusiak was awarded the 2008 SHASS Other Academic Infinite Mile Award for her continued outstanding service and innovative teaching at MIT. In 2008 Bartusiak was appointed to the Gamant Award Committee of the American Institute of Physics for a three-year term.

In 2008, Joe Haldeman was a Locus Award nominee (best novel) and Nebula Award nominee (best novel) for his book *The Accidental Time Machine*. In 2007 he was a Locus Award nominee (best novella) for *The Mars Girl* and a Seiun Award nominee (Japan; best novel) for his book *Camouflage*. Haldeman was a guest of honor at science fiction conventions in Pittsburgh in July 2007 and Niagara Falls in April 2008.

Rebecca Faery received an MIT Alumni Funds for Educational Innovation grant to launch an online magazine featuring the best writing from MIT Communication Intensive Writing classes. The initial issue is scheduled for August 2008. Faery continues to be chair of the Programming Committee and a member of the Steering Committee of Women's and Gender Studies.

Bill Corbett spoke at Sofia University and Tokyo University in Japan in January 2008. He also spoke at the Morgan Library and Museum exhibition of Philip Guston's drawings in New York in 2008.

Marginal Words, Marginal Work? Tutoring the Academy in the Work of Writing Centers, to which Neal Lerner contributed his essay on college writing, won the 2007 International Writing Centers Association Outstanding Book Award. In April 2008, Lerner presented at the Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference in Boise, ID, on writing across the curriculum. In January 2008 he presented on writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, NY. He gave similar talks at the University of South Carolina in November 2007 and at the Mississippi Writing Centers Association Conference in Jackson, MS, in September 2007.

Mya Poe served on the Diversity Committee, College Composition and Communication, and was the lead judge at the Siemens Westinghouse Science Competition. She presented "CxC/Science + Engineering = Next Generation Research on Science and Engineering Communication" at the Ninth Biennial International Writing Across the Curriculum conference in Austin, TX; "Storying with Data: Using Quantitative Reasoning to Teach Scientific Writing" and "Making Time for It All: Integrating Writing, Speaking, and Quantitative Reasoning in Disciplinary Courses" at Colby-Sawyer College; "Stereotypes in the Air: Meta-genres and the Racialized Regulation of Test Performance" at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in New Orleans, LA; "Writing Research Across Borders: The Challenges of International Collaboration" at the Writing Research Across Borders conference in Santa Barbara, CA; and "Charting the Transition from Academic to Professional Identities in Science and Engineering: New Approaches to Familiar Waters" at the University of New Hampshire Composition Conference.

Personnel

Professor Junot Díaz was promoted to the rank of full professor in the spring of 2008. Vivek Bald was hired as an assistant professor of writing and digital media and will start his appointment in September 2008. Dr. Mya Poe was reappointed as director of technical communication. Dr. Suzanne Lane was hired in February 2008 as coordinator/associate director for the WAC programs.

Women represent 63 percent of our total teaching staff and 17 percent of our core faculty. Minority representatives make up 13 percent of our total staff and 50 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 assistant professor is Indian American, and 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://web.mit.edu/humanistic/www/>.