Letter from the Director

Reading through this semester’s Session Notes, I am struck by writing’s ability to foster connection and build relationships across communities – cultural, disciplinary, professional. For example, writing helped Gilman Scholar Esther Oloff communicate her desire to study abroad so that she can work toward her goal to positively influence healthcare in developing countries. Mechanical & Industrial Engineering Assistant Professor Bill Schell talks about the fun he had collaborating with a co-author in nursing on a project studying engineering and nursing leadership behaviors in healthcare. And our own Writing Center tutors are traveling to the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing to present their research on writing centers as inclusive spaces. Writing and writing centers are relational. We enjoy finding the connections and understanding how to communicate across all of the communities that make up MSU. I invite you to browse through the pages of Session Notes; we would love to build community with you!

-Michelle Miley
Director and Assistant Professor of English
Fall 2016 marks our second semester partnering with MSU’s Study Abroad Office. We recently held our second writing workshop for students applying for the Gilman International Scholarship. Following our spring semester workshop, four MSU students earned the Gilman Scholarship for the fall semester. We interviewed Esther Oloff, a student who earned a Gilman Scholarship for the summer semester, who currently serves as a Global Ambassador for the Study Abroad Program. Esther is a senior studying Chemical and Biological Engineering.

Where did you study abroad and how did you choose this location?

I studied abroad twice, first in Nicaragua during summer 2015 and then in Peru during summer 2016. I chose to go to Nicaragua because I wanted to learn more Spanish. Studying in Peru was more relevant to my chemical engineering major because the program included Multidisciplinary Design, a required engineering class.

Can you tell us more about your area of research?

I work at the Center for Biofilm Engineering and am currently researching how to use microfluidic techniques to study gastric organoids. On the surface, this does not appear to have anything to do with studying abroad, but one day I would like to work internationally as a biomedical engineer to help with healthcare in developing countries. My research gives me experience for graduate school and lets me work on something that is important in the biomedical engineering field now.

Did you notice any differences between writing in the U.S. and writing in another country and culture?

Students are taught writing techniques differently in other countries. Sometimes they are taught to use as many literary devices and phrases as possible, so middle school compositions sometimes read like a string of cut-and-pasted idioms. For me, writing in other countries requires sensitivity to language in order to communicate clearly. A great deal of idiomatic expressions that people from the United States use on a regular basis are nonsense in other countries, and so I think that I have become a better writer because I have had to be careful to make sure my language is understood.

We Hire Tutors From Across Disciplines

By Emma Nelson, Peer Tutor

We are proud to have so many majors and fields of study represented by our tutors. Our tutors come from a variety of majors, which in turn diversify the center and the work done within. Tutors are able to help students with multiples genres of writing: resumes, personal statements, lab reports, essays, creative work, and more.

We’re currently hiring tutors for Spring 2017!
Application deadline: November 21, 2016
I recently picked the brain of Dr. William Schell, an Assistant Professor in the Mechanical & Industrial Engineering Department at MSU. The Writing Center is currently partnering with Dr. Schell and the student writers enrolled in his EIND 300: Engineering Management and Ethics course; I am one of the designated tutors for this course.

As an engineering student employed as a writing tutor, it’s often difficult to reconcile and relate the realm of engineering to the realm of the Writing Center. Dr. Schell has over fifteen years of industry experience and a long list of publications, and I view him as a role model because he also navigates these two seemingly different disciplines.

**What do you write? What writing have you most recently worked on?**

My writing falls into three categories: 1) research publications, 2) grant funding proposals, and 3) providing feedback to students and other writers. It seems that the third category is always in progress during the semester. My most recent substantive writing project was a grant proposal submitted to the National Science Foundation earlier this week. Right now, I have six different publication projects in progress at various stages, from initial outlines all the way to making revisions to submitted work for resubmission.

**What is your writing process? How often do you write?**

I think about my writing as a structured process that is highly iterative. For me, that process starts by trying to get a clear picture of what I want the end message to be, outlining the story between here and there, and then writing to that outline. My end message and outline tend to go through a lot of revisions as the writing unfolds. For crafting the message, I try to use Barbara Minto’s “Pyramid Principle” as an effective style. The biggest hurdle for me is to get a first cut out, something I think about as “vomiting on the page.” I’m also part of a writing group on campus that meets weekly to give each other feedback on writing in progress.

**Tell us about one of your favorite writing projects.**

My favorite writing projects have been when working with a single co-author who has a different perspective than mine: someone who is not shy about calling me out on something. A project from a couple years ago investigated engineering and nursing leadership behaviors in healthcare with a member of the MSU nursing faculty, and one from last year investigated the profiles of faculty engaged in training engineers for leadership with another engineering faculty on the East Coast. Both projects were a lot of fun while they were in motion, ended up way better than either of us could have done by ourselves, and won national level awards.

We at the Writing Center believe that we support our students best when we are in conversation with those teaching in the classroom. We want to partner with you!
Record Number of Tutors Attend NCPTW
By Kaidan McNamee, Peer Tutor

The National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) is an annual conference that explores the teaching of writing. Writing Center tutors attend this conference regularly as both panelists and learners. The 2016 conference theme is “The Inclusive Writing Center,” designed to explore how writing centers can become inclusive spaces for students of all identities and backgrounds and to challenge the idea that a writing center, by nature of its model, pairs a “needy” writer or student with an “elite” tutor.

MSU’s Writing Center will be hosting two panels composed almost entirely of student tutors. The first, “Silence and Listening: Theoretical Frameworks for Inclusivity,” features three speakers: Writing Center Director Michelle Miley and peer tutors Demi Sullivan and Kaidan McNamee (yours truly). Our panel explores how such theoretical frameworks as queer theory, rhetorical listening, feminist theory, and thirdspace theory can guide our creation of a more inclusive writing center. As a nonbinary transgender individual, I have a vested interest in understanding how writers of various identities interact with and utilize the Writing Center, especially since, as a tutor, I’ve found it to be a very identity-nurturing space.

Our second panel, “Bridging a Gap: Writing in Engineering,” features Bri Bos, Liz Kovalchuk, and Graeme Greenwood, MSU engineering students whose STEM backgrounds have created interesting challenges in their tutoring practice. Their fourth panelist, Kinsie Clarkson, is a writing major. Their panel will explore how ways of knowing outside of traditional writing scholarship can inform writing center and tutoring practices.

Inclusivity and diversity of student writers have become pivotal ideas in our Writing Center this year. MSU is the academic home of people of innumerable identities: race, ethnicity, culture, gender, orientation, religion, political affiliation, morality, family structure, nationality, and language all come together to create a nexus of identification and discourse. The inherently personal act of writing brings these identities together in one place; as such, our Writing Center model is dependent upon our ability as tutors to meet writers exactly where they are, not regardless of background, but with attention to each unique identity that comes through our door.

Calling all NIGHT OWLS!

WE’RE OPEN LATE in the MSU WRITING CENTER

1-114 Wilson
Open until 8:30 pm
Monday-Thursday

Renne Library
Open until 10:00 pm
Sunday-Thursday

Visit our website for more hours:
www.montana.edu/writingcenter