

FALL 2019 ISSUE

Writer's Insider

ROWAN WRITING ARTS

MULTIMODALITY

How do we
make meaning?

WINTER RETREAT

A weekend of writing
and learning.



INSIDER VIEW:

WRITING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT,
FACULTY EVENT AND INTERVIEWS

Life After Writing

Arts: A Look at Two Alumni Post BA

by Matt Berrian

So, you've graduated. . .now what? As college students, we spend every day of every semester with this question lurking around the corner. But when that big day comes, everyone gets a little blindsided by the weight of what lies ahead. I'm only a sophomore myself, but I wanted to write an article that might help myself and others feel more prepared for when the day finally comes for us to toss up our square caps and start bushwhacking our way through post-graduate life. What better way to begin a post-graduate survival guide than with some words of wisdom from post-graduates themselves?

Rachel Barton and Kaitlyn Gaffney both graduated within the Rowan Writing Arts Department in Spring 2019. I didn't know them very well during the brief window where their tenure as seniors overlapped with my tenure as a freshman, but I remembered seeing how hard working and professional they were during the several *Avant Magazine* meetings that I attended. When I got the idea to write an alumni spotlight article, their two names were the first that popped into my head. Rachel is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at NYU, and Kaitlyn is currently working as a teacher's assistant in France, helping the students learn English.

Interview with Rachel Barton

What drove you to pursue an MFA immediately after graduating?

I chose to go right into a graduate program for a few reasons. First, I thought I could get the best recommendations and support with applications while I was in school. I also felt like I was already in a school mindset; I was used to going to class, sitting in lectures, and maintaining a schedule for my work. The summer before senior year, I had been working in DC and really broke out of all my school habits and mindset. The semester that followed was a little more difficult than the others had been. When I was graduating, I thought it would be best to take my comfort with school and academics and expand upon it, rather than cutting it up by just working or taking a

gap year. That being said, lots of people, even in my program, took time between undergrad and their MFA. Different things work for different people.

Can you talk about what the application process for graduate school was like? What prior experiences have you had that you think prepared you for the application process?

I am disgustingly into applications. I think they're organized and make sense; I like figuring out how to best present my experience and interests to fit a position or program. I had experience with applying for countless jobs, internships, scholarships, and fellowships. Once you do it enough, it stops being scary. Failure or rejection becomes like a drop in the ocean. Who cares if you get rejected from one job, if you've also applied to 50 others? (The scariest applications I've ever done were for the Fulbright US-UK Summer Institutes and for the Smithsonian Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage. They were scary because I cared about them. And if I can get those, I can get anything, right?)

I think the process of applying to grad school starts way before you begin an application. First, you have to think about what kind of program you want (e.g. shifting from publishing to writing) and where you want to be. I interviewed so many of my professors to ask them about their experiences with the process. I also split my applications between fiction and nonfiction programs (I ultimately ended up in a nonfiction program). I knew that I wanted to stay on the East coast, but I also randomly picked some Midwest schools to keep things interesting. It helps to know what you want, but I would recommend trying out anything you feel interested in. None of this is set in stone; after all, they're just applications. Do research into the programs you find. Try to talk to alumni or current students. Check out their social media to see what kind of events they have.

Once I had the programs I was interested in, I made a thorough spreadsheet of basic information as well as application components to keep track of everything. I organized it by

deadline—or actually, by weeks before the deadline to make sure everything was in on time. I also gave my recommenders plenty of advanced notice and chose different individuals for fiction vs nonfiction programs (my reportage experience was less important for fiction apps, etc). The whole thing can be daunting, but the spreadsheet helps break it up into bite-sized pieces.

Just a few other tips about applications: Applying to grad school is expensive, but always apply for a fee waiver from the school—the worst they can say is no. You may also be able to get your application fee paid by your current school; for example, the Honors department offered to pay for the fee to Columbia (which doesn't have a fee waiver and therefore hates poor people). Have people read your essays!!!! I used to work in the Rowan Writing Center and they have fabulous tutors to check out your essays and writing samples (in fact, you can take basically anything there).

What have your experiences at NYU been like so far? Do you find yourself using skills learned within Rowan's Writing Arts Department in your day-to-day life?

I was incredibly nervous to start at NYU. It was one of those situations where you know it won't be a big deal once you're actually there, but that knowledge does nothing to relieve your current stress. After all, so much of the faculty and alumni are not only writers but they are also notable writers. I've read and been blown away by their books. It felt like moving up onto a completely different playing field than Rowan. I was just a kid from a state school in South Jersey; I knew the students in my program and my professors and everyone involved would be... different than me. Maybe even better. But that's all impostor syndrome and doesn't matter. Once I got there, things obviously went way better. I love everyone in my cohort; we're making friends slowly but surely. I even met someone who is from South Jersey and went to Drexel for undergrad. In that room, everyone is so different. They're all different ages, work different jobs, have been published different amounts, and write different things. The things that I thought would make me so blindingly less than actually just made me different in the regular way that we are all different from each other. (I think this understanding happened a bit quicker than it otherwise might have because we were all writing memoir. We learned a lot about each other very quickly.) There are definitely still moments where it hits me how weird this all is or something particularly pretentious happens at school, but it's less of a big deal now.

I think the biggest way RWA comes up in my daily life is through the readings it exposed me to. I thought I would show up to grad school and be dreadfully behind everyone else's reading knowledge, but that wasn't the case. Drew Kopp is going to be absolutely thrilled to hear this, but everything he ever made me read has come up in class or in conversation.



I regularly talk about Barthes and semiotics. Someone will mention something I think I have no idea about and out from my mouth comes all of this stuff I learned with him. Similarly, Leslie Allison's assigned texts come up quite frequently—in fact, we just did a John Berger text in my craft class. Those readings, usually theory-based and meta literary, have shaped the way I talk about writing, which makes it far easier to participate in a workshop.

The workshop experience I gained at Rowan has also proven helpful—just to be comfortable in that space to talk about other people's writing and listen to them talk about your own. The time I spent with first Avant then Katie Budris and Glassworks has been super helpful as well, since I'm now the assistant web editor for NYU's Washington Square Review. In fact, that experience, combined with the work I did for the Writing Arts internship, got me the position in the first place. I feel like I could go on and on. I'm a big believer in learning from everything and sort of piecing together your current identity from where've you been and what you've learned. I wouldn't be the me I am at NYU without the Rowan Writing Arts department and all of the incredible faculty members that I couldn't possibly list here

Now that you're living and learning in a completely new environment, what kind of advice would you give to a Writing Arts undergraduate who also wants to enter a graduate program after college?

Be scared: When I was choosing between my final two schools, one of my professors (Timothy Viator, English department) asked me which one scared me more. Obviously, it was NYU. I think sometimes being scared has more to do with growth so the scary option may just be the best option.

Don't do it alone: Get a roommate. Make a friend. Not only will it make things cheaper, but it always helps to have someone to talk to, especially if you're moving away from all your

friends and family like I did. If you do continue to feel especially lonely, don't be afraid to take advantage of your school's mental health services.

Compartmentalize: I'm actually borrowing this from the NYU Masters school orientation. Multiple current students and alum said the same thing—your life can't just be about the program. You need to have friends who have nothing to do with your program. You need to have hobbies completely outside of it. Your program is just a piece of you; don't let it become the whole thing.

Do the math: Lots of (read: all of) my professors told me to not go into debt for grad school. Some programs are fully funded, but some aren't. See what works for you and figure out how working may have to factor into your schedule.

Be yourself: This sounds lame but it's true. When you show up at grad school, you don't want to be the smartest person in the room—you learn a lot less that way. And you don't need to be someone else to do well or to make friends. Your "self" will change through the process, but that's good. The "self" is a flexible thing.

Interview with Kaitlyn Gaffney

For starters, what kind of work do you do as an English assistant for French students? How did you find your way into this opportunity in the first place?

When I was studying abroad in Paris, I met a woman doing this program called Teaching Assistant Program in France (TAPIF), directed by a subset of the French Ministry of Education. The application is open to all Americans and Canadians with a bachelor's degree. I loved being in Paris, so this seemed like a great way to return! I filled out one application and got accepted, and they placed me in one middle school and one high school in a small town called Sin-le-Noble, about 30 minutes by train from the metropolitan city of Lille in the north of France.

I assist in English classes and split my time evenly between the two schools. "Assisting" entails splitting the class in two and taking one half (of the students) at a time to another classroom for 20-30 minutes each. There, the focus is conversation and oral/listening comprehension; I don't give written assignments or tests. My goal as an assistant is to get the students speaking English as much as possible, and therefore my "lessons" often center on modern, culture-oriented subjects like music, television and film, fashion, and American culture in general.

As someone who's already making a name for herself in the working world, I wanted to ask if you see yourself using skills that you've learned from your time as a Writing Arts

major in your day-to-day working life? If you do, what skills would these be?

Absolutely. One of the most useful skills I gained during my time as a Writing Arts major is genre/communicative adaptability. Language immersion is widely believed to be the best way to learn a foreign language, so, theoretically, I should just speak as I normally would and allow the students to catch on eventually. However, while this strategy might work with an Honors senior English class, it would be counterproductive in my 6th grade classes. I have to remain constantly aware of the language I'm using, evaluating how familiar the students might be with both basic vocabulary as well as slang (that might even be unique to my own Northeastern American dialect!).

Besides gauging their language levels, I also have to remember that I am not a teacher, I'm an assistant. The students are used to communicating in a certain way with teachers, and by nature of my contract I have to create an altogether different learning space. I have to find a middle ground in communicating, where I conduct conversations in a judgement-free way, while



still maintaining professionalism and control of the lesson. I'll never give these students any sort of grade, and so the learning that goes on in my classroom is not incentive-based in a classical sense. I've had to find ways to mediate (a non-incentive based learning experience) so our time together is still productive in a meaningful, and (hopefully) exciting way.

Would you credit any experiences that you had within our department for encouraging your decision to start working after graduation?

My time with the Writing Arts department exposed me to so many different communities within the field of writing, particularly those with global reach and implications. As an associate editor of Glassworks magazine, I had the opportunity to travel to Portland, Oregon for the AWP conference this past March. I met professionals in the field from all over America, even from other countries as well, and got to meet with representatives and students from Literary Translation MFA programs across the country. In addition, throughout my four years at Rowan, I had the privilege of working closely with the editor-in-chief of Glassworks, Katie Budris, who was a fantastic mentor with a background in travel/international writing. In general, as a WA student with a specialization in creative writing, the faculty I worked with had so much wisdom in the way of workshopping, publishing, getting published, etc. from their own experience and I feel really lucky to have had such a hands-on, professional education from the start.

What kind of student do you think a young writer in our department has to be in order to get the most out of their time within the Writing Arts major? What steps can one take in order to become this type of student?

As much as I'm sure you've all heard this, forging relationships with your professors is absolutely essential. Our department is a perfect size for this; we don't have crazy lecture halls and we aren't just numbers in school statistics. Your professors know your name and they care about your success. Something I've always thought was special about writing, both the craft and the professional field, is that many (maybe most) of our obstacles as writers are not really age- or experience-specific. Writer's block, submission anxiety, creative self-doubt—these are things that we can experience at any point in our studies and our careers. Your professors know exactly what you're going through, and could be going through it themselves. Talk to them. They're awesome.

Thank you to Kaitlyn & Rachel for your time participating in these interviews! Your accomplishments impress all of us.

Awards & Honors

Ric and Jean Edelman pledged \$10 million to support students in the **College of Communication & Creative Arts**.

Celeste Del Russo and the Writing Center received the Access and Inclusion Award.

Glassworks Magazine nominated students **Eric Avedissian, Dina Folgias, and Joe Gramigna** for recognition in the *Intro Journals Project*, run by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs.

Anahita Bassiri won the CCA Excellence in Service Awards for the department.

Stephen Royek and Celeste Del Russo each won the STORI (Support for Teaching, Outreach and Research Innovations) award.

Jude Miller, Amanda Haruch, and Sam Kennedy were awarded a Textbook Alternative Program (TAP) grant.

Jason Luther was accepted into RCIE's Faculty Fellowship Program

Jackie Partyka had her work included in a new contemporary cultural studies book, *Trump Fiction: Essays on Donald Trump in Literature, Film, and Television*.

Keri Mikulski published the article "How to Spot and Survive Fanatical Sports Parents" in *Sammiches & Psych Meds/Mock Moms* online parenting journal

Grayson Morley's article "The New Priest" was published in *On the Seawall*. His article "The Henchmen" was included in the *Best American Short Stories*. Morley was also selected to deliver Rowan University's 10th annual "Last Lecture."

Lisa Jahn-Clough secured a book deal with *Random House* for her series *Strange Stories: About Nice Kids, Naughty Kids, Happy Kids, Sad Kids, Magic Toys, Spooky Ghosts, Yummy Waffles, Silly Monkeys, and Other Such Things*.

Student **Elizabeth Mosolovich** secured a spot in the PSE&G Green Teams Internship Program for Summer 2019.

Congratulations!

New CUGS:

Writing for the Environment

by Morgan Riccobene

This year, for students interested in addressing environmental concerns, the Writing Arts Department has just begun offering a Certificate of Undergraduate Study (CUGS) called Writing for the Environment.

The program allows students to combine knowledge about and advocacy for environmental issues with the reading, writing, and communication skills necessary for success in lobbying, policy writing, project briefs, and communicating one's position on environmental issues. According to the program's description on Rowan's Writing Arts website, "students will learn about the technical, professional, and scientific genres and forms of discourse, while learning to write for a wide range of audiences, including scientific peers, policy makers, and stakeholders in the public at large. Students will develop research, editing, and design skills, and learn how to use these skills in the service of environmental issues. In courses focused on issues relating to the environment and sustainability, students will develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment, focusing on how social norms, cultural attitudes, and political decisions shape the natural world. This CUGS will enable students to forge connections between the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and creative arts to nurture the skills they need to advocate for environmental issues that are important to them and their communities."

Dr. Ted Howell, creator of the new CUGS: I thought it would be a good thing for Writing Arts students who were interested in advocating for the environment and writing about environmental issues to learn about some of the content from the environmental studies courses as well as the skills and know-how they would get from Writing Arts courses. The CUGS in Writing for the Environment combines those into something that would allow them to pursue careers in Environmental Advocacy, more broadly, but things like nonprofits or nongovernmental organizations that are focused on environmental issues. [Students can choose from] Environmental Studies courses: Environmental Advocacy and Human Nature. There is also a sociology course, Environment Policy and Society.

Dr. Jordan Howell, coordinator of Environmental and Sustainability Studies: Human Nature: Intro to Environmental and Sustainability Studies focuses on humanistic and social science perspectives on the environment and knowing the environment. We talk about environmental history, environmental policy, and economics. We try to answer the question of "What does sustainability mean?", which is really hard to say that it's one thing at any one time— but it's an introduction class. Environmental Advocacy focuses on environmental movements and how they operate, how they organize ways of being effective in advocating for an environmental issue. It's a newer class so it's kind of evolving as to what it is, but we thought it was important to have an option for students who are kind of interested in different kinds of advocacy beyond just working for the government. There's plenty of ways to be concerned about the environment, and so we wanted to explore that in that class.

The courses are open to any student interested in the program, so if interested, talk to your advisor about registering for these courses and enrolling in the CUGS!



Winter Writer's Retreat

by Matt Berrian

At the first Writing Arts faculty-student meet and greet held this October, department chair Dr. Drew Kopp and Dr. Jade Jones unveiled a special opportunity that Writing Arts students could enroll in this coming January: the Writing Arts Winter Writing Retreat. During this announcement Dr. Kopp expressed that the Winter Writing Retreat will kickstart the Writing Arts Department's newly developed mission statement of providing students with "distinctive educational experiences" that will give them an edge in their future writing careers. With the first day of the retreat a single month away, now would be the time to take a closer look at what this retreat is going to look like for those attending and what this event means for the future of Writing Arts at Rowan.



Before I dig into what students can expect from this experience, I'm going to take a moment to give some background behind why this retreat is happening in the first place. Over the past year, Rowan's Writing Arts faculty have been taking time to re-evaluate its mission. This faculty-wide reflection has culminated in a unified goal: the Writing Arts major of Rowan will always strive to provide its students with an empowering, distinct education, guiding each student into new opportunities and experiences to shape them into exemplars. Dr. Kopp expressed that the department's commitment to following through with this goal will be seen through the upcoming Winter Writing Retreat that he and several other Writing Arts professors have put together, including Jade Jones, Megan Atwood, Lanre Akinsiku, Keri Mikulski, Heather Lanier, and Amanda Haruch.

For those lucky enough to be attending this weekend-long retreat, students will be traveling to Pendle Hill in Wallington, PA. This cozy retreat center sits on a comfortable 24 acres

of land, surrounded by plenty of wildlife, nature trails, and meditation ponds. During the day on Saturday, students will work in a series of workshops with published faculty and professional writers to hone their craft in a variety of written genres. Professor Jones will lead a workshop on creative nonfiction, with a focus on developing students' senses of voice, narrative point of view, and the power of descriptive language. Her workshop will guide students into these layers of understanding by analyzing excerpts from Octavia Butler and Audre Lorde. Professor Atwood's workshop will rely on her expertise in creative fiction to help students improve their ability to craft characters and setting.

Joining them will be published author Lanre Akinsiku, and new Writing Arts professor Heather Lanier. Akinsiku, whose work was placed in the New York Public Library's annual list of greatest books for children and young adults, will be leading his own fiction writing workshop, with special consideration being spent on helping students vanquish "some of the pesky writing demons" that feed writer's block, as he described. Professor Lanier's workshop will focus on elements of poetry -- such as how to create the right image, and the "musicality" of language. Students in her workshop will be in an environment fostered to promote creativity and growth, where they will write new poems and receive feedback from professors and peers. At the end of the retreat, students will have the opportunity to read what they've been working on to faculty and peers, and will also be able to join in on a dinner with a publisher who is currently working in the field.

The experiences that students will have at this retreat will be an encapsulation of the Writing Arts Department's newfound drive to forge opportunities for its hard-working students. There aren't many other schools that offer programs such as this retreat, which is exactly what makes department chair Dr. Kopp hope that the department will be able to offer other writing-workshop retreats in the future. "What I am committed to students getting from this," he explained, is an experience that "enriches and expands what it means to be a writer, deepening their connections with other students and faculty in the department." He and others in the department hope that the Winter Writing Retreat will lay a fertile groundwork for being able to keep expanding what Rowan's Writing Arts faculty can provide for their students in an ever-competitive market for writers.

A Spotlight on the Rowan Writing Center

by Connor Buckmaster

This year has been a big one for the Writing Center: one filled with awards, grants, travel, and growth. As the Writing Center is celebrating its 10 year anniversary, I wanted to take some time to shine a spotlight the center, partly because of the wonderful work the center does and its recent achievements, but also because, as a new tutor myself, I've had the privilege to work with the amazing tutors and faculty who welcomed me into their space.

If you're unfamiliar with the Writing Center, Celeste Del Russo, the Writing Center director, talked to me about its role on campus. "We work with undergrads and grad students on any type of writing project that they are working on for their coursework, or even in their own personal writing experience. We try to provide them with a space to share their work and to receive feedback in a non-judgemental environment. [We] help them to learn more about their writing process and what that looks like for them." Any student at any stage in the writing process can come to this social space and work with tutors, who are also their peers.

If you've ever visited the Writing Center before, it's always a fun, relaxed, welcoming and social space for students to learn, something the center prides itself on. Dr. Russo explained, "...[O]ne of the more important parts of our role is that the social space itself of the Writing Center is one that we hope to be welcoming to many different students, and we hope to provide a space where they feel comfortable. [The space fosters] the social aspects of writing, the sharing of writing, ideas, and communication." The Writing Center is an open space for all students, which is extremely valuable, especially to students who may not be confident in their work. Cate Romano, the Assistant Director of the Writing Center, echoed this point. She sees the Writing Center as "a safe space for overwhelmed students to come, and a place to boost their confidence." When tutors are in training, there is always a focus on positive, productive feedback. Dr. Russo said, "[T]he Writing Center [is] a space where we want to talk about a

student's strengths, as well as areas they can develop. [We] look for the positives and help them build up the confidence in sharing their writing and help them identify themselves as writers." Within my tutoring sessions, this is always a point I try to emphasize: you are a writer! Every Rowan student will encounter writing during their college experience. The Writing Center is the place to go whenever you need help. It's what they're there for, and it's what they love to do!

It's because of the great work the center does and their commitment to inclusion that the Writing Center received the Access and Inclusion Award from the Disability Resource Center (DRC). This honor is awarded to staff and departments who strive to provide access to the resources Rowan students need to succeed and thrive in college. The center had been working with the DRC for a long time, even in events outside of the Writing Center. Donna Mehalchick-Opal, the Coordinator for the Writing Center, told me about how she and other tutors have volunteered in the College Compass program.



This program provides students with disabilities a period of transition into their college and campus life. Donna and other tutors meet with students a few times during this program to inform them about the Writing Center and encouraging them to visit. Donna also shared some of the outcomes from the Writing Center's partnership with the DRC, includ-



ing training on access, inclusion, neurodiversity, and more. In asking why she felt they received the award, Dr. Russo pointed to this partnership with the DRC, but also spoke on the impact of the students they've worked with, saying "The students that have come to us through the [DRC] have taught me and taught all of our tutors so much about what it looks like to write from different ranges of ability. [I]t's helped us to really think about our tutoring strategies, and our tutor training, to make sure that we are providing the best kind of access to all students." Their approach hasn't been to find better ways to "accommodate" students, Dr. Russo emphasised, rather it's constantly asking "how can we provide better practices all around, provide better assistance universally."

Dr. Russo was also awarded \$1,800 to bring speaker and educator John Warner to conduct a workshop in celebration of the Writing Center's Ten Year anniversary. This was through the STORI Award (Support for Teaching, Outreach and Research Innovations). The STORI Award provides funds for initiatives focusing on one or more of these three areas: teaching initiatives that increase student learning, outreach to the community via student or faculty led initiatives and/or recruitment efforts, and new research initiatives. The workshop, which will be held next March, will be held for Rowan faculty members and local high-school educators.

On top of this work within the studio, the Writing Center has had an impact on the local community. Writing Center tutors have visited local Glassboro schools and Logan Township Middle school, leading writing workshops with middle school and high school students. I got to speak with Laura Kincaid, in her third year of tutoring and pursuing an MA in Writing Arts, about her experiences with local school outreach. She told me, "Last year, I went to an assisted living space where I ran a Creative Writing Nonfiction Workshop for some very nice elderly women. This year, we got a partnership with Logan Middle School. They had read an anthology over the summer which included a narrative poem, so they wanted us to come in to something on poetry." The first day, tutors worked with the students on their poems, providing encouragement and constructive feedback. The second day, tutors and students shared their works in a poetry reading. "The kids really liked that, and all the feedback that we got from the teachers was that it got [the students] excited and talking about their

assignments." Logan Middle School is looking to have tutors come back and lead more writing lessons next year!

Writing Center tutors and staff also had the opportunity to present at this year's International Writing Association conference (IWA). Nicole Tota, a junior English major and third-semester tutor, discussed their presentation on using collages as a multimodal form of essay creation and peer review. "Our participants were really interested," she told me, "and they really enjoyed our ideas." On top of the successful presentation, Cate Romano said she gained information from other sessions that she has since used in her classes. Cate learned of a PechaKucha, an online visual presentation service used by creators and schools. "My class just used it last week for their critical engagement, and they really liked it. I think it was really successful." Moving forward, the Writing Center is in the process of submitting their proposal to present at next year's Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association (MAWCA), held at Towson University, Maryland in March 2020.

It's only my first semester in the Writing Center, but I already feel like I've grown so much through my sessions with students and tutor trainings. The Writing Center is more than a place to bring your paper, it's a thriving community of students and faculty dedicated to helping students learn and grow as writers. When asked about the Writing Center's plans for the future, Dr. Russo explained, "Moving forward, we'll continue to think about issues like access and inclusion, how we can implement some of the First Year Writing goals of language diversity and social justice, and how we can continue to advocate for our students and our student writers." As new developments in writing continue to advance, and as more students in Rowan are required to produce and analyze multimodal works, so to will the Writing Center. "[We'll] think about how to continually adapt our practices to support students across different modalities." It's an honor to grow alongside their talented team of tutors.

Special thanks to all who contributed to this article: Celeste Del Russo, Director of the Writing Center; Donna Melchick-Opal, Coordinator of the Writing Center; Cate Romano, Assistant Director of the Writing Center; Laura Kincaid, third year tutor pursuing an MA in Writing Arts; Nicole Tota, third-semester tutor in her junior year as an English major.

Building Community:

The First Student- Faculty Meet & Greet

by Morgan Riccobene

On Wednesday October 2nd, the Writing Arts Department held its first faculty-student meet and greet where students had the opportunity to discuss their academic interests with professors of related programs in a casual environment over refreshments. Many of the students in attendance were new to the department as first semester students taking the Writing Arts Learning Community course, instructed by Professor Amanda Haruch. Professor Haruch explained that the goal of the course “is to foster a community that students are a part of for the duration of their academic career here.” The meet and greet expanded this community to include faculty as well, something Professor Haruch hoped would come of the event. These meetings create a more open environment throughout the department where everyone can become more involved as a community and aware of the opportunities offered to them. Professor Jade Jones recounts her experience at the event, “The faculty meet and greet gave us the chance to meet students outside the classroom in a more casual setting. I got to meet students who I may not have in class and I also got to talk to my current students without mentioning grades, readings, or writing assignments. The meet and greet was an opportunity for students and faculty to chat more as peers.” This view of faculty and students as peers is the Writing Department goal for both the Writing Arts Learning Community course and future Meet and Greet events, as it provides students with the experience of communicating with peers of their professional field.

I had the unique experience of interacting with both students and faculty, discussing internship opportunities and my own experience, as well as graduate options for myself as a senior student in the Writing Arts Major. In particular, I had a conversation with Writing Arts Learning Community

students who had transferred to Rowan this semester; Daria, a creative writing major interested in publishing, and Champagne who was an Education major with interest in teaching writing. I had the chance to tell Daria about the publishing experience I am gaining through my Writing Arts internship and work with Rowan’s Singularity Press, as we share the same career interests. Champagne and I discussed her goals as a Writing Arts student, and I was able to aid her by peer reviewing some of her writing.

As for faculty interaction, the other students and myself were able to meet and chat with Heather Lanier, a new professor to our department. She discussed the writing subjects she is experienced in, as well as the current courses she is teaching at Rowan. To hear more about her, stay tuned for a podcast interview conducted by Connor Buckmaster, head WA intern and Rowan graduate student. I also spoke with Dr. Grace Fillenwarth and Dr. Jason Luther whom I had met in Intro to Writing Arts. Both teach courses in Technical and Professional Writing, and although my concentration is Creative Writing, they had valuable information and insight to help me with my career goals. I expressed regret that I was unable to take Dr. Luther’s course Self-Publishing, so both professors were able to suggest graduate opportunities and provide contact information that would aid my search for publishing knowledge and experience. After, I had a conversation with Dr. Drew Kopp, chair of the Writing Arts Department, and expressed my gratitude for what I was able to learn about different theories of writing when I had taken How Writers Read with him a previous semester. He later expressed that he was “thrilled with how our first meet and greet went, and it succeeded due to the faculty who led the way: Jade Jones, Amanda Haruch, Megan Atwood, and Heather Lanier, to name a few of the faculty who were there at the meet and greet. However,

its success is also due to the students who actually showed up, primarily this year's Writing Arts Learning Community."

The Meet and Greet also served as a chance to discuss upcoming events. Professor Katie Budris passed out flyers and recommended students attend Glassworks' Issue 19 Launch Reading on October 24th at the High St. Art Gallery, and I was able to discuss plans for Rowan's involvement in the Collingswood Book Festival with Professor Stephen Royek who ran the Writing Arts booth at the festival and Dr. Luther who ran a booth there for his Self-Publishing course. To hear more about that annual event, be sure to read next week's article! The last event that the faculty-student meet and greet provided an informational platform for is the "newest winter session opportunity," the Winter Writing Retreat to the beautiful Pendle Hill retreat center in Wallingford, PA.

The Winter Writing Retreat was a main point in the meet and greet because it is a chance to further develop the department as a community. Dr. Kopp worded it best, relating the retreat to the goals of the department, "I see the Winter Writing Retreat to be an expression of a larger vision and mission for the department, a vision and mission that we are just beginning to articulate. Central to our vision and mission is a promise: to provide distinctive educational experiences for students that leave them empowered to be writers in the world. This retreat is one part of a larger structure to deliver on this promise, a structure that necessitates generating other similar events in the future, which will continue to generate more opportunities for faculty and students to interact within and beyond the classroom".

Creative Writing Professor Jade Jones held a presentation on what this creative writing retreat, presented and priced as



a 1 credit course, has to offer Writing students. She highlighted that herself, Megan Atwood, Lanre Akinsiku, and Heather Lanier will be sharing their creative writing expertise as published faculty. Jones made sure to mention that this writing focused retreat will allow students "the chance to use the January break productively and gain writing tools that'll help them in the years to come" and later expressed her excitement for the event mentioning that she is "looking forward to exploring multiple creative genres with students in January."

In the end, all of the students and faculty were able to engage in productive conversations that were enlightening to what that Writing Arts Department has to offer students. The main concern expressed across the board for future meet and greets was the hope for more upper-class students to attend as well, not just Freshman. However, Professor Haruch included with this suggestion the notion that "being able to access freshman students and begin to build those bonds so early in their Writing Arts Journey was priceless." Still, more upper-classman participation would ultimately provide freshman students a view of their future as Writing Arts students, and could benefit themselves as I did in learning about their opportunities post-graduation, catching up with their previous professors, and meeting those they never had the opportunity to take courses with. Despite the event including mostly students new to the program, faculty left the event feeling much the same as Dr. Kopp, who was "thrilled with how our first meet and greet went." As a representative of the student viewpoint, I agree with Dr. Kopp that the event was a great success and share the same sentiment as Professor Haruch: "My hope is that this is the first of many faculty and student meet and greets".

Multimodality:

Inside & Outside the Writing Arts Dept.

by Connor Buckmaster

Communication is created and shared through modes. Modes are ways of meaning-making, manners of expression. The common mode we writers are familiar with is alphanumeric text—words on a page. Yet communication exists beyond the black-and-white, it is visual, audible, spatial, interactive and interconnected. Rachel Shapiro, an assistant professor in the Writing Arts Department, defines multimodality as “the rhetorical (or not) use of multiple modes of meaning making in a single or overlapping compositions, including visual, aural, oral, written, digital and physical elements that can be used in various combinations to achieve a purpose.” Modes can be thought of as tools, each having a specific purpose informed by the context and audience. What are some common examples of multimodal texts?

Ads are a well-known form of multimodal text. Ads apply multiple modes: visual, textual, spatial, and depending on the medium, aural. This is usually accomplished through pictures, graphics, and text. Each mode in an ad works to persuade the viewer to purchase a product or service. Social media is another example; users encounter visual, audible, and textual modes online, and use these modes to converse with others. Podcasts communicate information

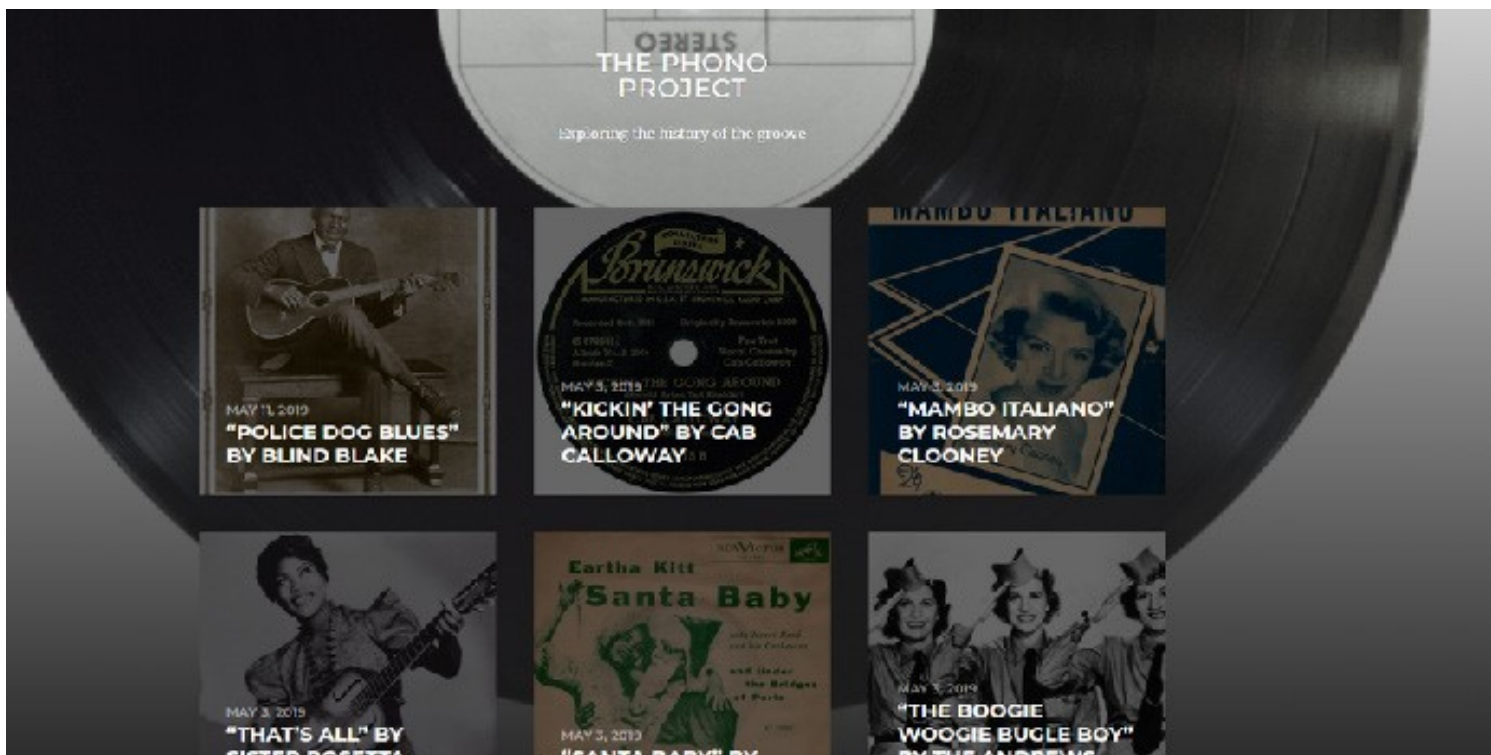
via the audible mode and are becoming increasingly popular.

But beyond these common examples, some believe that a monomodal text is impossible. Amanda Haruch, a Writing Arts alumni and current Writing Arts Lecturer, explains that “even one who is writing a traditional academic essay is engaging in multimodal writing—the text on the page, combined with the white space (spatial) and document design.” Thus, encounters with multimodal texts are unavoidable, and they play a central role in the way we communicate today. It is for this reason that students inside and outside the Writing Arts Major should work to understand and produce multimodal texts. How does the Writing Arts Department and Rowan University address this need for multimodal study?

Classes offered by the Writing Arts Department address multimodality in multiple ways. Drew Kopp, Associate Professor and Chair of the Writing Arts Department, uses Google Docs in his classes, allowing the students to work in a low-stakes collaborative environment. In Jason Luther’s module for Intro to Writing Arts, students maintain their own blogging website and produce a 90-second podcast which is published to The Phono Project, a digital publication run by Luther. This project ena-

bles students to work primarily within the textual and auditory modes, and is one of the first projects Writing Arts students encounter that teaches multimodality. From there, students will encounter multiple modes within their Writing Arts classes. Rachel Shapiro has encouraged her students to produce works in multiple genres such as “digital and print zine making, blogging, microblogging and social media, web design, document design, podcasting, video remix, documentary video, stop motion, infographics and more.” Amanda Haruch has also implemented multiple multimodal genres into her classes, such as “videos (remix and oral history), infographics, blog posts, and multimodal argumentative essays.” Each of these projects allows students to explore, analyze, and produce works in multiple modes; to shift the emphasis from textual arguments and incorporate it in different modes.

One of the best examples of multimodal instruction beyond the Writing Arts Department can be found in the First-Year Writing Program. The First-Year Writing Program (FYW Program) is designed to “foster and strengthen the critical reading and writing skills that students need to succeed at the university and beyond,” enabling students to be “rhetorically adept writers who can respond to a variety of academic,



personal, civic, and professional writing situations.” Due to the ever-growing encounters with multimodal texts, there has been a push for students within the FYW Program to encounter and produce multimodal texts. Kristine Lafferty, lecturer in the Writing Arts Department and Assistant Coordinator of the FYW Program, allows her CCI students to produce their final project as an info-graphic, a listicle, or a video. In her CCII class, there are multiple lessons which focus on analyzing multimodal texts. Students then take the techniques they learn and incorporate them into existing essays or analyze an existing multimodal argument. Amy Woodworth, the Coordinator for the FYW Program, also empowers her students with the ability to decide what genre they wish to produce. This decision is based on the student’s audience and how they intend to reach them.

The professors I reached out to also described why multimodality is taught to students, and why it is important. First, it is important for students to have the ability to critically engage with a multimodal text and understand the

rhetorical devices used within it. Shapiro highlighted this point, stating that crafting in multimodality helps writers “become better and more critical readers of multimodal texts.” Lafferty echoed this point in her response, stating “by teaching them to compose in multimodality, we are also strengthening their ability to analyze multimodal genres.” Every professor I spoke with understood the importance of equipping students with the tools to critically engage with multimodal texts, and each uses their platform as a professor to instill these skills for students who will venture out into our ever-growing multimodal world.

Beyond engagement, studying and producing multimodal texts enables students to communicate in new genres and to more audiences. Understanding and applying strategies through multimodal texts, as Lafferty states, equips them with the “tools to communicate effectively in the 21st century,” and these tools will be beneficial to students beyond their years at Rowan University. Multiple professors echoed this point, which is why they all incorporate multi-

modality in their classes!

It’s imperative that all students gain experience analyzing and producing multimodal texts for these reasons. And thanks to these professors, students inside and outside the Writing Arts Department are strengthening the skills they’ll need for our multimodal world and their future careers. The multimodal skills that students will learn will last far beyond their years at Rowan, because of the strides that these professors have taken for their students.

Thank you to all the professors who responded to my questions, allowing me to build this essay: Drew Kopp, Chair of the Writing Arts Department; Jason Luther, assistant Professor in the Writing Arts Department; Rachael Shapiro, assistant professor in the Writing Arts Department; Amanda Haruch, Writing Arts lecturer; Kristine Lafferty, Assistant Coordinator of the First Year Writing Program; Jude Miller, teacher in the First-Year Writing Sequence; Amy Woodworth, the Coordinator of the First-Year Writing Program.

An Interview with Heather Lanier

by Connor Buckmaster

Heather Lanier is the author of *Teaching in the Terrordome: Two Years in West Baltimore* with Teach For America, and two award-winning poetry chapbooks: *Heart-Shaped Bed in Hiroshima* (Standing Rock, 2015), and *The Story You Tell Yourself* (Kent State U, 2012), winner of the Wick Poetry Open Chapbook Competition. Her work has been noted in *The Best American Essays Series* and *The Pushcart Anthology Series*. She has published poems and essays in many places, including *Salon*, *The Sun*, *Vela Magazine*, *The Southern Review*, *The Threepenny Review*, and more. She has a forthcoming book about raising her daughter with a rare chromosomal syndrome, and she is a new teacher here for the Rowan University Writing Department.

Dr. Lanier and I talked about her approach to teaching and writing, her publishing journey, and her future plans at Rowan University. Below is a transcript taken from parts of this conversation.

Interview with Heather Lanier

Did you always know you wanted to be a teacher, or was that a later stage?

I was probably a writer before I was a teacher, but I was a writer early. I was writing in high school, kind of seriously. I was taking seriously the writing of poems and studying poems. So I knew that I loved writing as a way to make sense of the world, and that writing was a big part of my being in the world. Then I went through college and was a serious writer in college. I went to the University of Delaware and there wasn't a creative writing major at the time. So I studied English literature and I took all the creative writing classes I could take. Back then a lot of universities didn't have creative nonfiction at all. So I was studying poetry and fiction, and also writing memoir on the side. [...] I was always writing as an undergraduate. When I was twenty two and graduating I didn't know what to do, because I loved writing and I really loved learning. So I thought, what if I stood on the other side of the classroom, would I like that too? And I did! I really

loved teaching. I like fostering curiosity and exploration in the classroom, whether that's as a student or as a teacher. I've been doing it on the other side for a while, but I consider myself a "co-conspirator" in exploration and curiosity for my students.

What are you teaching here at Rowan University?

I have been hired to teach creative nonfiction of all kinds, and multi-genre creative writing. I'm also a poet, so I'll probably teach poetry at some point. Right now I'm teaching *Special Topics in Nonfiction*, which is focused on explorations of experiments and innovations in the contemporary essay, the weird things that people are doing in the essay in the last few decades. I also teach *Creative Writing I*, which is multi-genre, poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, for undergraduates.

I'd like to get into your new book that's coming out. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

The book is called *Raising a Rare Girl*, and it is a memoir about my first child. Eight years ago I had my first child, and she was born very tiny. The doctors were really concerned that something was wrong. We found out that she has this very rare chromosomal syndrome called *Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome*, which is the name that they've given because the scientist Wolf and Hirschhorn found that this particular syndrome corresponds to a certain kind of deletion in certain chromosomes. She has different chromosomes; her fourth chromosome is different than most other people's. That manifests in a lot of different differences but also challenges, developmental delays, and a lot of uncertainty in her developmental trajectory.

And so this book is about what it means to parent a person who is so different from what people expect, who culturally and historically has been dehumanized—it wasn't until 1975 that children with disabilities were guaranteed a right to education—but also what it means to parent at all, how hard it is, how much surrender and letting go you have to do, and opening yourself up to the unexpected.

I read a little bit of your book *Teaching in the Terrordome*, and that also deals with cultural biases. It also deals with the hardships that minorities and people that are considered “the other” face. It’s a similar thing that you’re touching on in your new book, these cultural pressures and stories that we tell. I’m wondering how you came to these topics and how you try to tackle them in your writing.

I think I’ve always been interested in the way that ableism expresses itself in our culture, I studied under disability scholars as a graduate student, and certainly writing about a primarily black school in the city and also writing about racism. I guess I am a little interested in systemic oppression of marginalized groups, but my child sort of found me. So it ended up being that I was writing about ableism from this very deep, heartfelt place.

There’s a quote, and I forget who says it, which says “having a child is like your heart walking around outside of you”, because you love this person so much. It was shocking to have people comment, really early on, about my daughter, and her life, and her worth when she was just a few days old, because she had this syndrome. Saying things about her they would never think to say about a child who didn’t present as having potential intellectual disabilities. So that subject kind of just landed in my lap, I suppose.

I watched your TED talk, and in it you go into detail about those beginning phases of raising your daughter and the stories that you heard from other people. I was wondering if you still think of that phrase, “good or bad, hard to say.” It’s an interesting topic to think of in terms of writing, but also in life, the stories we are telling ourselves, and how we are trying to put together our narrative—if that phrase was something you thought of writing this new book?

Any time I write something that’s partly what I’m thinking about, asking “what is the story here?” And any writer has to think about that. Joan Didian’s line from *The White Album*, “We tell ourselves stories in order to live,” is famous because every writer has to contend with the fact that we desire to make meaning of our lives, but the meaning that we make often falls flat, or is cliché, or is unfair to others, or is not the whole picture.

And so I am really interested in the stories that are told, and sort of flipping them around, in investigating our modern mythology. Often my work will do that. I think with both books I’m attempting to question some of the stories we tell.

Speaking of your works, I wanted to talk a little bit about your publishing journey. When did you first try to get into publishing? As you were starting, what’s something you wished you knew?

I started trying to publish after I graduated as an undergraduate, and I tried to publish poems. And, you know, poetry is really hard to place too—acceptance rates are often like one percent. So mostly I didn’t publish any poems, but I would send them out. I was told by a professor of poetry to make it just a thing that you do and to be proud of the rejections that you receive, because the rejections are proof that you are in some ways making public your work; you finished something, your sharing something with an editor, and that editor read it! Even if the answer is no, good work!

This was a poetry professor, Jeanne Murray Walker, who said, “Do something funny with your rejection letters, like cover your kitty litter box with them.” And I always took that as more of a metaphor than anything, the idea being, “don’t weep over your rejections too much.” That was really good advice.

And one final question, as you’re new here at Rowan, and we’re really excited to have you, what are you looking forward to accomplishing here at Rowan?

The one thing I’m really excited about is building energy and interest in creative nonfiction, which already is here; writers are already coming in with that interest. But also creating a space for people to find a home in a genre that I think everybody can find a home in. Everybody has some nonfiction that they want to write, whether it’s personal or researched. Every writer I know eventually starts dipping their toes into nonfiction. So I want to create that space for people to find a home in a genre that I love so much, and then be a support person for them. In some ways, being a writing professor is a bit like being a coach or a midwife, helping people give birth to something rather than being strict about how they should write. I really see my role as helping people foster people’s own projects. So that involves listening closely to what the graduate students are interested in and supporting the projects that they are drawn to—and at the undergraduate level, building interest in the genre.

Being a member of this amazing faculty, which is filled with all kinds of writers, is so exciting! This is the department that I would have loved as an undergraduate student. I think studying literature was great for me, but I would have been excited to be a Writing Arts major as an undergrad.

Well we are excited to have you here, thank you so much for having this conversation with me!

Thank you! Thanks for having me!



Meet Our Staff

The Writer's Insider is a semesterly publication written, managed, and designed by the Writing Arts Internal Interns.



Connor Buckmaster

Connor Buckmaster is the head intern for the Writing Arts Department since September of 2019. As the head intern, he is the co-editor of the Writer's Insider. He is in his senior year of undergraduate study, pursuing his Master's degree in Writing Arts within the 4+1 program. Connor also works as a tutor for the Writing Center.



Morgan Riccobene

Morgan Riccobene, co-editor of this semester's Writer's Insider, is a senior dual major at Rowan University in English and Writing Arts with a concentration in Creative Writing. She is one of the Writing Arts department interns and author of some of the articles published in this Writer's Insider. She has also done work for publishing companies Tonic Books and Singularity Press. Riccobene has several works published to Avant Literary Magazine. She will graduate from Rowan University after this Fall 2019 semester, and plans to further pursue a career in the publishing industry.



Matt Berrian

Matt Berrian is a sophomore Writing Arts student at Rowan University. He graduated from Hillsborough High School in 2018, and has been writing as a creative outlet since elementary school. Recently he's enjoyed several opportunities within and without the Writing Arts Internship program to further develop his professional writing skills as well. He considers himself lucky to contribute to the Writer's Insider this semester, and hopes that this publication helps students learn about all of the exciting things happening in the Writing Arts department!

