Professor Mya Poe will be joining the English Department faculty in the fall. She comes to Northeastern from Penn State University, where she was an Assistant Professor. Mya graduated from UMass-Amherst in 2006, where her dissertation focused on race, representation, and writing assessment.

Q.) How did you become interested in your focus within the field of composition?

A.) After receiving my undergraduate degree in English, I worked at AT&T as a technical writer, where I worked alongside computer engineers to develop documentation for users and engineers in the field. I thought writing documentation was boring, but I thought the culture of engineering writing was fascinating, so I became interested in what the engineers were doing and how their ways of writing informed what they were doing. I noticed those engineers who struggled with writing also struggled with participating in that culture. For example, one engineer who really struggled with writing would rarely initiate an email thread. Instead, he would just comment within email threads initiated by other writers—a word here, a phrase there. His inability to craft longer messages meant that he had to wait until face-to-face encounters to detail his ideas. Such observations shaped my approach to my research and teaching in that I’m interested in the lived presence of writing in our lives, in the way writing works in our everyday life – inside the academy and outside the academy – everywhere. Everyone is a writer. Learning to write is not just about getting a better job; it’s about participating in the world.

Q.) What current project are you working on?

Continued on 4
Writing Instructors at CCCC in Las Vegas

Writing Program Director Chris Gallagher and former M.A. student Jessica Pauszek (now a composition Ph.D. student at Syracuse University) presented on a panel entitled “Re-Organizing Graduate Education through Community Engagement.” Chris’s paper was “Academic Expertise and Antiracist Engagement” and Jess’s paper was “Creating Spaces and Redefining Graduate Education Through Community Engagement.”

Kim Freeman, Interim Director of AWD, presented her paper, “‘The Play’s the Thing’: Performance, Play, and Publics in Writing in the Disciplines” on a panel entitled, “Themes of Performance to Teach Writing Cross Disciplines: Food, Acting, and Performances.”

Neal Lerner, Director of the Writing Center, participated as a discussant on two panels, “Building Textual Bridges: An Analysis of Artifacts Connecting the Writing Center to the University Public” and a panel specializing in communication and engineering with incoming faculty member Mya Poe. He also gave a paper entitled, “Accounting for Context: Researching Seniors’ Meaningful Writing Experiences across Three Institutions” on the panel “Responding to the Public Crisis in Student Writing: Results from the Study of Seniors’ Meaningful Writing Experiences.”

Congratulations to Chris, Jess, Neal, Mya, and Kim!

NU Writing

NU Writing is currently seeking submissions for a Fall 2013 issue!

Please encourage your students who have not yet graduated to submit texts that were written in First-Year Writing or AWD. These texts may have been written in any genre (essays, poetry, fiction, etc.) and modality (alphabetic text, video, audio, etc.), as long as the piece has been digitized.

For more information, please email Laura Hartmann at hartmann.la@husky.neu.edu or visit the NU Writing webpage at: http://www.northeastern.edu/nuwriting/

Information on the Writing Program 2012-2013 and Spring 2013 Newsletter Publication

Director of the Writing Program: Chris Gallagher
Director of the Writing Center: Neal Lerner
Interim Director First-Year Writing: Kara Mae Brown
Interim Director of Advanced Writing in the Disciplines: Kim Freeman
Assistant Director of the Writing Center: Meg Tarquinio Roche
Assistant Director of the Writing Program: Laura Hartmann

Editor of newsletter, Laura Hartmann

Thank you to all contributors!
Expanding Outreach through Social Media

By Jenna Sciuto and Emily Artiano, Senior Writing Center Consultants

The Northeastern Writing Center had a very busy and productive spring semester. Our schedule via the WCONline was booked to capacity almost every week. Our walk-in hours at Snell Library also rose in popularity this semester, and extra consultants were assigned to the Hub at Snell in response to the growing interest in our services there.

Due to our increased presence online, thanks to NEU WRITES, a blog from the Northeastern Writing Center, as well as our active Twitter and Facebook accounts, students became more familiar with the range of modes in which we offer our services. In addition to our always popular e-mail response feature, our mobile consulting option was piloted on a larger scale this term with nearly ten consultants functioning as both mobile and in-person tutors. As a result of our online presence and the wide range of services we offer, the Northeastern Writing Center was able to reach more students, and we currently have over two thousand students in our client database. As these trends will only continue in the coming semesters, we can expect that number to increase even more as our role on campus develops.

The Writing Center also hosted and participated in several events to support writers. This spring, the Writing Center hosted a Write-In. On March 10, graduate students from different colleges at Northeastern came together and worked on different writing assignments. The Writing Center has also been working with faculty in other departments to help develop peer review guidelines for classes that have a writing component. A consultant will attend a Pharmacy class to model a peer review this summer.

The Writing Center has reached out to the organization WriteBoston to expand our tutoring services. Two Writing Center consultants started working at local high schools working with students to improve their writing skills.
A.) In all of my work, I’m interested in understanding how people use writing and what we think of as “good writing.” Specifically, in my current book project, I’m looking at how assessment shapes our development as writers—what counts as “good writing” and how we carry those messages with us into other writing situations. The project, which includes archival research as well as interview and quantitative data, has a strong cultural critique to it because not everyone is equally benefitting from those values about good writing. The consequences of writing assessment can be quite different depending on who you are. Ultimately, it’s really illuminating to examine what messages are sent back to students in the form of assessment, for example, in our classroom practices and in standardized tests like the SAT. (We’ll see what happens with the new Common Core Standards.)

Q.) What, in particular, excites you about joining the Northeastern English faculty?

A.) It’s an interesting time to come to Northeastern as there is a lot of potential in the English department and specifically in the composition and rhetoric program. There’s an advantage to where Northeastern is located as well: not only is it in a vibrant academic city with lots of potential for community outreach but there is also a void in composition research in New England. I’m looking forward to working with the graduate students; Northeastern gives graduate students wonderful opportunities to do research and to really participate and shape the Writing Program.

Q.) How has the field of composition changed in recent years, and what in particular interests you about those changes?

A.) Composition is changing rapidly. Three things are getting a lot of buzz right now: the digital, the international, and the public turn. Digital writing research is becoming a permanent axis of research in the field and how we think about delivering writing instruction. Digital writing is changing how and why people write, and digital technology is influencing and shaping our lives in new and unexpected ways – like the Boston Police posting on Twitter after the marathon explosions. Amazing to watch, read, and participate while I’m living far away from Boston. I don’t think people anticipated that Twitter would evolve into a disaster-response form of communication, and it certainly has.

International research is also vibrant right now and will likely stay active for a long time. There is not only the opportunity to work with students here in the U.S. but also to participate in international collaborations. My favorite conference right now is the Writing Research Across Borders conference because it brings together the best writing researchers in the world. I’ve learned so much from such international exchanges.

Finally, the public. People who are in the field of rhetoric used to distinguish between public spaces and more academic spaces. I don’t see that distinction so much anymore. The field has really changed so that there’s more fluidity across spaces. I would love to think about community engagement in building a national identity for the Northeastern composition and rhetoric graduate program.
Bringing BRAWN to the Brains of Academia
by James Stanfill, Communications Director

When you think of rhetoric and composition, brains might be more likely to pop into your head than brawn, but the Boston Rhetoric and Writing Network (BRAWN) is working to change that. Founded in June 2011, BRAWN connects Boston-area college writing and rhetoric teachers for professional development and intellectual community by sponsoring free and local workshops, symposia, research collaborations, and other events.

The flagship event is the Summer Institute for Teachers of College Writing. This free Institute for Boston-area teachers is tailored to those who want to learn about trends and issues in the field, engage with current scholarship, augment their teaching strategies, and develop their professional networks. The Institute consists of a series of interactive, hands-on workshops facilitated by local composition scholars, with readings distributed in advance. Participants choose four 2-hour workshops to attend over the first two days; two plenary sessions will “book-end” the Institute. Topics will include argumentation, revising, new media, teaching with portfolios, writing centers and writing conferencing, writing across the curriculum, teacher research, multilingual writers, and academic integrity. Facilitators are made up of experienced teachers and researchers of writing in the Boston area. It’s a great opportunity to learn alongside major names in the discipline, network with colleagues for research, and build lasting friendships.

Throughout the year, BRAWN also puts on various other social and professional events, including graduate student meet-ups at local pubs, writing retreats, on-going writing groups, and a storytelling event called Tales of the Profession (ToP). ToP is built on the idea that the stories we swap in the hallways are great for personal and professional growth. Clearly, swapping them in a bar should be good for something, too. This past year, ToP has taken up the themes of “Firsts” and “Blunders,” bringing heartwarming, hilarious, and inspiring stories together from all walks of our profession. The next Tales of the Profession is planned for Thursday, May 30th – the day before the Summer Institute.

If you’d like to get involved or hear about upcoming events, please email me at: bostonrhetoricwriting@gmail.com.
Writing Program Hosts 2nd Symposium for Teachers of International and Second Language Writers

With continued support from the Krueger family, the English Department continued the conversation at the start of this academic year with the second Krueger symposium, which took place on September 4th and 5th, 2012. This year, we hosted two distinguished academics and facilitators: Bruce Horner, Endowed Chair in Rhetoric and Composition, University of Louisville, and Min-Zhan Lu, Professor of English and University Scholar, University of Louisville. Together and separately Horner and Lu have written several books and numerous articles on language difference and the teaching of writing, and won awards for their scholarship.

Horner and Lu led three workshops. The first, “Proofreading as Reading,” served as the centerpiece for the Writing Program’s kick-off meeting. Horner offered a presentation that set the stage and developed context for the translingual approach that Horner and Lu champion. The second workshop was directed toward faculty across the disciplines. Lu showed ways we can help students improve their academic writing by identifying gaps between their habitual ways of reading and writing about course materials and the ways of reading and writing appropriate for specific disciplines. This practice-oriented workshop encouraged questions and experience sharing, and all participants benefitted from the examples and the thoughtful discussion.

Finally, in a public talk entitled “Resisting Monolingualism,” Horner addressed the teaching of writing in U.S. colleges and universities in the context of the increasingly multilingual character of their students and faculty and the workforce, the global spread and fracturing of “English” into world “Englishes,” and the ongoing interpenetration of English and other languages. His talk focused on “translingual” pedagogies that involve students as participants in exploring why and how they might write in, and shape, particular varieties of English, and also other languages and mixes of languages; the risks they take in either conforming to set conventions for writing or deviating from them; and strategies for teachers to use in helping students work through these challenges in their writing.

These workshops and talks offered teachers and administrators across the university ways of thinking about our students and our work that are both provocative and challenging. The Writing Program thanks all who participated, to Horner and Lu for their generosity of time and ideas, and to the Krueger family for their much-appreciated financial support.

Contributed by Matt Noonan

Writing Program Co-Sponsors Third Annual College Essay Boot Camp

On November 3rd, 2012, the Writing Program teamed up with community partners 826 Boston and WriteBoston to offer the third annual College Essay Boot Camp for Boston-area high school students.

Eighty-eight tutors worked with ninety-one students as they drafted, revised and edited their college essays. Of the students who attended, 61.5% had parents who were born outside the United States, 63% were from the Boston public schools, and 62% receive free or reduced lunch. Among the many warm testimonials from students were the following:

“I started out not knowing what I was going to do about my college essay and now I have an outline, which is the hardest step for me to overcome.”

“To be honest, I came here with no ideas, no topic, nothing. I am so grateful to be a participant in this program. I overcame a lot.”

Professor Gallagher helped organize the event and several Writing Program instructors participated as tutors. We look forward to next year’s college essay boot camp, at which we hope to serve more than 100 students.
Writing this book was incredibly helpful in terms of teaching, particularly Advanced Writing for the Health Professions. From a process standpoint, the conversations we have about scope, context, and translation for public audiences were extremely relevant to my writing and revising. In fact, scope presents one of the biggest challenges I faced in writing about something as broad and complex as a social history of modern disease. At the same time, medical ethics, transparency, direct-to-consumer advertising of drugs, and much more that are important themes in the book are also topics of frequent discussion in my classes.

In recent years, there has been an alarming rise in illnesses that defy diagnosis through clinical tests or have no known cure. Millions of people, especially women, with illnesses such as irritable bowel syndrome, chronic pain, and chronic fatigue syndrome face skepticism from physicians and the public alike. And people with diseases as varied as cardiovascular disease, HIV, certain cancers, and Type 2 diabetes have been accused of causing preventable illnesses through their lifestyle choices. Through research and patient narratives, health writer Laurie Edwards explores patient rights, the role of social media in medical advocacy, the origins of our attitudes about chronic illness, and much more.

- From the Snell Library website