

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 and offers engineering or science majors an opportunity to develop abilities that will play a key role in their professional careers. The minor in writing offers students a sustained opportunity to work in one of the program's three options while also exploring offerings in the program's core curriculum. 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; 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 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 on-request help to undergraduates and graduate students and all other members of the MIT community seeking assistance on their papers, theses, proposals, fellowship and graduate school applications, job talks, or 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 general public.

Program subjects during the past year enrolled 884 students, of whom four were majors, 20 were minors, and 81 were concentrators in writing for the HASS-D requirement. Our WAC programs brought writing instruction to almost 4,000 students in 30 departments and 104 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, providing assistance with reports, papers, oral presentations, applications, and thesis projects. Finally, seven students graduated from our SM science writing program and the graduate program had 63 applications (a record) for AY2010.

Research and Publications

Vivek Bald, assistant professor of writing and digital media, produced a documentary film, *In Search of Bengali Harlem*, about early 20th-century South Asian immigrants to New York City. Professor Bald completed an article, "Overlapping Diasporas, Multiracial Lives: South Asian Muslims in US Communities of Color, 1880–1950," for *Black Routes to Islam* (Manning Marable and Hisham Aidi, eds., Palgrave Macmillan). Another article, "Peddlers of Notions: Indian Muslims in New Orleans and Beyond,

1880–1920,” will be published in *Asian Americans and the US South* (Khyati Y. Joshi and Jigna Desai, eds., University of Georgia Press).

Professor Robert Kanigel conducted research in western Ireland and Dublin for his upcoming book *The Land of the Young*.

Professor Thomas Levenson’s book, *Newton and the Counterfeiter: The Unknown Detective Career of the World’s Greatest Scientist*, was published in May 2009 by Houghton Mifflin.

Nick Montfort, assistant professor in digital media, published a book with Ian Bogost, *Video Computer System: The Atari 2600 Platform* (MIT Press, 2009). Professor Montfort also published a book chapter, “An Interactive Fiction System for Narrative Variation,” in *New Narratives, Theory and Practice* (Ruth Page and Bronwen Thomas, eds., University of Nebraska Press, 2009). Another book chapter of Montfort’s, “Portal of Ivory, Passage of Horn,” appeared in *Well Played 1.0: Video Games, Value and Meaning* (Drew Davidson, ed., ETC Press, 2009). An article by Montfort and Ian Bogost, “Random and Raster: Display Technologies and the Development of Video Games,” was accepted for publication in *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*. In July 2008 Montfort published a hypertext prose poem, “The Purpling: A Poem,” in *The Iowa Review Web*, guest edited by Stuart Moulthrop. Montfort’s current projects include “Grand Text Auto,” which is a group blog about computer narrative, poetry, games, and art.

Professor James Paradis is working on a new study of the emergence of science as a cultural authority in 19th-century England (to be published by Blackwell Publishing).

Visiting professor Marcia Bartusiak published her book, *The Day We Found the Universe* (Pantheon Books, April 2009).

Joe Haldeman’s novels, *Marsbound* and *The Accidental Machine*, will be published in paperback by Ace Books.

Senior lecturer Ed Barrett published the following poems: “Same Difference” and “Ground Clearance” in *Zoland Poetry: An Annual of Poems, Translations and Interviews* (Steerforth Press, 2008), “Flight into Egypt” and “Hölderlin in Boston” in *Xconnect: Writers of the Information Age* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

Bill Corbett, director of student writing activities, wrote introductions to Charles North’s *Complete Lineups* (Hanging Loose Press), John Walker’s *Drawings: 1973–1975* (Knoedler Gallery, NYC) and *Songs of Vagabondia* (Pierre Menard Gallery, Cambridge, MA). In 2008–2009 Corbett’s poems, essays, and reviews appeared in the *Boston Phoenix*, the *Nation*, *Art New England* magazine, and *Zoland Poetry* annual.

Rebecca Faery, director of first year writing, published an essay titled “Patch Work: Picturing Vietnam” in *Birthing From Scorched Hearts: Women Respond to War* (MariJo Moore, ed. Fulcrum Publishing, December 2008). Faery’s essay “R&R,” originally published in *Kalliope: A Journal of Women’s Literature and Art* in November 2007, was listed among “Notable Essays of 2007” in *The Best American Essays 2008* (Adam Gopnik and Robert Atwan, eds., Houghton Mifflin, November 2008).

Neal Lerner, director of training in WAC, published *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2009). Lerner also published three essays on college writing: “Reconsiderations: After ‘The Idea of a Writing Center’” coauthored with Elizabeth Boquet in *College English* (November 2008), “Innovation Across the Curriculum: Three Case Studies in Teaching Science and Engineering Communication” with Jennifer Craig and Mya Poe in *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* (2008), and “Introduction to a List of Dissertations and Theses on Writing Centers, 1924–2008” in *The Writing Lab Newsletter* (2009).

Leslie Perelman, director of the communication requirement, published two articles in academic year 2008–2009: “Problems in Evaluating Four-Year Colleges” in *MIT Faculty Newsletter* (September/October 2008) and “Information Illiteracy and Mass Market Writing Assessments” in *College Composition and Communication* (September 2008).

Lecturer Erica Funkhouser published a collection of poems, *Earthly* (Houghton Mifflin, 2008). Funkhouser also published poems in a new anthology by Judith Kitchen and Ted Kooser, *The Poets Guide to the Birds*.

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

Mya Poe, director of technical communication, published the following articles during academic year 2008–2009: “Reporting Race and Ethnicity in International Assessments” in *Handbook of Research on Assessment Technologies, Methods, and Applications in Higher Education* (Christopher Schreiner, ed., Information Science Reference, 2009), “Scientific Writing and Technological Change: Teaching the New Story of Scientific Inquiry” in *The New Writing: Technology, Change, and Assessment* (Ann Herrington, Kevin Hodgson, and Charles Moran, eds., Teachers College Press, 2009), “Security and Privacy in the Wireless Composition Classroom” in *Going Wireless: A Critical Exploration of Wireless & Mobile Technologies for Composition Teachers and Scholars* (Amy C. Kimme Hea, ed., Hampton Press, 2009), and “Genre, Testing Systems, and the Constructed Realities of Student Achievement” in *College Composition and Communication* (2008).

Lecturer Andrea Walsh published “Nancy Savoca’s *Dogfight*: Representing Prefeminism” in the Schlesinger Library Film Lecture Series, Harvard University, March 2009.

In fall 2008 lecturer Jane Kokernak published an essay titled “Tethered to the Body” in *Bellevue Literary Review*. Kokernak also coauthored “Ways to Teach Peer Writing and Response” in *Tomorrow’s Professor Blog* (April 2009).

Contributions to MIT through Academic Programs and Initiatives

WHS continues to provide MIT students access to writing and communication in its many contemporary manifestations—as journalistic and reflective medium, professional instrument, and art form. Recent key initiatives that WHS has supported with its special expertise include the Institute’s Communication Requirement, the Comparative Media Studies (CMS) program, and the masters of science program in science writing.

The Communication Requirement, approved by the MIT Faculty in 2000, is an Institute-wide undertaking by the diverse faculties 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. In recognition of the fact 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 (CI-HW) subjects for entering students determined to need such instruction, to provide a tutoring program to strengthen writing instruction in the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences 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 the 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 associate professor Nick Montfort, assistant professor Beth Coleman, senior lecturer Edward Barrett, and lecturer Ben 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 seven classes of SM students. Although this program is relatively recent, it has now graduated 40 students. Our graduates hold positions at *IEEE Spectrum*, *Technology Review*, WGBH's *NOVA*, *Psychology Today*, *Seed*, and the *Boston Globe*, among others, and they freelance for a wide variety of publications. Two of our alumni published books to very positive reviews: *Superdove: How the Pigeon Took Manhattan...* and *And the World* by Courtney Humphries '04 and *Rocks and Minerals (The Restless Earth)* by Selby Cull '06.

Presentations, Service, Grants, and Awards

In AY2009 Professor Bald gave the following talks: "Indian, Irish, Negro: Maritime Encounter and the Political Transformation of Dada Amir Haider Khan, 1918–25" for the panel Shared Inequities, Shared Visions: Black and Asian Radicalism in Print and Practice at the Association of Asian American Studies Annual Conference in Honolulu, HI (April 2009); "State of the Field: Asian Pacific American History" at the Organization

of American History annual conference in Seattle, WA (March 2009). He was a guest lecturer for professor Manu Vimalassery's course, "South Asians in America" and gave a public screening and discussion of the film "Mutiny: Asians Storm British Music" at Williams College in Williamstown, MA (March 2009). In December 2008 he gave an additional film screening and presented "At the Limits of Diaspora? Indian Muslims in New Orleans and Harlem, 1890–1950" at Yale University's Initiative on Race, Gender and Globalization in New Haven, CT. Bald also presented "Hands Across the Water: Indian Muslim Maritime Workers and US Port-City Desertion, 1890–1950" for the panel Reexamining Early 20th-Century South Asian American Histories at the American Studies Association annual conference in Albuquerque, NM (October 2008). Bald also received the New York University Dean's Dissertation Fellowship. In May 2009 Bald was nominated for the National American Studies Association's 2009 Ralph Henry Gabriel Dissertation Prize by the New York University Program in American Studies.

Professor Robert Kanigel was on a Guggenheim leave for the spring 2009 semester.

In AY2009 Professor Montfort gave the following talks: "Curveship: Expanding the Literary Potential of Interactive Fiction" at HASTAC III: Traversing Digital Boundaries at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL (April 2009); "The Atari Video Computer System and Platform Studies" at the Society for Textual Scholarship, New York, NY (March 2009); "Platform Studies and the Atari VCS (Atari 2600)" at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (February 2009); "A New Dimension for All-Text Interactive Fiction" at Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH (February 2009); "Changing the Way Interactive Fiction is Told" at Goldsmiths, University of London (January 2009); "Writing, Digital Media, and MIT" at Kainan University, Taiwan (January 2009); "Narrative Variation for Interactive Fiction" at the third International Colloquium in Creativity, Cognition and Computers in Mexico City (November 2008); "And the Ports Have Names for the Sea: Reimagining Games for the Atari VCS" at the Association of Internet Researchers in Copenhagen (October 2008); "Integrating a Plot Generator and an Automatic Narrator to Create and Tell Stories" and "Computing Makes the 'Man': Programmer Creativity and the Platform Technology of the Atari Video Computer System" both at the fifth International Joint Workshop on Computational Creativity in Madrid (September 2008). Montfort also served on the CMS Advisory Committee for the fall 2009 semester as well as serving on the HASTAC steering committee. Montfort is a founder and organizer of the Purple Blurb digital writing series and is director of the Electronic Literature Organization. Montfort and Alex Mitchell received a grant for the Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab research project "Tools for Telling: How Game Development Systems Shape Interactive Storytelling."

In April 2009 visiting professor Marcia Bartusiak moderated a panel discussion among four leading astrophysicists, "A Cosmic Journey Through Space and Time," at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, DC. Bartusiak gave lectures on her newly published book *The Day We Found the Universe* at the Adler Planetarium in Chicago and the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia in June 2009 and at the Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in May 2009. Also in May 2009 Bartusiak was a panelist for the Galileo Symposia Series at the Catalyst Collaborative@MIT and presented at the "Inspiring Minds: Meet Women in Science" conference at the Boston Museum of Science.

Bartusiak was elected a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science for “exceptionally clear communication of the rich history, the intricate nature, and the modern practice of astronomy to the public at large.” Bartusiak served as a judge for the American Institute of Physics’s Andrew W. Gemant Award.

In AY2009, senior lecturer Ed Barrett served as a thesis advisor in the CMS graduate program. Barrett also helped design the new WHS major in digital media and developed a new WHS introductory subject in this field, “Science Writing and New Media.”

Bill Corbett gave readings at the Emerson College Writing Program, at the UMASS Boston Writing Program, at Boston University’s Graduate School of Art, and at The Poetry Project in New York City.

Rebecca Faery led a workshop “Writing Teachers Writing: Deepening Our Passion for Our Own Writing” at the National Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in San Francisco in March 2009. Faery continues to be chair of the programming committee and a member of the steering committee of Women’s and Gender Studies. She was also invited to be a judge for the National Council of Teachers of English/Norman Mailer Nonfiction High School and College Writing Awards, to be announced in the fall of 2009.

During AY2009 Neal Lerner was coeditor (with Elizabeth Boquet) of *The Writing Center Journal*, a biannual, peer-reviewed journal. In March 2009 Lerner made a consulting visit to London Metropolitan University in London to assess their writing tutorial services and Writing in The Disciplines program. In October 2008 Lerner visited Saint Mary’s College of California in Moraga, CA, to consult on the creation of a campus writing center and a writing across the curriculum program. Lerner served on the Subcommittee on the Communication Requirement at MIT in spring 2009. In 2008 Lerner received the International Writing Centers Association Outstanding Scholarship Award for “After ‘The Idea of a Writing Center’” (with Elizabeth Boquet); the National Council of Teachers of English Award for Best Article Reporting Historical Research in Technical or Scientific Communication for “Laboratory Lessons for Writing and Science”; the New York Metro Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication Merit Award for “Drawing to Learn Science: Legacies of Agassiz”; and the MIT Dean of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Research Grant, 2008, for Preston W. Search and Reform in the Teaching of Writing.

Steven Strang, director of the Writing and Communication Center, delivered a talk “Writing Center Strategies for Building Bridges at MIT and Beyond” at CCCC in San Francisco in March 2009.

Leslie Perelman delivered two conference talks: “Growing a WAC Program Takes a Lot of Time” at the Second International Writing and Critical Thinking Conference at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, CT, in November 2008 and “The Five-Paragraph Essay Makes People Stupid and Machines Smart” at CCCC in San Francisco in March 2009. Perelman also served on a committee on writing assessment at the conference.

In AY2009 Dr. Mya Poe gave the following talks: “Assessing Student Communication in Science and Engineering through Teacher Research” at the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing/Association canadienne de rédaction, Places of Writing Studies in Higher Education: Canadian and International Perspectives in Ottawa, Canada (May 2009); “Writing Across the Science and Engineering Curriculum: MIT and Beyond” for the MECESUP (Mejoramiento de la calidad de la educación superior) Program on Curricular Innovation and Harmonization in the Chilean Council of Chancellors (April 2009); “Theorizing Racism in Writing Assessment” at the CCCC in San Francisco, CA (March 2009); “Race and Educational Assessment: Who Are We Counting and Why?” at the Re-Envisioning Writing Assessment: Relevance, Diversity, and Achievement conference in Southbridge, MA (November 2008); “Writing Across the Science and Engineering Curriculum: MIT and Beyond” videoconference presentation to the faculty of Seoul National University in South Korea (October 2008); and “Communication Across the Curriculum and English Language Learning: Two Movements Learning from Each Other” at the sixth annual conference of the Asociación Nacional Universitaria de Profesores de Inglés in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico (October 2008). In 2008 Poe served as a referee of the *Caribbean Journal of Education* and was on the editorial board of the *Handbook of Research on Assessment Technologies and Applications in Higher Education*. In 2009 Poe served as a judge for the Robert A. Boit Writing Prize, part of the Ilona Karmel Writing Prizes Competition.

In AY2009 Andrea Walsh served as chair of the Louis Kampf Writing Prize Committee in the Women’s and Gender Studies Program. Walsh also served on the editorial committee of *Angles 2009*, the online journal of exemplary student writing in CI-HW subjects, and served as a judge at the Ilona Karmel Writing Prizes Competition.

Lecturers Leslie Roldan, Lisa Dush, and Jane Kokernak copresented “Writing in the Disciplines as a Disciplinary Apprenticeship: Does the Metaphor Work?” at CCCC in San Francisco in March 2009. Leslie Roldan and Jane Kokernak delivered a lecture “From Novice to Independent Researcher: A Sequence of Genre Tasks for the Undergraduate Scientists” at Quinnipiac University’s Writing Across a Critical Thinking Continuum biannual conference in Hamden, CT, in November 2008. Kokernak delivered the same talk at the Center for Educational Development and Assessment, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, in January 2009.

As part of the panel Approaches to Curriculum-wide Reform in Software Engineering, lecturer Susan Ruff presented “Communication in MIT’s Electrical Engineering/Computer Science Curriculum: Supporting Diverse Students and Subjects” at Miami University in Oxford, OH, in June 2009. Ruff also facilitated the Chautauqua-wide discussion “Defining Best Practices in the Redesign of the Software Engineering Curriculum” at Miami University. In addition, Ruff received an internal professional development grant for her research into the communication skills needed by software engineers in industry. Ruff became a member of the Association for Computing Machinery and of its Special Interest Group: Computer Science Education.

Personnel

Assistant professor Nick Montfort was promoted to the rank of associate professor with tenure as of July 1, 2009. Visiting professor Marcia Bartusiak was promoted to adjunct professor starting July 1, 2009. Adjunct professors Alan Lightman and Joe Haldeman were reappointed. Lecturers Janis Melvold and Andrea Walsh were promoted to lecturer II starting July 1, 2009. Associate professor Mia Consalvo was appointed visiting associate professor for AY2010.

Thomas Levenson became the head of the graduate program in science writing in AY2009. The graduate program also welcomed Phil Hilts, both as director of the Knight Science Journalism Fellowship and as a faculty member in the graduate program.

Women represent 63.5% of our total teaching staff and 22% of our core faculty. Minority representatives make up 11% of our total staff and 50% 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. 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://humanistic.mit.edu/>.