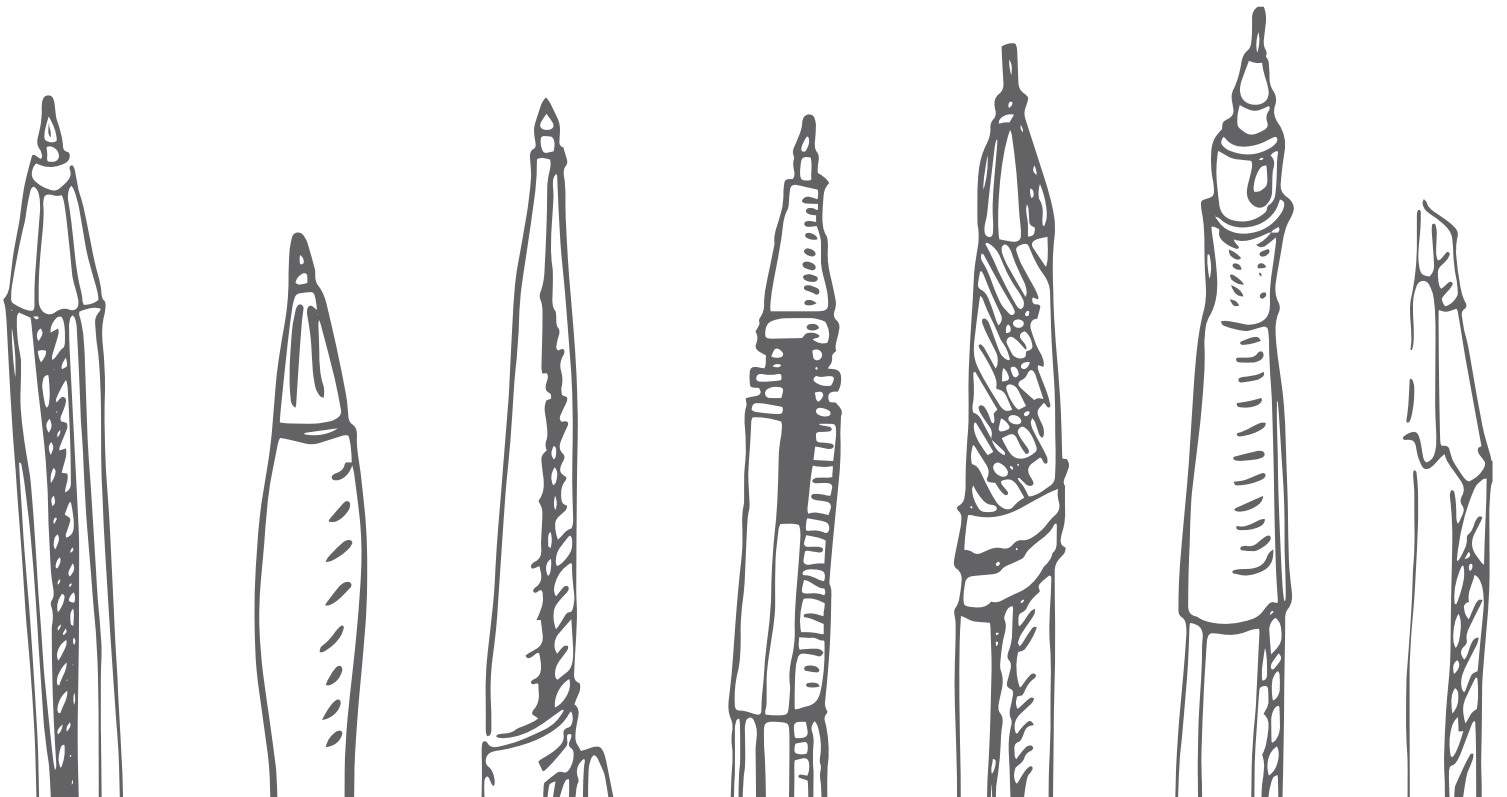




# WRITING@SVSU

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# **Writing@SVSU**

Volume I

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Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Writing@SVSU*!

Funded by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, *Writing@SVSU* offers a small slice of the good writing and efforts made to promote good writing that occur at SVSU. Possessing good writing skills is essential to having an educated population, a fact that SVSU emphasizes in its curriculum. The solid framework for academic writing that students can find in their First-Year Writing courses is continued through the other courses that are part of the General Education program: Category 1 and Category 10 classes and the many communication-intensive classes from which students can select. As students move through their majors and towards senior capstones, good writing continues to be a measure of success both in- and outside the classroom.

Thus, to a large degree, *Writing@SVSU* functions as a yearbook—one celebrating the ways in which good writing flourishes at SVSU. In the following pages, you'll find excerpts of some of the winners of various writing contests, events, and scholarships that occur at SVSU, including the University Writing Awards, the National Day on Writing, and the Seitz Scholarship, as well as profiles of the editors of our student publications, *Cardinal Sins* and *The Valley Vanguard*. We've also included profiles of students from each of our colleges who have found success through writing and essays by faculty members who were awarded some of SVSU's highest honors, such as the Warrick and Landee awards. We round out the issue with pieces by some of the talented creative writers who visited campus in 2014-15: Tim Seibles, David Baker, Peter Ho Davies, Éireann Lorsung, and Larry Watson.

*Writing@SVSU* also recognizes that writing is about learning; it is a process of discovery. To that end, we have tried to make the creation of this book an opportunity for our students to learn more about the entire writing process, particularly the publication process. We offer special thanks to those students who helped ready *Writing@SVSU* for your reading pleasure by writing articles, editing, proofing—and then editing, proofing, and checking again, and again, and again. We thank you, Alison, Wren, Sara, Allison, and Kylie, for your help and patience, and we hope you found this a valuable experience. And thanks to Deb Huntley, David Callejo, and Helen Raica-Klotz for their ongoing support of this project.

In no way is *Writing@SVSU* comprehensive in its coverage of the various good writing that occurs on campus. On some level, despite the various editing that has occurred, this publication remains a first draft. Next year we hope to include greater diversity in capturing writing at SVSU—particularly our work in the community. In fact, in the spirit of peer review, an essential component of the writing process, we ask our readers to send us suggestions for other writing successes that we can profile in the future. Until then, we thank you for the work you do to make writing at SVSU a vibrant part of our campus life.

Sincerely,

M. Pat Cavanaugh  
Writing Program Administrator

Chris Giroux  
Editor, *Writing@SVSU*



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# Spotlight on...

## University Writing Awards

**The Ruth and Ted Braun Awards** are presented in the categories of General Education, Graduate Programs, Multimedia, and in each of the five colleges to promote excellent writing across the curriculum. Members of the 2014-15 University Writing Committee judged this year's selections. The committee was chaired in 2014-15 by Kimberly Lacey, assistant professor of English, and Helen Raica-Klotz, director of the Diane Boehm Writing Center at SVSU. Past Braun Award publications are available online at <[svsu.edu/writingprogram/braun-awards.html](http://svsu.edu/writingprogram/braun-awards.html)>.

The Braun Awards were established by Ruth and Ted Braun. Longtime supporters of SVSU, they created these awards with the belief that no student can be successful in his or her academic career without writing competence and that no SVSU graduate should enter the workplace without such proficiency.

The Brauns' support of SVSU extends far beyond these writing awards. Both have served on the SVSU Board of Control and SVSU Foundation Board of Directors. The Board of Control's chairperson from 1995-1997, Ruth Braun has been active in community service: she has served on the State Board of Education and the Saginaw School District Board of Education, as the president of the Junior League of Saginaw, and as the chairperson of the Board of Trustees of Saginaw General Hospital. Hugo ("Ted") Braun is a partner in the Saginaw law firm Braun Kendrick Finkbeiner PLC. A recipient of an honorary Doctor of Laws from SVSU, he has been a longtime supporter of the school and, among his other volunteer work for the university, served on the Foundation Board's Finance & Investment Committee. Like his wife, he is much involved in other community organizations; he is president of the Harvey Randall Wickes Foundation, and United Way of Saginaw County has honored him with its Outstanding Volunteer Award.

**The Tyner Prizes** are awarded in the humanities to recognize writers of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Faculty in the Art, Communication, English, Modern Foreign Languages, Music, and Theater Departments nominate student work for these prizes. Dan Gates, associate professor of English, chaired the selection committee in 2015. The Tyner Prizes are named after Raymond Tyner, a former member of the English Department. Professor Tyner came to SVSU in 1968 and was long affiliated with the publication *The Green River Review*.

**The Robert S. P. Yien Freshman Writing Awards** recognize outstanding writing in First-Year Writing courses taught at SVSU. The First-Year Writing Program at SVSU strives to ensure incoming freshmen have a solid introduction to writing at a collegiate level. This program includes two comprehensive writing courses: Writing Skills (English 080) and Composition I (English 111). Members of the First-Year Writing Committee, chaired in 2015 by Sherrin Frances, assistant professor of English, selected the winning essays.

The Yien Awards are named after Robert S. P. ("Bob") Yien, a longtime supporter of academic excellence at SVSU who served as the school's chief academic officer for twenty-seven years. Dr. Yien came to SVSU in 1970 as a member of the Sociology Department and received the Landee Award for Teaching Excellence in 1973. SVSU's Vice President for Academic Affairs, he was instrumental in developing the school's University Writing Program and the Writing Center. He currently serves as Vice President for Administrative Affairs for Ming Chuan University's campus at SVSU.

The first prize for the 2015 Robert S. P. Yien Freshman Writing Awards went to Kelsey Setla. An excerpt from her prize-winning essay, “Standardized Testing Anxieties: Problems and Solutions,” is reprinted below. Other winners were as follows:

- Second Prize: “The Ugly Truth about GMOs” by Kaitlyn Bailey
- Third Prize: “The Overexposed Generation” by Alexis Lenoir
- Fourth Prize: “Breaking the Obesity Epidemic” by Ashley Howson
- Fifth Prize: “The Increased Use of Carbon Fiber” by Colton Kars

The following First-Year Writing students also received recognition for their achievements in English 080:

- Terrell Putman for the essay “Terrible Trip”
- Cameron Nixon for the essay “My Ice Arena”
- Colton Burns for the essay “Video Game Rating”
- Shaked Bachar for her essay “People Should Be Serving in the Army” in recognition for outstanding writing by an English 080 student for whom English is a second language

**The Diane Boehm Writing Awards for e-Portfolios** were awarded for the first time in 2015. Established by Diane Boehm, founder and former director of the SVSU Writing Center and the SVSU University Writing Program, the awards recognize the creative and effective integration of writing and multimedia by SVSU students via the medium of e-Portfolios. Entries are judged according to a portfolio’s ability to do the following: present a student’s capabilities in an engaging, professional, and comprehensive manner; include artifacts and documents that demonstrate deep learning appropriate to the student’s class or chosen major; include perceptive self-reflection; demonstrate creative use of multimedia; and be easy to navigate and aesthetically effective based on the capabilities of the software or program. Awards are given for portfolios made for the classroom or for a workplace application.

**The S. K. Yun Science Award** is named after S. K. Yun, a former professor in the Physics Department. Yun was known for his research into theoretical high-energy physics. The Yun Science Award recognizes student achievement and interest in the natural sciences. An essay is not a requirement for the award, but writing played a large role in determining this year’s recipient.

# The Inflation of Prescription Drug Prices: A Public Policy Solution

Trevor N. Ward

Braun Award for the College of Arts and Behavioral Sciences  
Nominated by John Kaczynski, Assistant Professor of Political Science



Trevor Ward, from Almont, Michigan, graduated in May of 2015, with a bachelor of arts in political science and history. During his time at SVSU, Trevor served as a resident assistant; parliamentarian to the SVSU Student Association; editor of *The Sovereign*, SVSU's political science journal; and director of the SVSU Moot Court Program. Trevor currently attends the College of William and Mary School of Law, with aspirations to become a judge advocate general attorney in the United States military.

The following paper was authored for Political Science 341, Public Policy Making in the United States. This paper utilized research conducted throughout Trevor's time at SVSU, capitalizing on the wealth of information he gained through various courses and research assistantships. This essay was Trevor's final health-policy paper and emphasizes the need to formulate effective and efficient alterations to the U.S. healthcare system. Particularly, the purpose of this piece is to illuminate the intricate issues and solutions to American's healthcare provision system, particularly in the realm of pharmaceutical drugs.

## Abstract

This paper reviews the history and political subtext of the American pharmaceutical industry, identifying one particular policy problem: that the American healthcare industry is suffering because of the high prices of pharmaceutical drugs. Addressing the political climate of the United States, at present and in recent history, the author eliminates non-viable solutions and presents two practical policy solutions: 1.) the reformation of United States patent law to ensure low pharmaceutical drug prices and 2.) the federal regulation of direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA). A projection of possible outcomes concerning the policy solutions is also presented. Lastly, after acknowledging pragmatic tradeoffs, the paper recommends the policy that the federal government should adopt.

## Key Terms

- *Direct Price Caps*: The regulation of a given product through a government issued price-control system, whereby the price of that product shall not exceed a specified amount.
- *Direct-to-Consumer Advertising*: Advertisement by American pharmaceutical companies to the nonmedical community (i.e., the general American populace). It shall be abbreviated as DTCA.
- *Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America*: The chief lobbying firms for the American pharmaceutical industry. It shall be abbreviated as PhRMA.
- *Referential Price Caps*: The regulation of a given product through a government-issued price-control system, whereby the price of that product shall not exceed the amount for which it is sold in foreign nations (using lowest price thereof).

## Introduction

The United States healthcare system is a point of political tension and a crippling aspect of American society. One of the most damaging components within the healthcare system itself is the constant inflation of the price of prescription drugs, propagated by the pharmaceutical industry and its

lobbies. Because of these groups' political and financial clout, this segment of the healthcare provision system has consistently been able to prevent healthcare reform initiatives from negatively affecting its interests. Two policy solutions to the rising prices of drugs are politically feasible, as well as pragmatically effective: 1.) federal reform of the United States patent law system as it applies to prescription drugs and pharmaceutical research and 2.) federal regulation, and eventual termination, of direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA).

### **History of the Pharmaceutical Industry in the United States**

Following the golden age of the pharmaceutical and drug industries' success in post-World War II America, the pharmaceutical industry was able to maintain a great deal of support from the general public, the political arena, and a multitude of entities within the medical field. In many ways, the research and development of drugs were viewed not only as favorable, but as modes of healthcare incapable of causing harm to the general public (Starr, 1982). However, throughout the early years of the twenty-first century, as a result of the increasingly high prices of medication, the industry in question became "public enemy number one" (Bodenheimer & Grumbach, 2009).

In 1998, medical drugs accounted for less than 6 percent of all national health expenditures; costs were so low that, according to numerous analysts, they had a minimal impact on insurers and consumers (Bodenheimer & Grumbach, 2009). By 2009 however, 10 percent of health expenditures were a direct result of drug-related expenses—most of which were covered by insurance agencies and the consumers themselves (Bodenheimer & Grumbach, 2009; Wiktorowicz, 2003). Recent studies have shown that the drug industry, in general, has an innumerable amount of irregularities, many of which not only disturb political actors, but also those within the medical field itself. These issues—to be addressed in subsequent sections—have led to the public, politicians, and those in medicine to hold more negative opinions about the pharmaceutical industry.

### **Problem Identification**

It comes as no surprise that one of the most pertinent issues within the modern-day American healthcare system involves the high prices of prescription drugs; despite continued popular and political opposition, drug prices continue to rise at an exponential rate. As stated earlier, in 1998, pharmaceuticals accounted for less than 6 percent of all national health expenditures (Bodenheimer & Grumbach, 2009). Both *prima facie* and subsidiary increased pharmaceutical prices hurt insurance providers and consumers.

### **Solutions to the Problem**

In regards to this problem, this author proposes two solutions. Each of the proposed solutions would involve reforms at the federal level of governance and require substantial political will, as well as the necessary ambition, from political actors. Although these solutions pose their fair share of pragmatic barriers—to be discussed in detail below—they are theoretically sound. The two solutions to rising pharmaceutical prices are 1.) federal patent law reform and 2.) federal reformation and termination of DTCA.

### **Patent Law Reform**

According to Raccine, "In the United States, U.S. Patent Law ... governs the exclusivity rights for new pharmaceutical products" (2010). Patent law reform is a modern, sociopolitically popular issue; in recent years, it has gained the reputation in the entertainment industries as being arbitrary, unnecessarily long, and a hindrance upon free market competition. Similar arguments are utilized by the medical industry when attacking the pharmaceutical companies' stranglehold on drug prices and their net profits (Raccine, 2010; Worthen, 2003). In the United States, patents on pharmaceuticals provide the right to exclude others from making, using, or selling a given product protected under an obtained patent. Although the number of years that these patents provide protection varies, the average duration is 20 years (Worthen, 2003). Critics of these "long" pharmaceutical patents claim that the company that first

achieves the patent has, essentially, a monopoly upon that specific drug (Starr, 2011). As a result, pharmaceutical companies have no motive to lower prices.

Another problem with patents is that they ensure the rise and maintenance of large conglomerate companies, which likewise create little competition. In the United States, small research firms are often bought out by large companies when a new development is made—if, of course, the companies cannot bring legal suit for patent violation to successfully eliminate competition (Wiktorowicz, 2003). Based on a general free market ideal, this elimination of competition inevitably leads to higher prices for the product in question.

By comparison, in Europe, patents are held, on average, between two and five years, with a European Union (EU) regulatory limit of seven years. As a result, multiple companies can produce a version of the same drug with similar effects on human anatomy (Schlenunberg, 2011), and the increased competition results in reduced prices. Moreover, the EU prohibits the buy-out of one pharmaceutical research center by a larger conglomerate, which further increases competition in the drug market (Schlenunberg, 2011). Policy research has shown that, as a result of this regulation of patent law, nations such as Great Britain and France have been able to maintain significantly low drug prices, while not actively engaging in price regulation (Schlenunberg, 2011; Worthen, 2003).

It seems clear that the United States federal government should implement reform of patent law for three reasons. Support from the American populace has shown that patent law garners significant attention outside of the medical industry and would maintain political focus (Starr, 2011; Weissert & Weissert, 2012). Moreover, patent law reform is significantly more popular in comparison to direct or relative price caps in the United States. Furthermore, patent law regulation in Europe has statistically shown an improvement in regards to lowering pharmaceutical drug prices.

### **Regulation and Elimination of DTCA**

The regulation and eventual termination of DTCA is another viable solution for the United States government in reducing pharmaceutical drug prices. DTCA is an extremely controversial form of drug advertisement, and professionals throughout the medical field reject DTCA as a legitimate form of pharmaceutical retailing (Raccine, 2010). In fact, from 2000 to 2010, the money the drug industry invested into consumer advertising doubled from approximately \$2 billion to over \$4 billion (Arnold & Oakley, 2013). DTCA acts as a negative counterweight to medical professionals and federal regulatory organizations (such as the Food and Drug Administration [FDA]), which are faced with the challenge of deflating pharmaceutical rhetoric, as well as battling drug companies over patients' opinions (Arnold & Oakley, 2013). DTCA is unpopular amongst medical professionals, bureaucrats, and legislators alike.

More importantly, DTCA has an impact upon the prices of pharmaceutical drugs. Because DTCA bypasses medical professionals (such as MDs, RNs, dietitians, and physical therapists), the rhetoric of pharmaceutical advertisement is able to easily influence the opinions of the uneducated American populace (Arnold & Oakley, 2013; Comanor, 1999). DTCA utilizes many scare tactics to ensure the public is attracted to the “cure” provided by the industry in question (Arnold & Oakley, 2013; Starr, 2011). In this way, by alarming the general public and then presenting the “one and only cure” to a particular disease, pharmaceutical companies are able to raise prices exorbitant amounts.

DTCA regulation in the pharmaceutical industry, as far as this author was able to assess, does not occur elsewhere in the world—primarily because both Europe and Canada have forbidden DTCA's existence (Schlenunberg, 2011; Wiktorowicz, 2003). As a result, a proper comparative analysis is impossible. DTCA reform was attempted under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) legislation, but was ultimately removed as part of a deal between the Obama Administration and the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA). The removal, however, was not a direct result of PhRMA discontent or of popular/political disapproval of federal regulation of DTCA; rather, its renunciation was related to a larger conflict regarding direct drug price caps (Starr, 2011; Weissert & Weissert, 2012). In fact, PhRMA had originally agreed to the DTCA regulation provision, but simply resisted its passing in response to the Obama administration's attempt to regulate drug prices (Enge, 2013). Thus, the political and medical atmosphere within the United States exists to perpetuate the proper regulation of pharmaceutical DTCA.

## **Non-Viable Alternatives**

The two aforementioned policy solutions represent a limited view into probable solutions to increasing drug prices; this essay addresses only patent law and DTCA reform because, politically, they are the two most viable options for effective, comprehensive change. Because PhRMA plays an influential role in lobbying, political pressures for reform need to be limited (Labson, 2003). Other probable solutions pose the risk of creating dissent within the pharmaceutical industry and larger society.

It may be inquired why, then, given public opinion and political support, this author does not advocate for price caps on pharmaceutical drugs, as demonstrated in the Norwegian and German regulatory systems (Schlenunberg, 2006). Put simply, such regulations are, at the present time, impossible, given the political environment. For example, twice in the last decade, Congress has attempted and failed to pass such regulation, with the Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) of 2004 and PPACA of 2010 (Weissert & Weissert, 2012). To a large extent, this federal ineffectiveness is the result of the pharmaceutical industry's lobbying power in Washington. Direct regulation of drug prices, through price caps or other similar methods, have meant political suicide for its proponents (Weissert & Weissert, 2012).

Another probable—yet nearly impossible—solution resulting in lower costs is the creation of a government research facility that could compete with the private pharmaceutical industry. Once again, politically, this is not an effective option. Public support, as noted, is a necessary impetus to policy change regarding the pharmaceutical industry (Bardach, 2012). During the Obama Administration's attempt to pass similar legislation concerning healthcare, the American public—even within liberal circles—opposed government intrusion in the “free market” (Kirk, 2010). Hence, the creation of a public entity to compete with private business would be ineffective.

## **Criteria for Judging Policy Effectiveness**

Any solution that cannot achieve success politically is not a positive policy alteration (Bardach, 2012). As has been noted above, political realities play a large part in assessing the effectiveness of any policy change. For this reason, both patent law and DTCA reform are viable options. For instance, patent law reform is highly encouraged by the youth of the United States because patent laws often interfere with both their entrepreneurial ambitions—inventions, businesses, etc.—as well as other interests, such as film, music, and electronic publishing (Worthen, 2003). In addition to large support from youth, a majority of the American populace is in support of some kind of patent law reform—whether in manufacturing in general or in the pharmaceutical industry itself (Raccine, 2010). DTCA reform, as mentioned prior, also has substantial support from both the professional medical community, as well as the general public (Arnold & Oakley, 2013; Weissert & Weissert, 2012).

Not only should a solution be feasible, in the political sense, but it should also solve the principal problem. As referenced above, the main problem with rising pharmaceutical prices is that the high costs are being passed on to the consumer. The United States medical system has, in general, become increasingly expensive over the past two decades (Frank, 2001; Comanor, 1999). World organizations, including democracy indicators and the World Health Organization, have held that U.S. healthcare remains extremely expensive and that the lack of healthcare is damaging many segments of U.S. society (Wiktorowicz, 2003; World Health Organization, 2014). Politicians and intellectuals on both sides of the political spectrum have also conceded that the American healthcare provision system has several flaws—all rooted in increasing costs and consistent unaffordability for lower segments of society (Hellander & Bhargavan, 2012). Hence, it is the purpose of this policy analysis and proposed solution to address the cost of healthcare provision.

## **Projection of Solution Outcomes**

As reviewed in the initial analysis provided, DTCA reform would help alleviate the high cost of prescription drugs. Not only does it allow for increased customer awareness about drugs, but DTCA reform would resolve some problems for the medical industry, thus providing a positive subsidiary effect (Arnold & Oakley, 2013; Kirk, 2010). Patent law reform also seems viable; its implementation in several

European nations has resulted in considerable decreases in the prices of prescription drugs (Frank, 2001; Raccine, 2010). Simply by improving competition and allowing for less “profit-based industry,” European nations have been able to counter the growing monopoly of European pharmaceutical companies (Schlenunberg, 2011; Worthen, 2003). Moreover, patent law alteration adheres to free market principles—essential to American political culture and the garnering of public support (Giaccato, Santarre, & Vernon, 2005; Schlenunberg, 2011).

In contrast to patent law alteration, DTCA reform comes into opposition with free market values. Thus, the political culture of the United States public would be considerably less open to DTCA reform than patent alterations (Arnold & Oakley, 2005; Jaenicke & Wadden, 2006; Weissert & Weissert, 2012). On top of this, both DTCA and patent law reform hit major roadblocks in regards to political practicality. First, both plans require significant federal legislation, which, in general, is difficult to pass in the modern, polarized environment of the United States Congress (J. Kaczynski, lecture, February 13, 2014). Moreover, even if legislation were passed, it would have to be implemented by a bloated bureaucracy, which, as proven throughout the PPACA healthcare rollout, is ineffective (Enge, 2013). With this dual burden, it would be practically impossible for the Department of Health and Human Services to adequately roll out comprehensive pharmaceutical reform.

Also, despite declining public support, pharmaceutical and drug industries within the United States have maintained their political prominence and continue to dramatically influence healthcare policy at the federal and state levels. Weissert and Weissert (2012) declare that healthcare interest groups, such as the industries mentioned above, maintain a substantial amount of leverage over other political actors. According to a *Frontline* episode titled “Obama’s Deal,” the resources at the disposal of pharmaceutical companies are enormous; the wealth of resources and influence regarded within the aforementioned entities can force the hands of legislators, executives, and bureaucratic agencies alike (Kirk, 2010). Seldom, it is implied by policy analyst Ramón Castellblanch, does it occur that political actors are allowed to escape the lobbying and “interest-group grip” of the American pharmaceutical industry (2003).

Thus, it is probable that a major effect of either policy change will be an extraordinary amount of political backlash from PhRMA and other similar lobbying groups. In both attempts by the federal government to accomplish comprehensive healthcare reform in the past 30 years—with the MMA and PPACA—PhRMA was able to substantially alter legislation. In doing so, PhRMA was able to garner public opinion through advertisement and political lobbying against the legislation. The concept of “death panels,” for instance, during the PPACA legislating process, was a product of PhRMA’s and other insurance companies’ political influence (Kirk, 2010; Weissert & Weissert, 2012).

### **Conclusion: Recommendation of Action**

After considerable review and research, it is clear that the United States federal government should attempt to utilize pharmaceutical drug patent law reform to fix inflated drug prices. Although both patent law and DTCA reform face similar problems, such as a loss of political support from major lobbying organizations like PhRMA, patent law alteration retains many advantages over a DTCA-based plan.

Patent law reform is optimal because it dramatically alters the pharmaceutical industry’s ability to abuse drug prices, while at the same time does not directly affect the “free markets” that are at risk in DTCA reform. Rather, patent law deconstruction expands free market participation. In this way, patent law reform appeals to American political culture in a way that DTCA reform cannot. Moreover, patent law alterations have been successful in other countries; these case studies provide the necessary institutional and intellectual knowledge to conclude that patent law reform will indeed lower pharmaceutical costs. DTCA, on the other hand, being an American ideal and practice, has no similar case study to assess effectiveness.

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# Makeover: An Essay Exam

Brandon Lopez

Braun Award for General Education

Nominated by Nameeta Mathur, Professor of History



Brandon Lopez is a junior from Waterford, MI. He is pursuing a business degree with a double major in business management and marketing. His ultimate career goal is to be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. The following, which is excerpted from the longer essay exam he wrote, was submitted in a section of History 220 (Survey of European History). The exam asked him to do the following: “Analyze the various forces of religious, economic, social, cultural, and intellectual ‘modernity’ in Europe during the time period under review. Explain how the monarchies in the different European regions/empires attempted to strengthen their powers and/or their states and with what kinds of consequences for their people.”

Brandon writes, “History is so opinionated, but for this paper, I simply put myself in the shoes of an average citizen living at this time. My biggest challenge for this piece was to avoid rambling on because of the intense detail that needed to be explored. In the process of writing this paper, I learned to plan out the piece well in advance.”

As this was an essay exam, Brandon’s paper does not incorporate traditional methods of documentation, but Dr. Nameeta Mathur praises Brandon’s paper as a model paper for other reasons: “Brandon’s tour of Europe to understand the lives of the ordinary people is so richly detailed and painstakingly analyzed. The conclusion of his essay is also reflective and insightful.... [It offers] a powerful recognition that history is always about people and the best way to understand events in the distant past is to place oneself in the past....

“Since effective writing requires effective reading of the course material, Brandon’s excellent essay is worthy of recognition also in its demonstration of effective reading that successfully prioritized *what was learned* (as opposed to the descriptive simplicity of *what was read*). Brandon’s essay is a model for writing well-organized and well-articulated essay papers with scholastic confidence, precision, and erudition. I commend Brandon for his strong analytical skills, detail-oriented approach, and a systemic understanding of human institutions and human existence.”

## Introduction

The study of history enables us to understand how we got to where we are today. Despite the epidemics, battles, droughts, economic depressions, revolutions, and many other factors that have changed the world, we are still in a better world than we once were. In this paper, I work to understand the modernization of Europe from the Renaissance to the present through different sub-categories, including religion and economics, as well as social, cultural and intellectual aspects of society. Additionally, I will explore how monarchs in different European regions and empires (including Great Britain, France, the Dutch Republic, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire) attempted to strengthen their powers and/or their states and what effect their actions had on their peoples....

## France

In France, we begin with militarism and France’s battles for expansion. The first war in the time under review was the Hundred Years’ War against Great Britain. Despite winning the war and gaining land, France and its people still had to pay for the war. The people of France were not thrilled; not only

did they fight for their country, but after the war, the French government raised their taxes to pay for the war. The people did not agree with this logic. As a result, peasant revolts began to spring up across the country. What happened next for France was the beginning of absolutism; France followed in Spain's footsteps, using control and force to end the revolts. France then consolidated power under King Louis XI, which made the peasants confused and unhappy, because it moved in the opposite direction of what they wanted, which was having more say in their governance....

War broke out again, the Thirty Years' War, the final and deadliest war of religion for the whole world to date. It began within the borders of the Holy Roman Empire, originating in Bohemia. When France realized that the Holy Roman Empire was occupied with its eastern borders, France sought to gain land from the Holy Roman Empire.

Around the time of the Thirty Years' War, absolutism began to take a strong hold in France's society. Absolutism involves absolutely no challenging of the monarchy; absolutism requires obedience, loyalty, and the glorification of the monarchy. One such monarch who used absolutism greatly was Louis XIV, who told his followers he was the "Sun King," meaning that the universe revolved around him just as our planets revolve around the sun. Mercantilism, however, was also implemented to ensure that the wealth from the New World came back to the monarchy. Louis XIV invested this newfound wealth into the palace at Versailles. The palace was a grand one, with many amazing paintings, much sculpture, and a geometrically and mathematically perfect garden. The monarch of France thought he could strengthen the nation's power by flaunting its wealth to and consolidating its power against anyone who offered opposition. Lastly, to solidify the position of royalty and ensure it would last, France built royal academies for noble families; this was ultimately another form of modernity, the promotion of excellent education. These acts, however, had a negative effect on the masses because the monarchy continued to raise taxes to pay for all of these expenditures.

France entered another war, but this time for only nine years. William III, Prince of Orange and King of Great Britain and Scotland, set out to form an alliance to stop Louis XIV's "expansion ambitions" once and for all. When the Treaty of Ryswick (1697) was signed to end hostilities, the French people once again had to pay twice, once for service and again for the taxes to pay for the war. Overall, France strengthened its monarchy and favored absolutism at the expense of its people, who were not happy with the seemingly never-ending high taxes, war, and no real chance for territorial expansion.

### **Dutch Republic**

I begin with the Dutch Republic during the Protestant Reformation. Up until this time in our review period, the Dutch were under Spanish control. In 1576, the army of Spain's King Phillip II sacked the city of Antwerp, and within eleven days of the raiding, the Spanish army had killed over seven thousand people; this came to be known as the Spanish Fury at Antwerp. In the northern parts of the Dutch Republic, the Dutch famously flooded a city, killing all the Spanish soldiers within it. This created a stronghold for the Dutch rebels, and these events led to the Dutch Republic's formation and secession from Spain.

To secede from Spain, the Dutch Republic became Protestant to attract more followers among the Dutch people. Protestantism was linked to freedom. Additionally, increased freedom came in other ways. At this time, the Dutch Republic was controlled by King William III and Queen Mary II, who also ruled Great Britain. They let Great Britain build a parliament and switch to a constitutional monarchy, and the Dutch Republic followed suit. Furthermore, with the Dutch Republic being along the coast, they began building great ships for trade and military purposes. These ships were ahead of their time in terms of capacity and durability, which led the Dutch Republic to become a shipping capital with an enormous amount of wealth. From this trade and the wealth it generated, the parliament solidified its power against its competitors. The Dutch Republic was on the up-and-coming European powers list.

### **Spain**

Spain was always flexing its muscles, and shows of power in Spain were often linked to anti-Semitism and attempts to "purify" the country. The Treaty of Tordesillas also enabled the Spanish to explore the world without interference from Portugal. Everything west of the assigned boundary line

would be explored by Spain; areas to the east would be explored by the Portuguese. This was a huge boost for Spain's power because Spain had the first voyagers to travel to the New World. Spain spent much of its wealth on education and building churches. This would prove to be a bad decision, because with little to none spent on the military, the Spanish armada failed horribly.

Phillip II inherited fewer lands than his father had, but he was still the most powerful ruler in all of Europe. When neighboring Portugal had no heir to assume the throne, Phillip II took over Portugal and all of its colonies, becoming an ever greater ruler and world power, as well as one of the wealthiest. With all of this land to take and keep control of, problems were bound to occur and lands bound to be lost. One big parcel of land was the Dutch Republic, which seceded from Spain as previously discussed. Another piece of land that was taken from Spain was Gibraltar, on the southern tip of Spain.

Seemingly since the beginning of time, the Spaniards and French had resented each other, but this was coming to an end with the Peace of Utrecht. Through this treaty, Spain and France agreed to end their feud; Spain could no longer try to gain the French crown, and vice versa. This made the people of Spain happy because this treaty meant no more battles with neighboring France, and they hoped it would mean a better life for everyone. Over the course of the time under review, the majority of the Spanish people were Catholic and lived in a absolutist monarchy with little room to expand....

### **Prussia**

... Because it came from the Holy Roman Empire, Prussia tended to be an absolutist country. The Prussians did learn a little from the Holy Roman Empire, for although it was absolutist, it was a good form of absolutism. Prussia did, however, move toward militarism, and because it wanted to have better communication between commanders, it implemented a postal system, an outcome of which was a rising literacy rate. In other military matters, Prussia chose to intimidate its foes in battle by having Grenadiers. These people had to be a certain height (six feet tall), so they began to kidnap men over six feet from neighboring countries....

### **Russian Empire**

Today's Russian empire, as we know, is communist, which is a form of absolutism, and it begins here in the time under review for this essay. Tsars ruled over the Russian lands at this time. Russia was a serfdom, which means one's social class at birth dictated one's place in life. There was little to no room for movement amongst the classes. The serfs were the lowest, but largest, class in Russia. One family in particular who owned 3 million acres of land had 130,000 serfs living and working for them. Because of its social structure and the fact it was ruled by a dictator called a tsar, scholars think of Russia as a brutal absolutist empire....

One tsar who stood out from the rest was Peter the Great. Peter the Great wanted a great navy for his country. This was a sign of modernity for the Russians because they had never before had such a great navy. This navy would come into play in the Great Northern War against the Scandinavian region (mainly Sweden). The Swedes were a very tough military country, which is why the Russians' win, which came about with the Treaty of Nystad, was such a great triumph. Peter the Great is also known for implementing the Table of Ranks for his government, which was based only on merit. This was actually in opposition to serfdom and the favoritism shown in other kingdoms, for the Table of Ranks meant officials were rewarded because of effort, not money or family ties. Peter the Great also wanted to build a new and perfect capital in a town called St. Petersburg. The streets were to be geometrically perfect, as were the buildings. Overall, the Russian Empire was doing good things to strengthen its monarchy and state power, but at the expense of its people. The Russian people were not happy being part of a serfdom because they were at the mercy of the government and had little to no room for advancement.

### **Poland-Lithuania**

Poland and Lithuania began consolidating and strengthening their powers together through marriage. This set an example of what a marriage between political powers can do; other nations followed suit. Although Poland and Lithuania implemented constitutionalism and the Sejm (the Polish Parliament),

theirs was not a “good” form of constitutionalism. They implemented the rule that political and economic reforms needed 100% pass or 100% veto. This led to the slow dissipation of Poland and its fall.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I ask myself and others, where would you want to live at this time in Europe? I believe the best place to live at this time would be Great Britain because it offered the greatest freedoms. Its economy and government allowed for the most expansion within, and I could join a voyage over to the New World and live in the New England area if I needed to start a new life with my family. Furthermore, the New World was miles upon miles away from the monarchy, and by the time the monarchy would hear about events like a rebellion, the rebellion could already be going strong.

# The Effects of Therapeutic Interventions Administered by Athletic Trainers in the Management of Patellar Tendinopathy in Adults: A Systematic Review

Clayton M. Westdorp and Cody M. Forbes

Braun Award for the College of Health and Human Services

Nominated by David C. Berry, Professor of Kinesiology



Clayton M. Westdorp is from McBain, Michigan, a small dairy farming community in the northwestern part of the Lower Peninsula. He is a junior working toward his bachelor's degree in athletic training. Athletics have always been a huge part of his life, and the idea of building a career around his passion is what motivated him to study athletic training. It is his goal to continue his education at the master's level and one day to have a successful career as an athletic trainer at a major university.



Cody M. Forbes is from Hillsdale, Michigan. A junior, he is an athletic training major at SVSU who plans to work with collegiate athletes after he graduates. He is involved with the National Society of Leadership and Success and with SVSU's Athletic Training Club.

This paper was written for Kinesiology 234 (Evidence Based Practice and Documentation in Health Care). In this class, Clayton and Cody learned about different types of research, such as systematic reviews and critically appraised papers. This particular assignment was meant to help them better understand the different steps in developing a research paper.

This particular systematic review analyzes the treatment of a common sports injury/condition in terms of what an athletic trainer can do to help the athlete. Many treatments for patellar tendinopathy involve procedures that are outside of athletic trainers' scope of practice; therefore, Cody and Clayton looked into what treatment an athletic trainer can, and should, utilize when dealing with this condition. Cody and Clayton took into account the cost, ease of access, and length of the treatments in addition to the usual degree of success to conclude which treatment would be most beneficial.

Clayton says, "This project was my first real experience with medical research and all of the components that encompass it. The process is long and drawn-out ... I have learned the difficulties of converting general ideas into 'medical talk' as well as the need for careful analysis when performing a review of literature; whether it is a randomized controlled trial or an essay in an English class, it is important to consider the entirety of the work as well as the small detail."

## Abstract

**Context:** Patellar tendinopathy, commonly referred to as jumper's knee or patellar tendonitis, is an overuse condition affecting the patellar tendon. Athletic trainers (ATs) use many different therapeutic interventions to reduce symptoms of patellar tendinopathy; however, no agreement exists among providers as to which intervention is most effective. **Objective:** Systematically review, evaluate, and

summarize the literature related to patellar tendinopathy interventions from randomized, controlled clinical trials to determine optimal intervention strategies to be used by ATs. **Data Sources:** A search for relevant articles was completed using the databases *MEDLINE*, *Science Direct*, and *PubMed*, the phrase “(patella OR patellar) AND (tendonit\* OR tendin\*) AND randomized,” and the publication date parameters of January 2000 and November 2014. **Study Selection:** We selected and read 21 of 55 articles for inclusion; a final six articles were selected for final review. Studies were used if they met the following criteria: (1) were peer-reviewed, randomized clinical trials, (2) were written in English, (3) provided an abstract, (4) applied interventions to participants between 18-35 years of age, (5) used interventions within an AT’s scope of practice as defined by the National Athletic Trainers’ Association *Athletic Training Educational Competencies* (5<sup>th</sup> edition) and the Board of Certification’s *Role Delineation Study/Practice Analysis* (6<sup>th</sup> edition), and (6) included study outcomes measuring pain (e.g., visual analogue scale [VAS] or numeric rating scale [NRS]) and/or function (e.g., Victoria Institute of Sport Assessment [VISA]). **Data Extraction:** Two reviewers independently assessed and graded studies using the Physiotherapy Evidence Database (PEDro) scale. Data of interest were subjects, interventions (type and length), means/standard deviations (SDs), confidence intervals (CIs), and effect size (calculated from data when applicable) of the main outcome measure(s). **Data Synthesis:** Six full reports met the inclusion criteria. PEDro scores ranged from 6-9 (maximum score=10); average score was 7.42±1.02. The studies resulted in a sample size of 197 with a pooled mean subject age of 26.16±5.54 (range 18-35). One study examining the effects of an exercise program (eccentric exercise, stretching), pulsed ultrasound, and transverse friction massage found significant improvements in pain (measured as ordinal data) in the exercise group at the end of treatments ( $\chi^2=12.21$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), at one month post-treatment ( $\chi^2=23.2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and at three months post-treatment ( $\chi^2=23.2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ); effect sizes could not be calculated due to the ordinal data. A twelve-week eccentric training program study found the program ineffective at enhancing patellar tendinopathy function. The remaining four studies found no significant differences between the compared interventions (i.e., eccentric training, ultrasound, and low-intensity pulsed ultrasound) and produced relatively low (<0.4) calculated effect sizes. However, all interventions demonstrated significant pre-to-post reductions in pain and/or improved function in patellar tendinopathy patients. **Conclusions:** There is little evidence to support a “gold standard” intervention for the management of patellar tendinopathy by ATs. Despite the lack of a gold standard intervention, eccentric training programs offer value when factoring in outside variables. Further research is necessary to differentiate between intervention effects to establish a model intervention for patellar tendinopathy. **Key Words:** Patellar tendinopathy, eccentric training, intervention.

## Introduction

The prevalence of patellar tendinopathy in physically active individuals and athletes is high and has the potential to limit an athlete’s performance or even their career.<sup>1</sup> Commonly referred to as “jumper’s knee” or “patellar tendonitis,” patellar tendinopathy is described as an overuse condition affecting the patellar ligament.<sup>2</sup> The term “tendinopathy” is a generalized term that relates to pain involving a tendon; the term is used in place of the more common “tendonitis” as the result of recent research demonstrating that this inflammatory condition is actually due to tissue degeneration.<sup>2</sup>

Patellar tendinopathy often presents with a sharp and aching pain located around the anterior knee, usually slightly inferior to the patella.<sup>3</sup> Palpation of the area is often used to determine the location that is most painful to the athlete to aid in the differential diagnosis. The Passive Extension–Flexion Sign and Standing Active Quadriceps Sign tests are used by athletic trainers (ATs) to diagnose the condition.<sup>3</sup> Although the Extension-Flexion and Standing Active Quadriceps Sign tests are used in the assessment of patellar tendinopathy, a clinical diagnosis may involve using diagnostic ultrasound imaging or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to uncover tendon abnormalities.<sup>4</sup> Hyman suggests that diagnostic ultrasound is more beneficial when detecting abnormalities, as compared to MRI, because of Color Doppler or Power Doppler’s ability to expose abnormalities, ease of access, lower cost, and patient comfort.<sup>4</sup>

The occurrence of patellar tendinopathy is more frequent than many believe. Lian, Engebretsen, and Bahr<sup>1</sup> examined the injury rates of 613 elite athletes participating in the following sports: (1) basketball, (2) volleyball, (3) handball, (4) cycling, (5) orienteering, (6) wrestling, (7) ice hockey, (8) high jump, and (9) 100-200 meter sprinters. They found the prevalence of jumper’s knee to be around 14%,

with 8% of the athletes reporting previous symptoms of jumper's knee. Further calculation revealed that every fifth elite athlete will be affected by jumper's knee at some point in their career.<sup>1</sup>

The literature describes numerous interventions that can be used to manage patellar tendinopathy, everything from rest and ice, to corticoid injections and even arthroscopic surgery.<sup>5</sup> With such a variety of interventions, health care providers may find it difficult to determine which intervention will work best for patients. As of November 2014, no clinical guidelines or gold standard interventions for the treatment of patellar tendinopathy existed for ATs. Considering that patellar tendinopathy injuries are common in athletics and that ATs are the first source of care for many athletes, it is important to know which intervention ATs should apply to produce the best results (lowering pain and improving function). The purpose of this paper is to systematically review, evaluate, and summarize the literature related to patellar tendinopathy interventions from randomized controlled clinical trials to determine optimal intervention strategies to be used by ATs.

## Methods

### Data Sources

The *MEDLINE* database was searched for relevant articles published between January 2000 and November 2014 using the search phrase “(patella OR patellar) AND (tendonit\* OR tendin\*) AND randomized,” resulting in forty-four articles. Additionally the *PubMed*, *Science Direct*, and *Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine* databases were searched using the same search phrase. The *PubMed* search revealed nine additional articles, and the *Science Direct* search found two additional relevant articles. The *Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine* database did not result in any new articles; therefore, the total article count was fifty-five. The fifty-five articles were screened according to the inclusion criteria stated below. Six articles were deemed acceptable to be included in the review with a pooled sample size of 197 individuals. The search process is laid out in Figure 1.

To be included in the study, articles had to meet several different inclusion criteria. Any article to be included had to be written in English; had to be a peer-reviewed, randomized clinical (control) trial; and had to have an available abstract. To ensure that ATs could utilize the assessed intervention(s), all interventions/studies had to be within an AT's scope of practice as defined by both the National Athletic Trainers' Association's *Athletic Training Educational Competencies* (5<sup>th</sup> edition)<sup>6</sup> and the Board of Certification's *Role Delineation Study/Practice Analysis* (6<sup>th</sup> edition).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the key outcome(s) of each study had to include measurements of pain using a visual analogue scale (VAS) or numeric rating scale (NRS), or measurements of function as assessed by the Victoria Institute of Sport Assessment (VISA).<sup>8</sup> The VISA is a patient-based questionnaire featuring eight questions and a VAS to assess the symptoms and function of subjects, and their ability to participate in sports. An end score derived from answers to the questionnaire ranges from 0-100, a score of 100 representing an asymptomatic and fully functional individual.<sup>8</sup> Finally, because a majority of ATs work with young athletes, study participants were required to be between 18 and 35 years of age.

### Data Extraction

The quality of the six articles to be included in the review was assessed and graded by two independent reviewers using the Physiotherapy Evidence Database (PEDro) scale. (See Tables 1 and 2.) The PEDro scale is derived from the Delphi list that was developed by Verhagen and colleagues at the University of Maastricht<sup>9</sup> to help users of the PEDro database assess the quality of the randomized clinical trials stored in the database. The eleven criteria that make up the PEDro scale are scored with either a “Yes” or a “No” based on the information found within the article. The total number of “Yes” answers comprises the article's PEDro score. It should be noted that although there are eleven criteria, the maximum PEDro score is ten; PEDro criterion 1 is used to determine the applicability of a study and is not used in the calculation of the PEDro score.<sup>9</sup> In this review, studies with PEDro scores of seven or higher were considered high-quality randomized clinical trials.

Two reviewers independently assessed the included studies and expert recommendations according to the Strengthening in the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) checklist and the Oxford Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine (CEBM) level of evidence classification

system. All expert/association recommendation articles were automatically graded level five evidence according to CEBM classification. The reviewers came together to discuss and compare their independent STROBE assessments of the four empirical studies and impressions of the four expert recommendation articles. Data of interest included the following: (1) subjects, (2) interventions (type and length of intervention), (3) means (SDs) and effect size (calculated from relevant data when applicable) of the main outcome measure(s), (4) 95% confidence intervals (CIs), and (5) frequency of similar recommendations.

## Results

Six studies, all full reports, met the inclusion criteria. PEDro scores ranged from 6-9 (maximum=10) with an average score of  $7.42 \pm 1.02$ . The six studies resulted in a sample size of 197 with a pooled mean subject age of  $26.16 \pm 5.54$  (range 18-35). One study compared eccentric training to ultrasound and transverse friction massage. Eccentric training was also compared with a novel eccentric overload training device in one study, decline squats in another, and with a no-intervention control group in a third study. The use of ultrasound was compared with low intensity-pulsed ultrasound (LIPUS) in one study and extracorporeal shockwave therapy in a different study. (Study summaries including results are shown in Table 3.)

Of the six studies included in the review, four recorded primary outcomes that assessed, in the form of VISA scores and VAS ratings, both pain in and function of the patients' knees.<sup>10-13</sup> One study evaluated the patients' response to pain by using an ordinal rating scale;<sup>14</sup> additionally, one study assessed the effectiveness of intervention using only the outcome of function with a VISA score.<sup>15</sup> Another study revealed no significant improvement in patient pain and/or function from pre-to-post-intervention.<sup>15</sup> The remaining five studies<sup>10-14</sup> were able to find significant improvements in patient pain and/or function from pre-to-post-intervention for both the intervention and control groups. Of the five studies<sup>10-14</sup> that found a significant improvement in patient pain and/or function from pre-to-post-intervention, only one<sup>14</sup> found a significant difference between the compared intervention groups.

### Eccentric Training

Visnes, Hoksrud, Cook, and Bahr<sup>15</sup> compared the effects of a twelve-week eccentric training program to the absence of a training program on elite volleyball players exhibiting patellar tendinopathy during their competitive season. The training group was instructed to perform an eccentric exercise program using a twenty-five-degree decline board twice a day. Each session consisted of three sets of squatting with the downward component of the squat on the affected leg; fifteen repetitions were required for each set.<sup>6</sup> The study resulted in no significant improvements in either group, demonstrating that eccentric training was an ineffective intervention for improving patellar tendinopathy function. Additionally, no significant differences of function were found between the groups. A Cohen's d effect size of -0.323 was calculated using the average VISA scores from both intervention groups.<sup>15</sup>

Eccentric training was assessed in three other studies as well. When compared with ultrasound and transverse friction massage, Stasinopoulos and Stasinopoulos<sup>14</sup> found that eccentric training was statistically better than both ultrasound and transverse friction massage at reducing pain associated with patellar tendinopathy at the end of the four-week intervention period.<sup>14</sup> Similar results were evident at one month post-intervention and also at three months post-intervention. However, the ultrasound and transverse friction interventions did show a statistically significant improvement in patient pain pre-to-post-intervention.<sup>14</sup> Patient responses were recorded as either "worse," "no change," "somewhat better," "much better," or "no pain." Effect sizes for the compared interventions could not be calculated because the primary outcomes were measured using an ordinal data scale. Additionally, responses were separated into two groups to perform a chi square test of hypothesis. "Worse," "no change," and "somewhat better" responses were grouped together while the second group consisted of the patient responses "much better" and "no pain."<sup>14</sup> (See Table 2 for study details.)

The use of a novel eccentric overload training device was compared to a standard program of one-leg squatting exercises by Frohm, Saartok, Halvorsen, and Renström.<sup>10</sup> Twenty subjects with homogenous baseline data were randomized into two intervention groups and assessed for the primary study outcome (using the Victorian Institute of Sports Assessment for the Patellar Tendon [VISA-P]). The



exercise device used in this study was the Bromsman eccentric overload training device. Study participants in the Bromsman device group performed three sets of four repetitions with a warm-up set. The group performing the one-legged squatting program did so at a pace of three sets of fifteen repetitions on a twenty-five degree decline board with additional weights.<sup>10</sup> Results showed no statistical difference between the interventions. However, both intervention groups did show a significant improvement in both pain and function at the end of a twelve-week intervention period. Study results were not reported in a way that would allow for accurate calculations of effect size.<sup>10</sup>

When a traditional eccentric protocol step group was compared to a more contemporary decline squat group over the course of twelve weeks, no significant difference could be found between the two interventions.<sup>11</sup> Both intervention groups did, however, have a significant improvement in function over the course of the twelve-week segment. All participants in this study were found to be statistically similar at baseline, with the exception of patient height, indicating homogeneity of subjects. In addition to the primary results of the study, an analysis of the results revealed that over the course of twelve months, rather than twelve weeks, the decline group would have a greater likelihood of improvement in function. The effect size of the compared interventions was not calculable from the provided data.<sup>11</sup>

### **Active Low-Intensity Pulsed Ultrasound**

Active low-intensity pulsed ultrasound (LIPUS) was compared with inactive-LIPUS (a placebo) in a study conducted by Warden, Metcalf, Kiss, et al.<sup>12</sup> to determine which intervention was best at improving pain and function in patellar tendinopathy patients. Participants in the active LIPUS group self-applied the intervention, which consisted of 2-microsecond (ms) bursts of 1.0 MegaHertz (MHz) sine waves repeated at 100 Hertz (Hz). In addition to the LIPUS or placebo treatments, both groups performed single-legged squats on a decline board as a part of the intervention.

The twelve weeks of intervention use revealed no difference between the active and inactive LIPUS groups for reduction of pain or function. However, both interventions did result in significant improvements in pain and function at the end of the twelve-week study. A Cohen's d effect size was calculated from the available data for outcome measures of pain using a VAS and the VISA for the patellar tendon. Effect sizes using a VAS for both "usual" and "worst" tendon pains were calculated as -0.044 and -0.157 respectively. The effect size for the VISA results was calculated as 0.037 between interventions, indicating that the LIPUS intervention will have little effect on the tendinopathy compared to the inactive intervention. Study participants were tested for similarity on a variety of factors including personal characteristics, clinical characteristics, and radiological characteristics. No significant differences were reported for participant characteristics.<sup>12</sup>

### **Extracorporeal Shockwave Therapy**

Extracorporeal shockwave therapy was evaluated in one study involving Dutch basketball, handball, and volleyball associations during competitive seasons.<sup>13</sup> The twenty-two week study found that the use of extracorporeal shock wave therapy provided no additional benefit over the control group.<sup>13</sup> The control group in this study received the same intervention of two thousand impulses at a frequency of 4Hz, but without the use of transmission gel. The absence of transmission gel did not allow for shockwaves to be produced. Effect sizes of -0.12, -0.09, and -0.28 were calculated for VISA score, pain during activities of daily living, and pain during sport respectively.<sup>13</sup> Although no difference was found between the two interventions, both intervention groups showed a significant improvement in function over the twenty-two-week study.<sup>13</sup>

## **Discussion**

The results of the review found that a "gold standard" patellar tendinopathy intervention for ATs may not currently exist. Several interventions<sup>5</sup> have shown improvements in pain and/or function in patellar tendinopathy patients. Only the Visnes, Hoksrud, Cook, and Bahr<sup>15</sup> study lacked positive results for the tested interventions. Although that study found eccentric training to have no effect on patellar tendinopathy pain and/or function, three other studies in the review, also testing eccentric training, were

able to find significant results of improvement.<sup>10,11,14</sup> In addition to the three eccentric training studies,<sup>10,11,14</sup> one study found significant results of improvement with the use of LIPUS,<sup>12</sup> and another study found the use of extracorporeal shockwave therapy<sup>13</sup> to be an effective intervention for treating patellar tendinopathy patients.

The results of the six studies included in this review fail to reveal which intervention could be an obvious first-line management technique for ATs. To further complicate the decision, the calculated effect sizes for various interventions were relatively low. The largest of all the effect sizes, -0.323, came from Visnes, Hoksrud, Cook, and Bahr's<sup>15</sup> study on a newly developed eccentric training program for volleyball athletes. Even so, an effect size of -0.323 indicates only a moderate effect, meaning that even if the intervention shows significant results, those results will have relatively little effect on the outcomes of pain and/or function. This combination of low-effect sizes and several studies showing positive results with insignificant differences between the interventions leads us to rule out a clear-cut gold standard intervention. Therefore, to make a reasonable conclusion on which intervention to use, other variables must be factored into the comparisons.

Three key variables relative to making a decision about which intervention should be used in the management of patellar tendinopathy for ATs are cost, ease of access, and time to recovery. Budget size has the unfortunate role of limiting quality; Bradley assesses this ill-fated role in his research on AT budget sizes in various work settings.<sup>16</sup> Bradley's research found that the size of an athletic training budget is directly related to the number of sports and ATs at the venue. A school supporting a larger number of sport teams will have a larger budget compared to a school that does not support as many teams. Likewise, the larger the number of sport teams that a school supports, the more ATs are necessary to provide proper care.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, this research reveals an incredible variation in program and AT budget size across the nation. A National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I school will likely accommodate more student athletes and teams than a Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) Class B high school. The AT budget would differ greatly between these venues.

With budget as a concern for many ATs, cost efficiency becomes a priority. Of all the interventions examined in this review, eccentric training appears as the least expensive to put into practice. The implementation of an eccentric training program for an athlete with patellar tendinopathy has practically no impact on an AT's budget. Both LIPUS and standard ultrasound therapy interventions present with a higher cost due to the cost of the unit, maintenance, use (e.g., clinician's time), and accessory equipment (e.g., gels, towels) that are required to facilitate the treatment. A standard exercise environment (e.g., weight room/gym) is ordinarily available for ATs to use in rehabilitation; therefore, no new purchases are necessary for equipment to construct an eccentric training program. Furthermore, the knowledge necessary to develop an eccentric training program specialized to an athlete's condition is already known and requires no additional training.

Ease of access, in addition to cost, can also have an impact on which intervention should be utilized. Of the interventions analyzed in this review (i.e., ultrasound, LIPUS, shockwave therapy, transverse friction massage, and eccentric training), all but the eccentric training are dependent interventions. Eccentric training was the only intervention that does not require additional assistance (i.e., clinician applied) to administer. Ultrasound, LIPUS, shockwave therapy, and even transverse friction massage require a trained individual to administer the intervention, limiting the intervention's accessibility and feasibility in many cases. With proper instruction and occasional observation, an athlete can progress through a basic eccentric training program with little assistance from the AT.

Not only are these interventions limited by the need for assistance, but they are also limited by location. Ultrasound, LIPUS, and shockwave therapy are all limited to an athletic training room or another clinical setting. A simple eccentric training program can be performed in a variety of different environments and is not limited to one location as is the case with other treatments. A possible benefit to eccentric training's accessibility is the option to create a home exercise program for the athlete and thereby potentially decrease healing time and return to play time. If an athlete can prove that he or she can properly perform the exercises, the AT does not have to monitor the athlete continuously; because supervision does not have to be constant, the AT can direct the athlete to complete some of the exercises at home on his or her own time.

In athletics, time is an important aspect when evaluating interventions. It is one thing to achieve full recovery from an injury; it is another to do so in a timely fashion. Athletes do not look forward to

sitting out of competition to nurse an injury. Hence, an intervention gains priority if results can be achieved in a short period of time. Stasinopoulos and Stasinopoulos<sup>14</sup> found significant results for eccentric training, ultrasound, and transverse friction massage after only four weeks of applying the interventions. Compared to the intervention periods of twelve and twenty-two weeks in the other studies, four weeks is a recognizably shorter intervention period. A short intervention period that yields significant results is optimal for an injured athlete seeking to return to play, particularly if the injury occurs during the competitive season.

Although eccentric exercise training appears to have an advantage in the management of patellar tendinopathy, the physiological effects are still unknown. Shalabi et al.<sup>17</sup> found that tendon volume and intratendinous signal decreased on MRI scans after a twelve-week eccentric training program for patients with Achilles tendinopathy. Decreased volume and intratendinous signal could be the result of a healing process triggered by the loading of the deranged fibers that exist in tendinopathy tissue.<sup>17</sup> Further explanation, as discovered by Whitehead et al.,<sup>18</sup> could be that the rise in passive tension of a tendon combined with the damage that eccentric training creates on a muscle/tendon is what provides protection from further injury during activity. More research is necessary to discover the true physiological effect that eccentric training has on tendinopathy tissues.

### **Limitations**

We acknowledge that there are limitations to this review that may limit its effectiveness. This study has been isolated to a participant age range of 18-35 years old. Therefore, the results may not be adequate for an athlete or non-athlete outside of this age range. Furthermore, the cause and duration of symptoms for the participants in each study were not assessed or taken into consideration when determining which studies would be included in the review. Patients with symptoms that are chronic or caused by a co-morbid condition may not respond in the same manner to the described interventions.

Some bias is noted in the study selection process as well. Criteria for the review required articles to be written in English with an available abstract. Language bias as well as the selection of articles with an available abstract limit the quality of the review.

### **Clinical Relevance**

The results of this review show insufficient evidence for differentiating between interventions in the treatment of patellar tendinopathy. With no intervention showing significantly better results in the reduction of pain or improvement in function, ATs should consider other variables that affect athletes and their condition, such as ease of access, time to recovery, and cost. Eccentric training is a low-cost and versatile intervention that presents with significant results of pain reduction and improved function in patellar tendinopathy patients.

### **Conclusion**

The six studies included in this review contribute greatly to discovering the most effective intervention for ATs to use to treat patellar tendinopathy. However, more research is necessary to truly determine which intervention ATs should utilize. Eccentric exercise, ultrasound, LIPUS, transverse friction massage, and shockwave therapy all emerge as possible interventions and show significant improvements in pain and/or function. Thus, ATs ought to assess the entirety of the situation before selecting an intervention. With that in mind, we suggest ATs consider the use of eccentric training in the treatment of patellar tendinopathy because eccentric training is a low-cost and easily accessible intervention yielding timely results of pain and/or function improvements.

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**Table 1. PEDro Quality Assessment**

Study	Categories: Eligibility	Randomization	Concealed Allocation	Similar Baseline	Subject Blinding
Stasinopoulos D, Stasinopoulos I. <sup>14</sup>	Tenderness with palpation  No history of trauma to the knee  Minimum duration of symptoms 3 mos.	Patients were randomly allocated into three groups by drawing lots.	Yes	Exercise group n=10 Age 28.129 ±2.03 Female/male ratio 3:7  Ultrasound group n=10 Age 29.179 ±3.76 Female/male ratio 4:6  Transverse friction group n=10 Age 26.249 ±4.17 Female/male ratio 5:5	No
Young MA, Cook JL, Purdam CR, Kiss ZS, Alfredson H. <sup>11</sup>	18-35 y.o.  Proximal patellar tendon pain  VISA score <80  Abnormal ultrasound	Patients randomly drew sealed envelopes to determine group placement.	Yes	No	No
Frohm A, Saartok T, Halvorsen K, Renström P. <sup>10</sup>	Hx patellar tendinopathy continuously >3 mos.  Ultrasound or MRI confirmation	Patients were randomly allocated by draw of sealed envelope containing group assignment.	Yes	Overload group n=11 Age 26±8 Female/male ratio 2:9  Standard group n=9 Age 28±8 female/male ratio 2:7	No
Warden SJ, Metcalf BR, Kiss ZS, et al. <sup>12</sup>	18+ y.o.  Pain in jumping/landing/running/changing direction  VISA score <80  Symptoms lasting at least 6 mos.	Patients were randomized in blocks of 10 using computer-generated table of random numbers.	Yes	LIPUS group n=17 Age 27±7 Female/male ratio 5:12  Ultrasound group n=20 Age 27±7 Female/male ratio 2:18	Yes

**Table 1 Continued**

<b>Study</b>	<b>Categories: Eligibility</b>	<b>Randomization</b>	<b>Concealed Allocation</b>	<b>Similar Baseline</b>	<b>Subject Blinding</b>
Visnes H, Hoksrud A, Cook J, Bahr R. <sup>15</sup>	18-35 y.o.  History of patellar pain  Symptoms present for at least 3 mos. VISA score <80	Patients were randomized by blinded statistician.	Yes	Training group n=13 Age 26.8±4.6 (19-35) Female/male ratio 5:13  Control group n=16 Age 26.4±3.4 (20-31) Female/male ratio 5:16	No
Zwerver J, Hartgens F, Verhagen E, Van der Worp H, Van den Akker-Scheek I, Diercks RL. <sup>13</sup>	18+ y.o.  Pain in patellar tendon  Symptoms for 3-12 mos.  VISA score <80	Patients were randomly allocated into treatment groups by blinded statistician.	Yes	Extracorporeal shockwave therapy (ESWT) group n=31 Age 24.2±5.2 Female/male ratio 11:20  Placebo group n=31 Age 25.7±4.5 Female/male ratio 10:21	Yes

**Table 2. PEDro Assessment, Part 2**

Study	Therapist Blinding	Assessor Blinding	85% Retention Rate	Intention-to-Treat	Between-Group Comparison	Measure of Variability	PEDro Score
Stasinopoulos D, Stasinopoulos I <sup>14</sup>	No	Patients' evaluations were measured independently by the manager of the centre who was blind to the patients' therapy group.	100% retention rate	Yes	The exercise program was statistically significantly better than the other two treatments at the end of treatment ( $\chi^2=12.21$ , $p<0.01$ ).	None	7
Young MA, Cook JL, Purdam CR, Kiss ZS, Alfredson H <sup>11</sup>	No	Investigators were blinded to all VAS and VISA measurements throughout the study.	100% retention rate	Yes	There was no difference between groups for either outcome measure at any time.	Variability was shown in a forest plot in the article.	7
Frohm A, Saartok T, Halvorsen K, Renström P <sup>10</sup>	No	No	100% retention rate	Yes	Comparisons are shown in Table 2 and Figure 4 of the article.	CIs and P-value were reported for pain measurements.	7
Warden SJ, Metcalf BR, Kiss ZS, et al. <sup>12</sup>	No	Outcomes were assessed at baseline and at the conclusion of the 12-week intervention period by a single blinded examiner.	No	Yes	Comparisons were determined with unpaired t-tests, Kruskal–Wallis tests, or 2-tests, depending on the measurement scale of the variable being compared.	95% CIs and P-values were reported in tables.	8

**Table 2 Continued**

<b>Study</b>	<b>Therapist Blinding</b>	<b>Assessor Blinding</b>	<b>85% Retention Rate</b>	<b>Intention-to-Treat</b>	<b>Between-Group Comparison</b>	<b>Measure of Variability</b>	<b>PEDro Score</b>
Visnes H, Hoksrud A, Cook J, Bahr R <sup>15</sup>	No	No	No	Yes	Paired t tests and P-values were used to compare group data. There was no difference between groups P=.39	VISA scores $\pm$ SE were reported in a graph, as well as the P-values from comparison tests.	8
Zwerver J, Hartgens F, Verhagen E, Van der Worp H, Van den Akker-Scheek I, Diercks RL <sup>13</sup>	No	Yes	100% retention rate	Yes	Differences between variables were expressed as 95% CIs in a table within the article.	CIs and P-values were reported, as well as means and SDs of several measured variables.	9



**Table 3. Study Summary with Results**

Study	Summary	Within-Group Results	Between-Group Results	Quality Assessment
Stasinopoulos D, Stasinopoulos I <sup>14</sup>	<p>Aim: Compare the effects of an exercise program consisting of eccentric and stretching exercises, pulsed ultrasound and transverse friction treatments</p> <p>Subjects: 30 patients meeting eligibility criteria</p> <p>Intervention: A) Eccentric exercise and stretching B) Ultrasound C) Transverse friction</p> <p>Evaluation/Outcome: Pain response was recorded as “worse,” “no change,” “somewhat better,” “much better,” “no pain.” Results were recorded at the end of treatment, 1 month post treatment and 3 months post treatment.</p>	No comparisons were made within the respective treatment groups.	The exercise program was significantly better than the ultrasound and transverse friction interventions at the end of the treatment period ( $\chi^2=12.21$ , $p<0.01$ ), one month ( $\chi^2=23.2$ , $p<0.001$ ) and three months ( $\chi^2=23.2$ , $p<0.001$ ) after the end of the treatment.	7/10
Young MA, Cook JL, Purdam CR, Kiss ZS, Alfredson H <sup>11</sup>	<p>Aim: Investigate the short- and long-term efficacy of two exercise programs: (1) traditional eccentric protocol (step group). (2) Contemporary treatment options (decline group).</p> <p>Subjects: 17 subjects included in the study; mean age <math>27.3\pm1.8</math> years</p> <p>Intervention: Traditional eccentric group n=8. Subjects used a 10 cm step to perform their squats.  Contemporary, decline, group n=9. Subjects used a 25° decline board to perform their squats.</p> <p>Evaluation/Outcome: VSA pain and VISA score used to quantify results</p>	Both the decline and traditional groups showed significant improvement at 12 weeks and 12 months ( $p<0.05$ ).	No difference between the groups was evident throughout the study. However, there was a 94% chance that the decline group would have positive results at 12 months, compared to only a 41% chance in the traditional step group.	7/10

**Table 3 Continued**

Study	Summary	Within-Group Results	Between-Group Results	Quality Assessment
Frohm A, Saartok T, Halvorsen K, Renström P <sup>10</sup>	<p>Aim: Compare the results of eccentric training using a novel eccentric overload training device to one-leg squatting exercises.</p> <p>Subjects: 20 patients meeting inclusion and exclusion criteria</p> <p>Intervention: Eccentric overload group (n=11) used Bromsman eccentric overload training device with 320Kg weight.</p> <p>One-leg squat group (n=8) used a 25° decline board.</p> <p>Evaluation/Outcome: VSA pain and VISA scores used to quantify results</p>	<p>Both groups improved significantly during the treatment period (P&lt;0.001). The overload group increased from a median of 49 (95% CI 38 to 61) to 86 (95% CI 71 to 92) points. The one-leg squat group increased from a median of 36 (95% CI 23 to 61) to 75 (95% CI 46 to 83) points (VISA Scale).</p> <p>VAS scores decreased for both groups: overload group from median 4 (Q25–Q75 4–6) at baseline and median 0 (Q25–Q75 0–1; p=0.003) after treatment; one-leg squat group from median 5 (Q25–Q75 4–5) at baseline to median 1 (Q2–Q75 1–2; p=0.008) after treatment.</p>	<p>There were no significant differences between the two study groups at any time during the course of the study.</p> <p>Average VISA: Eccentric overload group= 81.5±15.63; one-leg squat group= 64.45±24.07</p>	7/10

**Table 3 Continued**

Study	Summary	Within-Group Results	Between-Group Results	Quality Assessment
Warden SJ, Metcalf BR, Kiss ZS, et al. <sup>12</sup>	<p>Aim: Investigate the clinical efficacy of LIPUS in the management of patellar tendinopathy symptoms.</p> <p>Subjects: 37 participants meeting the required criteria for the study. Age <math>\geq</math> 18 years</p> <p>Interventions: LIPUS group (n=17) intervention was self-administered for 20 mins./day, 7 days/week for 12 weeks. Control group (n=20). Both groups performed eccentric exercises in addition to the therapies in question.</p> <p>Evaluation/Outcome: Pain during the participants' most aggravating activity measured on 10-cm VAS for both usual (VAS-U) and worst (VAS-W) tendon pain</p> <p>Secondary Outcomes: Change in VISA scores and patients' response to treatment using a 5-point scale</p>	<p>VAS-U and VAS-W for the study decreased by <math>1.6 \pm 1.9</math>cm (<math>28 \pm 40\%</math>) (<math>P &lt; 0.01</math>) and <math>2.5 \pm 2.4</math>cm (<math>35 \pm 31\%</math>) (<math>P &lt; 0.01</math>).</p> <p>VISA scores improved by <math>12.3 \pm 16.1</math> (<math>30 \pm 44\%</math>) (<math>P &lt; 0.01</math>) over the course of the study.</p>	<p>There were no differences between the active-LIPUS and control groups for VAS-U (<math>P = 0.82</math>) or VAS-W (<math>P = 0.65</math>) at the completion of treatment, or for change in VAS-U (<math>P = 0.74</math>) or VAS-W (<math>P = 0.57</math>) over the course of the study.</p> <p>11/13 participants in the LIPUS group and 9/14 in the control group felt that they had improved after treatment.</p> <p>There was no significant difference in patient-perceived response between the treatment groups (<math>\chi^2 = 1.45</math>, <math>P = 0.23</math>).</p> <p>There were no differences between the two groups for VISA score at the end of the intervention period (<math>P = .90</math>)</p> <p>Cohen's d: VISA = 0.037 VAS-W = -0.157 VAS-U = -0.044</p>	8/10

**Table 3 Continued**

Study	Summary	Within-Group Results	Between-Group Results	Quality Assessment
Visnes H, Hoksrud A, Cook J, Bahr R <sup>15</sup>	<p>Aim: Investigate the effect of a newly developed eccentric training program for volleyball players during competitive season.</p> <p>Subjects: 31 participants, all from the Norwegian elite and first divisions (volleyball)</p> <p>Interventions: Training group (n=13) performed an eccentric exercise program on a 25° decline board (3 sets of 15 twice a day). Control group (n=16) received no additional treatment/therapy.</p> <p>Evaluation/Outcome: The primary outcome, knee function, recorded using the VISA scale</p> <p>Secondary outcomes: Global evaluation score and jump performance</p>	There was no significant difference between pre-treatment and post-treatment VISA scores ( $F_{1,27}$ $P=0.98$ )	<p>No significant differences were found in the VISA scores between the two intervention groups at the end of the intervention period (<math>P=0.39</math>, <math>F_{11,17}=1.14</math>). Additionally, there were no significant differences between the two groups 6 weeks or 6 months post-treatment (<math>P=0.71</math> and <math>P=0.99</math> respectively).</p> <p>Cohen's d: VISA = -0.323</p>	8/10
Zwerver J, Hartgens F, Verhagen E, Van der Worp H, Van den Akker-Scheek I, Diercks RL <sup>13</sup>	<p>Aim: Determine the effectiveness of ESWT on pain, symptoms, and function in athletes</p> <p>Subjects: 62 patients; male and female athletes from 3 major typical jumping sports (basketball, handball, and volleyball) in the Netherlands</p> <p>Intervention: Shockwave group (n=31): ESWT was administered in 3 sessions at 1-week intervals using a Piezoelectric ESWT device. Placebo group (n=31): The treatment was the same, except that no transmission gel was applied. Thus, shockwaves were not or hardly conducted.</p> <p>Evaluation/Outcome: Main outcome measurements quantified with VISA-P questionnaire</p>	The mean VISA-P score for the shockwave group increased by $11.1 \pm 18.6$ ( $20.9\% \pm 35.2\%$ ) and the mean VISA-P for the control group increased by $10.4 \pm 15.5$ ( $18.8\% \pm 30.6\%$ ).	<p>There were no significant differences between the VISA-P scores for the two treatment groups at the end of treatment, 12 weeks post-treatment, or 22 weeks post-treatment.</p> <p>95% CIs: End of treatment (-3.2 to 10.4)</p> <p>12 weeks post-treatment (-7.7 to 9.3)</p> <p>22 weeks post-treatment (-8.0 to 9.4)</p> <p>Cohen's d: VISA= -0.12 Pain from ADL= -0.09 Pain from sport= -0.28</p>	9/10

# The “48” Problem

## Joshua Bailey

Braun Award for the College of Science, Engineering and Technology

Nominated by Anthony Crachiola, Associate Professor of Mathematics



Joshua Bailey graduated from SVSU with a bachelor of science degree in mathematics in the winter semester of 2014. After living in Saginaw for most of his life, he thought it was only natural to attend Delta College and then SVSU. His hobby of programming eventually turned into a career, as he is currently employed as a software developer.

This paper, an excerpt from a longer report that was written in the course Math 480 (Senior Seminar in Math), was meant to demonstrate the knowledge and skills Joshua learned during his studies of mathematics. The report sparked his curiosity when his professor presented the problem to the class. This spark, Joshua says, turned into a fire, and soon enough a rough copy of his work existed. Joshua’s favorite thing about writing mathematical exposition is that the author is leading the reader on a journey of discovery.

As part of his letter nominating Joshua for this award, Anthony Crachiola wrote the following: “[E]very week [in Math 480] I gave the students a variety of problems to work on. Some of them were straightforward review problems, others were more challenging, and a few were broad and even a little vague. Students submitted solutions every week, and I gave feedback. Essentially these were rough drafts. Then after several weeks, I asked the students to pick a couple of their favorite problems and write up their polished solutions....

“Joshua’s report is an excellent example of mathematical writing, the best I have seen from an undergraduate class assignment. His writing is clear and precise. He shows mastery of mathematical writing customs expected in any peer-reviewed journal. His use of notation enhances the delivery of the solution. Due to the technical nature of the work, I understand that it might be difficult for many people to read the paper. This is unfortunately the nature of upper-level mathematics.... It is the writer’s job to make this process as painless as possible, not to be persuasive so much as to illuminate. Joshua succeeds at this task. His work shows great maturity for an undergraduate.”

The “48” problem is as follows: find integers  $n$  such that  $n + 1$  and  $\frac{n}{2} + 1$  are perfect squares. Let  $\{n_i\}$ ,  $\{x_i\}$  and  $\{y_i\}$  be sequences of integers for  $i \geq 0$  such that  $n_i + 1 = x_i^2$  and  $\frac{n_i}{2} + 1 = y_i^2$ . We have the following table of values for the first few terms in each sequence:

$i$	$n_i$	$x_i$	$y_i$
0	0	1	1
1	48	7	5
2	1,680	41	29
3	57,120	239	169
4	1,940,448	1,393	985
5	65,918,160	8,119	5,741

Some of these numbers are ridiculously huge. The numbers 0 and 48, which is why this is called the “48” problem, were found by trying different combinations of numbers to solve those two equations. However, the goal of this paper is to find all numbers  $n$  such that the conditions above hold, not just 0 and 48. Luckily through the power of mathematics, we are able to find those numbers, and as an added bonus, we can find all of those numbers in their succession! Our journey of discovery can now begin.

Upon rearrangement of  $n_i + 1 = x_i^2$  and  $\frac{n_i}{2} + 1 = y_i^2$ , we get

$$x_i^2 - 2y_i^2 = -1,$$

which is known as a variant of Pell’s equation. The solution of this problem requires solving this equation. A solution of this equation will be denoted as  $(x_i, y_i)$  from this point forward.

In an attempt to solve Pell’s equation, we can write the difference of squares

$$(x + y\sqrt{2})(-x + y\sqrt{2}) = 1.$$

In other words, any solution to Pell’s equation will be a unit in the ring  $\mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{2}]$ , that is, the set  $\{a + b\sqrt{2} : a, b \in \mathbb{Z}\}$  with the operations addition and multiplication. For example,  $1 + \sqrt{2}$  is a unit of this ring because  $(1 + \sqrt{2})(-1 + \sqrt{2}) = 1$ , and  $(1, 1)$  is a solution to  $x_i^2 - 2y_i^2 = -1$ .

**Proposition 1.** *The element  $(1 + \sqrt{2})^n$  is a unit of  $\mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{2}]$  for all natural numbers  $n$ .*

*Proof.* First, we notice that  $(1 + \sqrt{2})(-1 + \sqrt{2}) = 1$ . Since  $\mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{2}]$  is a commutative ring, we have

$$\begin{aligned} (1 + \sqrt{2})^n (-1 + \sqrt{2})^n &= 1^n \\ ((1 + \sqrt{2})(-1 + \sqrt{2}))^n &= 1 \\ 1 &= 1. \end{aligned}$$

So  $(1 + \sqrt{2})^n$  is a unit of  $\mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{2}]$  and this completes the proof.

There are patterns in mathematics everywhere, so let us find a pattern in this problem. Refer back to the table above and observe the following:

$$\begin{aligned} 1 + \sqrt{2} &= x_0 + y_0\sqrt{2} \\ (1 + \sqrt{2})^2 &= 3 + 2\sqrt{2} \\ (1 + \sqrt{2})^3 &= 7 + 5\sqrt{2} = x_1 + y_1\sqrt{2} \\ (1 + \sqrt{2})^4 &= 17 + 12\sqrt{2} \\ (1 + \sqrt{2})^5 &= 41 + 29\sqrt{2} = x_2 + y_2\sqrt{2} \end{aligned}$$

So it appears that every odd, positive power of  $1 + \sqrt{2}$  is related to  $x_i$  and  $y_i$ .

**Proposition 2.** *If  $(1 + \sqrt{2})^n = a_n + b_n\sqrt{2}$ , and  $(1 + \sqrt{2})^{n+2} = a_{n+1} + b_{n+1}\sqrt{2}$ , where  $a_i$  and  $b_i$  are integers with  $i \geq 0$ , then*

$$\begin{aligned} a_{i+1} &= 3a_i + 4b_i \\ b_{i+1} &= 2a_i + 3b_i. \end{aligned}$$

*Proof.* We compute

$$\begin{aligned}
(1 + \sqrt{2})^{n+2} &= (1 + \sqrt{2})^n (1 + \sqrt{2})^2 \\
&= (a_n + b_n \sqrt{2})(3 + \sqrt{2}) \\
&= (3a_n + 4b_n) + (2a_n + 3b_n)\sqrt{2}.
\end{aligned}$$

So

$$a_{n+1} + b_{n+1}\sqrt{2} = (3a_n + 4b_n) + (2a_n + 3b_n)\sqrt{2}.$$

Since  $a_i$  and  $b_i$  are integers, we can compare like terms, and see our desired result, so this proof is complete.

**Theorem 1.** Consider the sequences

$$x_{i+1} = 3x_i + 4y_i,$$

$$y_{i+1} = 2x_i + 3y_i,$$

with  $x_0 = y_0 = 1$ . These sequences yield solutions  $(x_i, y_i)$  to  $x_i^2 - 2y_i^2 = -1$  for all  $i \geq 0$ .

*Proof.* We prove this using mathematical induction. For the base case, we have

$$x_0^2 - 2y_0^2 = 1 - 2 = -1.$$

Now we assume  $(x_n, y_n)$  for some  $n \geq 0$  is a solution. Thus  $x_n^2 - 2y_n^2 = -1$ . Now,

$$\begin{aligned}
x_{n+1}^2 - 2y_{n+1}^2 &= (3x_n + 4y_n)^2 - 2(2x_n + 3y_n)^2 \\
&= x_n^2 - 2y_n^2 \\
&= -1.
\end{aligned}$$

Therefore  $(x_{n+1}, y_{n+1})$  is also a solution. So by the principle of mathematical induction,  $(x_i, y_i)$  is a solution for all  $i \geq 0$ . This completes the proof.

What did we prove? We proved that not only are  $(x_i, y_i)$  given by each odd power of  $1 + \sqrt{2}$ , but that there is a relationship between  $(x_i, y_i)$  and  $(x_{i-1}, y_{i-1})$  and an infinite number of solutions exist. Therefore,  $\{n_i\}$  is an infinite sequence.

Define  $v_i = x_i - y_i$ , for all  $i \geq 0$ . Then

$$v_i^2 = \left( \sqrt{n_i + 1} - \sqrt{\frac{n_i}{2} + 1} \right)^2.$$

Expanding and rearranging the terms, as a student in College Algebra would do, we find a quadratic equation in terms of  $n_i$ . We find that one of the solutions to the quadratic equation is

$$n_i = 6v_i^2 + 4v_i\sqrt{2v_i^2 + 1}.$$

This solution is important because it tells us that if we can find a formula for  $v_i$ , then we can find a formula for  $n_i$ , which is our goal. To reach our goal, we will use a concept called generating functions and a suitable recurrence relation for  $v_i$ .

We know that

$$x_{i+1} = 3x_i + 4y_i$$

for  $x_i = y_i = 1$ . If we extend the sequence to include another term by effectively adding zero, we have

$$x_{i+2} = 3x_{i+1} + 4y_{i+1} + x_i - x_i,$$

for  $x_0 = y_0 = 1$  and  $x_1 = 7$ .

Upon massaging the recurrence relation, we get

$$\begin{aligned}
x_{i+2} &= 3x_{i+1} + 3x_{i+1} - 3x_{i+1} + 4y_{i+1} + x_i - x_i \\
&= 6x_{i+1} - 3(3x_i + 4y_i) + 4(2x_i + 3y_i) + x_i - x_i \\
&= 6x_{i+1} - x_i.
\end{aligned}$$

Similarly,

$$y_{i+2} = 6y_{i+1} - y_i$$

with  $y_0 = 1$  and  $y_1 = 5$ .

Now  $v_i$  is given by

$$v_{i+2} = 6v_{i+1} - v_i$$

for  $v_0 = 0$  and  $v_1 = 2$ .

We now have a proper recurrence relation to make use of a generating function. We define our generating function as  $V(x) = \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} v_k x^k$ . Now note that

$$\begin{aligned} V(x) &= v_0 + v_1 x + v_2 x^2 + \dots, \\ -6xV(x) &= 0 - 6v_0 x - 6v_1 x^2 - 6v_2 x^3 - \dots, \\ x^2 V(x) &= 0 + 0x + v_0 x^2 + v_1 x^3 + \dots. \end{aligned}$$

So

$$V(x)(1 - 6x + x^2) = v_0 + (v_1 - 6v_0)x + \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} (v_{k+2} - 6v_{k+1} + v_k)x^k.$$

The last term is zero, based on our recurrence relation, and we know that  $v_0 = 0$  and  $v_1 = 2$ , so upon substitution and rearrangement, we have

$$V(x) = \frac{2x}{x^2 - 6x + 1}.$$

Our goal right now is to expand this fraction into a series of sums, which we can then match up with our generating function in order to find an equation for  $v_i$ .

By using partial fractions and algebra, we find that

$$\frac{1}{x^2 - 6x + 1} = \frac{1}{4\sqrt{2}} \left( \frac{3 + 2\sqrt{2}}{1 - (3 + 2\sqrt{2})x} - \frac{3 - 2\sqrt{2}}{1 - (3 - 2\sqrt{2})x} \right).$$

Let  $\alpha = 3 + 2\sqrt{2}$  and  $\beta = 3 - 2\sqrt{2}$  for convenience.

With the fact that the series expansion of  $\frac{1}{1-ax}$  is  $\sum_{i=0}^{\infty} (ax)^i$  for  $|x| < 1$ , we find that

$$\frac{1}{x^2 - 6x + 1} = \frac{1}{4\sqrt{2}} ((\alpha - \beta) + (\alpha^2 - \beta^2)x + (\alpha^3 - \beta^3)x^2 + \dots).$$

So

$$V(x) = \frac{2x}{x^2 - 6x + 1} = \frac{\sqrt{2}}{4} ((\alpha - \beta)x + (\alpha^2 - \beta^2)x^2 + (\alpha^3 - \beta^3)x^3 + \dots).$$

By matching up the terms of the infinite, convergent sum with the coefficients of  $v_i$  of  $V(x)$  we find that

$$v_i = \frac{\sqrt{2}}{4} (\alpha^i - \beta^i).$$

If we substitute the above equation into the equation we found for  $n_i$  earlier, we get

$$n_i = \frac{\alpha^{2i+1} + \beta^{2i+1} - 6}{4}$$

for all  $i \geq 0$ . Note that our favorite number  $1 + \sqrt{2}$  and its conjugate are hidden in this formula. Observe that  $(1 + \sqrt{2})^2 = 3 + 2\sqrt{2}$ , which is  $\alpha$ , and  $(1 - \sqrt{2})^2 = 3 - 2\sqrt{2}$  which is  $\beta$ . Now we can rewrite the above formula as

$$n_i = \frac{(1 + \sqrt{2})^{4i+2} + (1 - \sqrt{2})^{4i+2} - 6}{4},$$

for all  $i \geq 0$ . With this formula, for any  $i$  one chooses to substitute, its output will be a number that such that  $n_i + 1$  and  $\frac{n_i}{2} + 1$  are perfect squares.

Our journey of discovery ends here for now. Many other questions and patterns can be discovered from these results. Which of the  $x_i$  and  $y_i$  are prime? What if we looked for numbers  $n + 2$  and  $\frac{n}{2} + 2$  such that both were perfect squares? This is the nature of mathematics. Once something is discovered, new mysteries present themselves just waiting to be investigated.



# Occupation Unfolding into the Community

Jordan Vincke

Braun Award for Graduate Programs

Nominated by Donald Earley, Professor of Occupational Therapy



Jordan Vincke grew up in the small town of Chesaning, Michigan. He has been at SVSU for about five years and is in his second year of SVSU's Master of Science in Occupational Therapy program. He is currently the president of the Student Occupational Therapy Association and Pi Theta Epsilon. Through these organizations, he hopes to help others and increase awareness about occupational therapy. His future plans include working towards his doctorate in occupational therapy and becoming a certified hand therapist (CHT). In his spare time, he loves to cook, exercise, read, draw, and spend quality time with his family and friends.

This essay, Jordan says, brought together everything he learned in OT 610 (Occupation in Community). Jordan's goal with this assignment was to make vital connections between occupation and community. He compares the writing of this paper to a large puzzle. Each referenced resource was inherently unique; however, through meticulous analysis and inquiry, connections became apparent. Writing this essay, he says, has enlightened him as a student and as a future occupational therapist.

## Introduction

Learning and applying knowledge about community is important for future occupational therapists. This is largely because community is a dynamic construct that is intimately connected to the clients of occupational therapists. This essay aims to explore aspects of community and their relation to the profession of occupational therapy.

In the pages that follow, I provide a brief timeline of occupational therapy's relationship with the concept of community, general definitions of community and occupation, and the importance of the occupation-community relationship for occupational therapy. The essay also focuses on how occupation unfolds into a community. Meaning-making and shared experiences, I believe, form the bridge that allows occupation to unfold into a community. This essay thus strives to establish how the meaningful and purposeful occupations of an individual can aid in the creation of community.

## The Occupation and Community Relationship

As I was reading one day, my brother asked me what I was working on. I replied that I was reading community-related articles. He then responded, "What does that have to with occupational therapy?" I think this question shows that many people think of therapeutic services as solely linked to an individual, but occupational therapists realize that an individual is part of a larger system. In fact, over time and with careful planning, our profession has developed a comprehensive framework that consists of core concepts and definitions to guide occupational therapists in their daily roles. This framework clearly states that occupational therapists not only work with the individual, but with groups that create a community (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2008). As this framework shows, occupational therapists understand that the community and individuals are inseparable. They also appreciate that there is a connection between daily occupations and community, and that occupation and community are interdependent and influence each other. That is, occupation will influence performance in the community, and community will influence performance in an occupation (Dickie, Cutchin & Humphry, 2006; Earley, 2004).

The relationship between community and occupation is discussed in some of the earliest literature produced in the field of occupational therapy. As Scaffa and Reitz (2013) have recounted, the field's earliest practitioners, George Barton and Eleanor Clarke Slagle, created the first community-based programs related to the profession. Later, in 1938, Banyai described the importance of community engagement and deinstitutionalization of those with tuberculosis. From the field's earliest beginnings, occupational therapists were aware of communities' importance to the profession (cited in Scaffa & Reitz, 2013).

In the 1960s, there was a push to go beyond the traditional medical model and setting. As cited in Scaffa and Reitz, Riley stated that the focus needed to change from the individual to the community and the environment. She claimed that focusing on the environment would enhance adaptive competencies of clients. Furthermore, West urged that occupational therapists belong in the community and not so much in a hospital. (As the primary facility settings in which occupational therapists worked, hospitals limited occupational therapists' opportunities to utilize community as an intervention or therapeutic tool.) Despite this great push from the profession's leaders in the 1960s, community-based practice was still underutilized. A focus on community in the 1970s and 1980s involved independent living projects, teen pregnancy programs, and prevention services for the elderly. However, it remained difficult for members of the profession to initiate community-based programs for several reasons. For one, the profession was deeply attached to the medical model. There was also a lack of evidence, guidelines, and education regarding community benefits (2013).

A breakthrough occurred in 1997, when the landmark Well-Elderly Study was completed. This study, according to Scaffa and Reitz (2013), showed the large-scale benefits of community and demonstrated that individual well-being and health can be positively impacted by a community. Scaffa and Reitz also reminded readers that, in 2006, the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) increased the emphasis on health promotion services and population-based services; additionally, in the same year, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) adopted the 2017 Centennial Vision, which states that occupational therapy will be widely recognized and be an evidence-based profession that meets society's occupational needs. The Centennial Vision relates to the community-paradigm practice created by the profession—that when people engage in activities of daily living (ADLs), they are likely to meet society's occupational needs (2013). That is, a person who is independent in all areas of life will be able to explore the multitude of available occupations in a given society. For example, an individual who is independent (i.e., not limited in ADLs) may choose to volunteer at a Relay for Life event or play golf at a local course, both of which can be described as occupations. Occupation is not just a synonym for “job” or “career,” and there is an evident link between individuals' level of independence and their ability to engage in a variety of occupations embedded into society or any given community.

This brief timeline shows that the profession regularly pushed for community-based practice, but for us to realize more fully why some leaders advocated for this practice, we must better understand the concepts of occupation and community.

## **Community and Occupation**

### **Defining Community**

Societies began as geographically and genetically defined groups of people who shared the task of survival. Once survival needs were secured, individuals began working with others, usually with a common goal in mind (Christiansen & Townsend, 2010). This means that people eventually began to participate collectively via shared interests and occupations. Because humans have a natural drive or tendency to live with other human beings, we can think of community as a bond among people with related backgrounds and interests (Christiansen & Townsend, 2010); thus, when I employ the term “community” within this essay, I also refer to a “sense” of community and not just the physical aspect of community as a literal group of people in a given area. I do not ignore the importance of a physical community, but I stress that that an individual can live in a physical community and not necessarily experience a sense of that community. In fact, there is an underlying emotional component to creating a true sense of community, and Walter (2012) mentioned that how we build a community is tied to how we

conceptualize and relate to the concept of community. Individuals who are part of a community are involved in common activities. These activities create an environment that is more meaningful for human action, and as many sources have noted, a sense of community promotes a feeling of connectedness (Crabtree, 1998; Freie, 1998; Grady, 1995; Scaffa & Reitz, 2013); community, after all, is built upon common values, beliefs, rituals, and spirit (Freie, 1998). Lastly, communities need to be inclusive. This means that everyone, regardless of any differences, should be accepted by the their group (Grady, 1995).

It is imperative to stress that a community may mean something different to everyone; it has richness and is diverse (Scaffa & Reitz, 2013). If every individual had the exact same sense of community, then a place of near perfect qualities desired by everyone, a utopia, would exist. Wilcox (2001) stated that an occupational utopia (where people could ideally engage in their respective occupations regardless of disability or barriers) would permit, encourage, and enable all people to reach towards their potential. Perhaps it is because utopias do not exist that Freie (1998) proposed a more practical definition, one that, again, recognizes the emotional and physical aspects of a community. He specified that community is an interlocking pattern of human relationships in which people have at least a minimal sense of concerns (the emotional component of community) within a definable region (the physical component). He continued that people in a community actively participate and cooperate with others to create their own self-worth, a sense of caring about others, and a feeling of connectedness (1998). Therefore, a community strives to form connections, develop trust, and create a sense of purpose.

As I hope to have shown, community is not simply about the physical neighborhood, city, or collection of individual people. Imagine being in your home, and all your personal items were stripped from it. You would be living in a physical space still, yet the emotional connection could be gone. Your home was slowly developed over time to create a sense of “homeyness.” This is how we need to view and observe communities. We need to ask “How did they start?” and “What are they now?”

### **Function of the Community**

A community’s main function is to act as a go-between linking the individual and larger society (Christiansen & Townsend, 2010). That is, people need communities to act as a “middle-place.” This middle-place allows for social structures to form and social interactions to occur (Christiansen & Townsend, 2010; Freie, 1998; Mandel et al., 1999; Wilcox, 2001; Whiteford & Hocking, 2012). It is this social structure that allows for the sharing of occupations. When social groups develop a sense of commitment and emotional support in times of need, they generate shared beliefs, traditions, and goals through shared occupations (Christiansen & Townsend, 2010). The community also creates a sense of belonging, fulfills members’ needs, provides influence, and offers shared connections (Christiansen & Townsend, 2010; Grady, 1995). Furthermore, communities provide choice, which allows for exploration and the pursuit of self-actualization (Grady, 1995). Another function of a community is to provide opportunities for partnership and participation (Christiansen & Townsend, 2010; Whiteford & Hocking, 2012). Participation refers to people’s intentional involvement in circumstances where doing things together can generate a shared identity. An important function of person-centered participatory community occupation is the generation of optimism and hope (Christiansen & Townsend, 2010).

### **Defining Occupation**

Defining occupation is not a simple task. In the simplest of terms, an occupation is anything in which a human engages during a given day. Taking a shower, cooking food, playing a sport, traveling in your community, working at your job: all of these are considered occupations. Simply put, occupation can be summed up as everything humans do, and this thus includes the social and economic fabric of clients’ community (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2008). However, occupation is a subjective experience, as individuals view and engage in occupations in various ways. That is, not everyone participates in the same occupation, participates equally in given occupations, or places the same value on occupations. Nevertheless, despite the subjectivity with which occupations are viewed, all occupations have meaning ascribed to them by individuals. There are still other ways to define occupation. As Trombly (1995) stated, occupation is any voluntary activity a person does that has meaning. Christiansen (1999) agreed with the notion that engaging in occupation brings meaning to life, and Hammell added

that occupation can be thought of as doing, belonging, and becoming: doing means engaging in purposeful, goal-oriented activities; belonging is related to social interaction and a feeling of being included; and becoming involves the idea that people can envision future, or possible, selves (2004). Engaging in occupation leads to developing identity, which helps to bring meaning into our lives (Christiansen, 1999). In other words, occupations, because they are meaningful, literally define who we are and what we will become.

Running through these various descriptions of occupation are the ideas of purpose, community, and meaning, concepts that many occupational therapy professionals have noted. For example, in the 1996 Eleanor Clark Slagle lecture, Nelson explained how occupation needs to have meaning and purpose. He described that meaning could be either affective, symbolic, or perceived: cooking would be affective if an individual has an emotional connection with it; using a machine to represent similar working conditions would be considered symbolic; perceived meaning is having people “buy” into a therapeutic intervention (for example, explaining to a client how lifting weights can lead to increased performance with ADLs). According to Nelson, occupational forms represent the physical and social aspect of the occupation being performed (1996).

Hasselkus (2011) also noted connections between these ideas, notably that occupation and meaning are interdependent, that occupation will influence meaning and vice versa. That is, people engage in occupations that create meaning for them. People who enjoy cleaning their homes would consider this a meaningful occupation and engage in it, but individuals who despise cleaning may not consider that task meaningful and avoid it. Crabtree (1998) furthered commentary on this topic, mentioning that occupation itself can be viewed as meaning-making. The occupational forms thus lead to occupational performance, the “doing” part (described above). The purpose of that “doing” will be the goal-directed behavior that will motivate the person to engage in the previous meaningful occupation. Meaning and purposeful occupations, as I hope will become apparent throughout this essay, are the basic building blocks of community.

### **Aspects of Occupation That Unfold with Community**

To gain an understanding of the occupation-community relationship, occupational therapists need to understand the relationship between occupation, symbols, space and place, roles, habits and routines, rituals, and identities. Because all of these ideas overlap, this creates confusion for those new to the field of occupational therapy. It is rather difficult to separate them completely, as they all may influence one another in infinite ways. My task is to try to identify the terms individually, yet show how they combine for each individual. These concepts must be understood because they all involve meaning-making and ultimately contribute to the relationship between occupation and community. It is through these aspects of occupation that we can appreciate the parallels between occupation and community, the complex connections between them, and the variables that affect them. All of these aspects need to occur, in some fashion, in order for occupations to unfold into the community.

### **Symbols**

A symbol is a sign that stands for something beyond the object or thing itself (Fazio, 1994). As mentioned previously, individuals’ daily lives consist of occupations, and symbols can provide meaning for occupations. For example, consider a culture that celebrates Christmas. The ritual of Christmas is loaded with symbols that people within this culture mutually share: a Christmas tree, lights, caroling, presents under the tree, and so on. Although individuals interpret and perceive symbols in various ways, individuals’ tendency to share symbolic gestures leads to a group with an identity. This allows the group to be part of the larger culture in which it resides, for culture and symbols cannot be easily separated (Fazio, 1994). In essence, shared symbols lead to shared meaning, which, in turn, leads to group cohesion and identity.

## **Space and Place**

Shared living quarters appear to be closely tied to biological and social survival (Christiansen & Townsend, 2010). Obtaining a stable place creates security, which leads to a sense of openness of space (Tuan, 2001). This openness refers to the ability to feel comfortable or at ease within a defined space. Openness of space develops over time, with the length of time required varying from individual to individual. This ability to be open allows individuals to begin sharing with (or opening up to) others. In essence, one must typically achieve stability and security in a fixed place and then proceed to being increasingly comfortable, open, and social to surrounding people in the area. This can then allow individuals to share meaningful experiences and thereby build a sense of community. However, the potential for cohesiveness is threatened by the fact that people tend to be individualistic, mobile, and consumed with jobs, daily tasks, and multiple roles (Tall, 1996; Wood, 2001). People are always on the go, so in order for occupation to unfold in a community, individuals must share the same space and place.

## **Habits and Routines**

The concepts of habits and habituation are individual aspects of occupation and prerequisites to developing a community. Habits help to create rhythm and routine, and allow for a sense of being in place, whereas habituation is created and learned via repetition (Rowles, 2000). As individuals begin to develop daily routines within the places they live, these routines inevitably intertwine with other people's routines, creating a dynamic system of interaction (Whiteford & Hocking, 2012). That is, when people occupy the same physical space and place, re-occurring patterns of occupations begin to emerge. When daily routines re-occur, this can then lead to events that are meaningfully related to one another, or a sense of synchronicity (Rowles, 2000). These diverse routines have unique meaning for each individual, but they also can provide an avenue for shared meaning. I believe these intertwining reoccurring routines link and strengthen a sense of community.

## **Rituals**

Crepeau (1995) stated that rituals can be ambiguous; however, they are symbolic and contain meaning. Segal (2004) also mentioned that rituals consist of meaning-making activities, which are symbolic in nature; for example, if a family prays at meals, this is meaningful for the family and is symbolic of the family's religion of choice. Rituals allow for a particular group to establish itself via shared experiences, which can lead to the development of community. These shared or collective experiences function to bring a group together (Crepeau, 1995). Engaging in occupation that attends to cultural rituals and rules is critical if a community is to flourish. This is because rituals bring people together to reach meaningful goals (Christiansen & Townsend, 2010). In other words, the development of rituals can be associated with the individual and with community. When a group of individuals develops meaningful rituals, a sense of community begins to arise.

## **Identity**

One's identity creates meaning for the daily events that one experiences. Christiansen (1999) proposed that occupations build identities and eventually meaningful lives. Nelson (1996) added that as people participate in daily occupations that provide meaning, this participation causes them to reengage in that occupation (Nelson, 1996). This can be viewed as a loop: as individuals engage in an occupation, this creates meaning, which cause individuals to reengage in that occupation. For instance, if a boy were to play (i.e., participate in) a videogame, and it created a sense of meaning for him, he would likely reengage in that occupation (i.e., playing the game). This repeated cycle leads to individuals developing an identity, or "selfing" (Hasselkus, 2011). As people engage in daily occupations, these occupations are continually shaping identity, which transforms throughout life (Hasselkus, 2011). Moreover, even though individuals choose their own path, their identity will inevitably be influenced by their relationships (Christiansen, 1999). This relates back to the concept of community. That is, our identity is shaped by ourselves and by others. As we continue to share meaningful experiences, our identities become part of a collective whole.

This leads to a common purpose and connection among the individual members (Freie, 1998; Grady, 1995).

### **Meaning-Making and Shared Experiences**

By engaging in this intertwining web of occupation and community, individuals begin to create meaning-making experiences, which, I believe, can be shared experiences as well. As creatures with the capability for memory, language, and a variety of emotions, and in possession of the ever-mysterious consciousness (Kolb & Wishaw, 2009), humans engage in various occupations every day, and we use our memories, language, and emotions to give meaning and purpose to those everyday occupations. Based on this, I would argue that occupations are critical for individuals' well-being and function. For a moment, imagine that we had nothing to do, that occupations did not exist. What would humans do day-to-day? If occupations did not exist, there would be no meaning, and we would have no purpose. To what would we attach our memories and emotions? And what if we were all alone? We would not be able to share our memories or emotions; language would be obsolete.

My personal understanding is that humans need occupations to engage in and others to share with. I agree with Mandel et al.'s notion that humans are occupational beings (1999), with Hasselkus's claim that the nature of humans is to make meaning via occupations (2011) and with Clark et al.'s assertion that humans are most true to their humanity when they are engaged in occupations (1990). As we develop and grow, we go through a process of becoming and being (Hasselkus, 2011); a sense of meaning arises, which we uniquely relate to our occupations (Crabtree, 1998; Earley, 2003). Engagement with these occupations leads to unique meaning-making experiences that will help to create various habits, routines, roles, spaces, places, and an identity for that person. However, although occupations involve the individual and self-action, one cannot ignore the influence of context (Dickie et al., 2006). Humans are always looking for a sense of connectedness (Grady, 1995; Freie, 1998). Thus, the individual begins to share meaningful and purposeful occupations with others, which leads to shared experiences.

After reviewing the literature, I believe the catalyst that enables occupation to unfold into the community is the shared experience, and I believe it is through multiple reoccurring shared experiences that a community will begin to emerge. For example, the concepts of space and place allow people to feel secure with others. This security can enable people to be more open with each other and therefore deepen their shared experiences. They may begin to develop a deeper trust, bond emotionally, interact socially, and attain a sense of belonging. These community developments are possible only when individuals collectively attach meaning to space and place. The use of symbols also helps to create a shared experience and, potentially, a mutual understanding between people. When people engage in daily habits and routines within the same space and place with others, a shared experience happens yet again. As stated previously, these meaningful events create a sense of synchronicity (Rowles, 2000). As they continue to share meaningful experiences, people's identities are shaped by others, becoming part of a collective whole. Individual identity and group identity are intertwined, and as Grady (1995) stated, a sense of belonging leads to the development of identity and sense of self.

### **The Importance of Community and Occupational Therapy**

If occupational therapists play a significant role in promoting the health and well-being of their clients (Scaffa & Reitz, 2013), the profession of occupational therapy also plays a role in allowing clients to experience meaningful occupations in the context of their environment or society (Scaffa & Reitz, 2013; Mandel et al., 1999; Grady, 1995), to create meaning-making experiences, and to share those experiences. Occupational therapists thus must advocate for the significance of community-based practice (Scaffa & Reitz, 2013, American Occupational Therapy Association, 2008). It is vital that communities are structured, provide opportunities, and enhance community integration (Taylor, Bogdan, & Racino, 1991).

People belong together regardless of real or perceived differences (Grady, 1995). This means that all individuals should have equal opportunity to belong to a genuine community. If a person is in a wheelchair, he should not be excluded. If a person is a certain race, she should not be excluded. We are all human, regardless of such differences, and advocacy on the part of occupation therapists is imperative

because those with a disability are often excluded and are frequently isolated within the community (Craddock, 1996a and 1996b; Grady, 1995). In other words, being in the community is not the same as being part of the community (Taylor, Bogdan & Racino, 1991). This is critical to understand, because if an individual is isolated within the community, her well-being, quality of life, or health may be adversely influenced (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2008; Christiansen & Townsend, 2010; Earley, 2003; Mandel et al., 1999; Scaffa & Reitz, 2013). In sum, a person with a disability may not be allowed to create the meaning-making and shared experiences discussed previously. Loneliness and isolation have a negative effect on such an individual's health and well-being, but inclusion helps to end loneliness and helplessness, and empowers the individual (Grady, 1995),

This link between community and well-being has been demonstrated through such community occupation-based programs as the Well-Elderly Study, Out and About, and Lifestyle Redesign Program. These programs did not necessarily focus on improving function, but on creating meaning-making experiences by utilizing shared occupations and building a sense of community. These programs have demonstrated that patients improve their physical and mental well-being through shared meaningful occupations with other group members (Barnes et al., 2008; Earley, 2003; Mandel et al., 1999).

### Conclusion

Through my study of the literature, I am beginning to understand the true complexity of the occupation-community relationship. I have learned that shared occupations lead to a common purpose of creating stable and ongoing community structures. Therefore, occupational therapists should always consider the inseparable bond between individuals and their contexts. Occupational therapists are experts in occupation, but based on the dynamic relationship between occupation and community, they must become experts in community too. They must be mindful of the intertwining structures that determine how occupation unfolds in a community. To understand this process, they need to be cognizant of how occupation brings meaning and purpose to one's life. Occupational therapists then need to be attentive to how meaning-making experiences can lead to various shared experiences. This is vital because community can impact client well-being and health. Learning about all these concepts and ideas was a thought-provoking process. As Rowles (2000) stated, recognizing the ordinary can lead to extraordinary outcomes.

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# The Communal Dress

Nathan Daniel Phillips

Tyner Prize for Fiction

Nominated by C. Vince Samarco, Professor of English

Nathan Daniel Phillips graduated in May 2015 with creative writing and literature majors and a history minor; he lives in Bay City, and his work can be found in *Cardinal Sins* and in *The Story Shack*. Nathan says, “‘The Communal Dress’ was born out of a trip I took to Africa and written for ENGL 461: Seminar in Creative Writing. For three weeks, I stayed with a missionary and spent a great deal of time in the KwaZakele Township. Afterward, the idea of a communal dress came to me, along with the complications that would arise from individuality in a collective society. This led me to question the limits of collective ideologies. Though it is often said that the needs of the many outweigh the few, I wanted to explore cases where that may not be accurate or where the sacrifice of the few would result in a cheapening of the many. This tension of the individual and the collective fascinates me. As David Mitchell writes, ‘we are but one drop in a limitless ocean. But what is an ocean but a multitude of drops?’”

## 1

The dress. Over time its white faded to a light blue hue, a mixture of cloud and early-morning sky. Halos of sweat were under the armpits, the hem covered with six inches of mud, sleeves tapered at the wrists into a tight funnel, and the bulbous shoulders round as snow-globes. The train had long been lost, ripped by a wild dog before one of the weddings. The skirt of the dress had lost its shape. Pockets of fabric bunched together down its domed bottom.

Despite its appearance, the dress brought the mamas joy. They had, twenty or thirty of them, saved for nearly a year to buy it for their daughters and for their nieces. *When my daughter is married*, they said, *she will not wear some ratty thing. She will have a real wedding dress*. When they had first seen it, eight years before, it seemed like something from a movie. *A princess’s dress*, one of the mamas said.

They bought it in town for 900R. The missionary’s wife, Tami, a white woman with eyelids painted dark blue and red-dusted cheeks, drove Mama Sitole into the city. Mama Sitole wore her best dress, her church dress, and bought a hat for the trip. She had never been to the city, never worked or shopped there. Twelve miles from the township, the trip was impossible for those without a car. Coming off the highway, buildings and cross-cut streets enveloped the car. They passed groceries and factory-sized malls. Shops with thick, black-framed windows displayed frail mannequins with bright scarves and leather purses draped over their well-endowed chests.

Once in the boutique, white-walled with tile floors, it took only fifteen minutes to find the dress. They needed something large, something the big girls could wear but that would not swallow the smaller girls. Mama Sitole slipped the money to Tami when they found the dress, marked by a large, orange sticker reading “SALE.”

They returned to the township. A group of thirty mamas awaited them, standing in clusters like bees on a honeycomb. Children broke off to run and tag each other through the high field, stalks of half-eared grain. Wind leaned the sheaves of grain atop one another in small layers, like waves of the ocean seen from a mile away.

Mama Sitole opened the door and slung the plastic-covered dress over her shoulder like a cape. The mamas stepped forward, and she opened the dress. It was finally here.

To Tami, the dress looked like something from an under-funded soap opera, hastily assembled from spare, well-worn parts. To the mamas, it was their treasure.

When news of Nikitu's engagement came to the mamas, it was hardly news. They had spoke of it among themselves, prophesied it, expected it like the setting sun. They were a good match, Bobalu and Nikitu. Both were young, lived in KwaZakhele, were attractive: dark-skinned, lean, muscular. She had olive-green eyes set against pearl-white, her teeth bright and perfectly aligned as though she was the daughter of a dentist. Bobalu was trustworthy and hard-working: he already had money for the *lobalu*—a dowry of two cattle—to be given to Nikitu's mother, her father having died a decade before.

The mamas spoke of seeing the dress again; they told their husbands of the wedding. The men only shrugged and returned to their card games or their bottles. Having thought the dress a poor purchase eight years before, they were hardly stirred at the prospect of an entire day soaked up by the proceedings of yet another wedding, even if there was to be food.

Mama Sitole was particularly excited. For her, each wedding was like a rebirthing. It was she who led the brides through the preparations, she who sewed the dress if it ripped, spoke to the missionaries and planned dates to use the church, found an empty shanty for the couple to use on their wedding night, set the schedule for meal deliveries for the new couple, and heralded the best marriage advice from the other mamas. Over time, she had become something of an unspoken leader among the mamas. Hers was a soft power. Whenever disagreements arose, Mama Sitole's quiet verdict would inevitably sway a few of the other women to her position. She altered the rudder of the township silently and ever so cautiously. She feared that making this power known would eradicate it. The Xhosa were a proud people: being led was not in their nature.

With every wedding, and this one in particular, fear arose in Mama Sitole. Nikitu was a stubborn girl. As a child, she had spent a whole day in the river because her friend had bet her she would not. Although most of the mamas praised the girl for her determination, Mama Sitole knew such zealotry should be as much dreaded as praised. A mama needed to be fluid, ever-changing. Mama Sitole worried that Nikitu would not be malleable enough to lead through the wedding, too strong-willed to argue with the other mamas, and too demanding to be taken seriously.

## 3

Nikitu sat by the river. She was often there at sunrise, when fractured light hit the river like flowing pieces of stained glass. She dipped her toe into the water, the coolness of the moisture refreshing her. It would be a long week. The wedding was six days away and there was much to do. Soon, life would change, carried on the shoulders of another, the yoke shared, the weight added. Would she still be able to wake with the birds, walk the township paths to the river, and wait for the sun to rise? Bobalu had a hatred of useless things, and she feared he would see this as such. Though she knew her morning practice was not useless, she could not, even if pressed, come up with any value besides her own enjoyment.

The mamas would be there soon. Mornings meant washing. Soon, a herd of them, with rugged, impenetrable dresses, tied in large knots at their hips, would descend on the river and hold shirts and skirts, jeans and scarves, under the flowing water, dirt collecting under the armpits. They would wring the clothes out and throw them to a child who would run back to a thin line stretching from shanty to shanty and hang the over-saturated garments to dry. Every day Nikitu stood ankle-deep in the mud, a soft grain grazing against her ankles and filling the spaces between her toes, and helped them.

Since she was little, Nikitu had wanted to be a mama. She stayed late into the night as they talked around fires, went to mamas' lunches before weddings, helped make food, plant gardens. Anything they did, she would be beside them, her braids ever at their waists. Now, she felt so close. Marriage would not make her a mama, but soon after, she would inevitably have children and would officially join their ranks.

Their position was a fascinating one, the mamas. Nikitu never bored of hearing them tell of older mamas, those long dead, resurrected only in exaggerated tales of tired, sweat-stained women.

"When I was your age, Nikitu....," they would say. Her back would straighten, hands fall in a clump in her lap. Mama Sitole told her of a legendary mama who settled disputes among gangs, fought off crocodiles when they went after children, and quieted the drunk, unruly men in the street late at night. They were giants, women whose wills held like time, ever-changing yet always the same. Nikitu felt these stories in a near spiritual way.

“That is what a mama does, Nikitu,” Mama Sitole would say. “She protects her township.”

Other girls shied from the mamas. They cared little for the township and wished to move to the paved streets of the city. They heard of neon, saw Polaroids of clubs, restaurants, casinos three stories tall. Cape Town and Johannesburg could have been named heaven, and they would have seen no difference. For Nikitu, however, there was no calling higher than being a mama.

4

Nikitu walked along the paved roads, which formed a skewed rectangle around KwaZakhele. The roads were new, laid by the local government a month before elections to show that they were, in fact, working for the people. The side of the road was lined with women carrying buckets of fruits and berries to sell at wooden stalls, with men with buckets of loose beef, a bag of dismembered bull horns. Outside the paved roads stood houses, real, stucco-walled, multi-roomed houses. Painted bright reds and mint greens, they had gates all around them, dogs barking and sawing the metal bars with their teeth. All who lived in these houses worked in the city as cooks or maids, some as nurses or secretaries. It was hardly even the township. Although they fell within the township’s bounds, the families in the houses had little use for the mamas and their old ways. They formed their own groups, started their own churches, drove to the city, and laughed at the mud-crowned shanties, the fly-dusted outhouses.

But Nikitu did not live there. No, she lived on the other side of the paved roads, the inside, where shanties—thin, wooden frames held together with rummaged nails and sheets of plastic—ran in jagged rows like veins down an arm. It was not until this trip to Mama Sitole’s did Nikitu realize that the paved roads ended at the last row of shanties. They were being boxed in.

The dress hung on a nail sticking out from Mama Sitole’s shanty. Nikitu entered and saw it hanging like some spirit that had chosen to visit them. She passed her hand over the sheer, prickly skirt, bushy and dulled into a grey-white.

“It is not as bright as it was, Nikitu,” Mama Sitole said. “I am sorry for that.”

“Of course, Mama Sitole.”

“Eight years will do that.”

“Yes.” Nikitu moved in small circles, her hands deep in the pocket of her loose, thin pants.

“You look worried.”

“Nervous, I think,” Nikitu said. She spoke quickly as though there was some place she had to be. “I have thought about this for so long, you know. I just want everything to be right.”

“You have thought about what, Nikitu? The wedding or the marriage?”

“Both,” Nikitu said.

“They are very different things.”

“I know, Mama Sitole. I have wanted to be a mama for so long—”

“Oh, I think we all know how much you want to be a mama,” Mama Sitole smiled. “But marriage does not make you a mama, Nikitu.”

“I know. I must have children,” Nikitu said.

“It is hardly just that. Look at me. I have no children, but I am a mama.” Mama Sitole’s one child had died only eight weeks after it was born. The township mourned for the loss of such young life. “It is how you live, what you think about, the actions you take.”

“I will do all of those things, Mama Sitole, I promise.”

“It is not a list of things to do, Nikitu. It is a way to be, a way of life. You do not wake up one morning and decide to be a mama on that day. You wake up a mama.”

“Yes, of course,” Nikitu said. She loved these conversations, small training sessions on the life of adult women. They seemed so romantic, their lives: protectors of their families, of the township; responsible for feeding everyone, clothing them, settling disputes. And although she knew everything Mama Sitole had to say on being a mama, she listened with vigor to every word.

“But that is all work,” Mama Sitole said. “Boring, no-fun work. First comes the fun: the wedding. How is that coming along?”

“It will be here soon. Next Monday.”

“So soon, Nikitu? That is hardly time to plan.”

“We did not want to wait,” Nikitu said.

“Young love,” Mama Sitole said, “so impatient. But of course. You have spent your whole lives apart. It must seem time enough to spend them together.” Nikitu smiled, happy with knowing Mama Sitole approved of the hurried wedding. “What about the dress, Nikitu? Are you planning on making changes to it?”

“Oh, yes,” Nikitu said. “Many changes.”

## 5

Mama Sitole was full of fear as she told the other mamas of Nikitu’s plan for the dress. Before she spoke, she knew what their reaction would be. Their hands would rest on hips, their brows downcast, speaking quickly and angrily, their Xhosa clicks popping like fireflies in the night.

“Nikitu plans to cut the sleeves from the dress,” Mama Sitole said. Silence followed. The mamas were a loud group; laughter filled even the most serious discussions. But here, no one laughed.

“What?” one managed to say.

“She came to collect the dress and when I asked about what changes she wanted to make, she said she wanted to cut the sleeves. She said that she had always hated the sleeves; she said the day would not be right if they were left on.” The mamas, so disgusted, sputtered to speak, like an engine that would not quite turn over.

“Is she going to slit all of our throats with the same knife she uses to cut the dress?”

“Mamas...,” Mama Sitole began before the mamas began speaking to each other and their noise swallowed her voice. They began to remember prophecies they had never made.

“Did I not say she would be trouble?”

“I saw this coming!”

“Those green eyes make her think she is better than all of us.”

“I bet it was that boy, Bobalu. It seems like something he would tell her to do.” The mill churned; the spinners ran, weaving conjectures and proclamations in long strands, which were passed mama to mama, changed slightly, each becoming a new thread—a new color—altering the strand. Mama Sitole stood silent. She was unsure of what to say, even if she should say anything. Sometimes, problems rose and fell with the moon: the mamas would rush about for a day as though life would end and would wake the next morning serene.

This did not seem like one of those times. The dress was not a simple dispute over bathing times. Over the years, with every woman who wore the dress, every mother who sewed the sides for fit, every groom who took his bride into his arms through the white fabric, the dress ingrained itself into the mamas’ idea of the township. Nikitu had been young when Mama Sitole brought the dress back, although she remembered the day. The fire-like whiteness was the most beautiful thing she had seen.

“She is too young to understand,” they said. And it was true. She did not understand the weight the dress carried. To Nikitu, the dress was an object of beauty that would connect her to every bride before her, but she thought little, if at all, of the families who paid for the dress, the mamas who walked miles to work in hot fields on July afternoons in blankets of sweat thick as honey. To the mamas, the dress was the township, and they needed to protect their township.

“We must talk to her,” the mamas said.

## 6

Rain fell in long arches, streaking toward the ground. It was the season wherein every day clouds hovered with malicious possibilities. The people of KwaZakhele buttressed their shanties with buckets, weighted down with rain. They lived off a slope, a small hill blocking them from the highway’s view, and when it rained hard, like it did that night, water collected and carried itself down the slope in a great force.

The warning went out at dinner. Rain is coming, coming hard. The people prepared, covered their clothes in loose plastic, huddled close—body forming body—to keep warm. The first jab of water hit the shanties near midnight. The rain was constant for a few hours; light patters became bear-like fists against their roofs. Children felt as though they were at sea, the mix of awe and terror at the plain of open water. Mama Thiango placed her back against the six-inch shard of open plastic on the side of the shanty and felt the pang of rushing water, pressure building, the sting of a nail on her well-soaked skin.

The first rush came like a cavalry. It was too quick to see, to make out—too much water was coming from everywhere, the cracks, the roof, the ground even, lifting the shirts and towels and shorts and pans from the ground, six inches in two seconds, a collapse like a gunshot from three shanties over, hurried cries from children, breathless, water pouring into their lungs like an open drain, a prayer quickly reworded, a creak, bending, the sound of plastic folding over itself, and so much weight, such a heavy shanty though it looked so light, legs trapped, heels dug, first to her ankles, arms reached in around her thighs, looser now, the air clear into her nose, small hands on her shoulders, water from her ears.

She rolled onto her stomach, up onto her hands and knees. The water was at her five-year-old's waist. He stood holding the hand of his older sister, both pairs of eyes looking at the collapsed shanties surrounding them. "It is okay," Mama Thiango kept telling them, half-believing it. Her arms felt weak, her stomach ready to empty itself.

When morning broke and the water stilled, the families stirred, mamas running street to street, their shins parting waves of water out, shouting into the shanties of their friends. Nearly half of the shanties had been felled. Mama Sitole stepped carefully through the fresh-made lakes, wary of boards with upturned nails.

Families had already begun walking through the township toward Motherwell, toward Kingshead, Madiba Bay. They would lose four families, at least, maybe six. Everything was falling apart. It was all falling apart.

## 7

A young boy, naked save for thin, hole-filled socks, stood next to Nikitu. He pissed at the edge of the river, his eyes wide at the parabola of his urine as though witnessing a miracle. Nikitu saw this and shooed him away. The boy ended his stream and ran from her onto the dirt-worn paths. Though young, he knew every path in the township. His feet aided in their creation with every step. The paths were as much a part of him as his name or the Xhosa language.

Nikitu waited for the mamas. She knew they would be there soon. Mama Sitole warned of their visit. She said they were angry, that they would not be merciful. Nikitu stared at the small puddle the boy had made in the mud.

The river flowed in mosaic, pre-dawn light. It moved quickly. She halved the bridge and laid flat and stretched her arm toward the water. Mist graced the tips of her fingers. As she stood and moved back to her spot on the bank, two small indents engraved where she regularly sat, she saw the mamas approaching like a herd in the distance, their dresses blending into a blur of color.

She tried to ready herself against the anticipatory pain in her stomach. They were close now. Nikitu began to make out faces among the crowd: Mama Thiango, Mama Sixhule, Mama Thanatsitsi, many more. Women she had known since birth, who had protected her since birth, now stood before her, their faces fueled with anger. She must defend herself, she must convince them. Her mouth, half-open, perched, ready to spring, was stopped by the mamas' rising voices.

"How dare you, Nikitu! How dare you, girl," one mama said.

"Since when do you decide how everything will be for all of us?"

"It is not your place, Nikitu," they said.

"Do you think you are more special than the other girls, than my daughter? Did your mother pay more than the rest of us for the dress?"

"What arrogance! You have always thought you were better than we are," they said. It continued in this way, each mama snapping at her like a pack of dogs around a carcass.

"How will the other girls feel when they see the dress in tatters?"

"Cutting the arms! I have never heard such selfishness."

"You are one of us, Nikitu, one of us! Not better than us." Nikitu tried to look at each of the women as they spoke, but their accusations were strung together so solidly without pause or break, often overlapping by a few words, that it was difficult for her to see who spoke. It was becoming too much. Nikitu felt such great weight upon her. Her eyes began to burn; she was near tears. Mama Sitole, who had stayed silent, stepped forward.

“Nikitu, talk to us,” she said. “Please. Tell us why you are doing this.” Mama Sitole’s face was not enraged like the other mamas’. It was the soft, round face Nikitu had always seen, always remembered. Fixing upon Mama Sitole, Nikitu softly began.

“I mean no disrespe—”

“You give disrespect whether you mean to or not!” a mama said.

“Mamas, please,” Mama Sitole said. “Let her finish.”

“I mean no disrespect,” Nikitu said. Her dry throat struggled to swallow. “I only want my wedding to be like I have always thought of it. I know that is not enough for you, and I’m sorry. But I know that it is for me. I only want to be honest with you.”

“Nikitu,” a mama said, “if you do this, you will never see me or my children again.” The wet pockets of moisture in Nikitu’s eyes opened and fell freely.

“Please, no,” Nikitu said. “You can sew the sleeves back on. I will sew them on. Anything! I simply wish to have the choice. All I want is the choice. I do not want to hurt anyone.”

“It will look the same, but it will not be the same. You cannot change this township at your whim, Nikitu.”

“I cannot sit and watch as one of our own tears our dress apart!” a mama said, her voice rising like a politician’s before a crowd.

“But is it not my dress as well?” Nikitu said.

“It is yours as much as it is mine,” Mama Sitole said, “and as much as it is each of ours here.”

“But it is not only you and Nikitu here, Mama Sitole,” they said. “There are many of us.”

“Is it solely a game of numbers, then?” Nikitu said.

“It is not about numbers, Nikitu. It is about doing what is right for the families in the township,” a mama said. A chorus hummed in agreement.

“You who want to be a mama more than anything,” another said, “who have spent so much time with us, washing every day, cooking every night. How could you not see the pain this would cause? The happiness this would destroy?”

“Mamas, I do not understand,” Nikitu said. “Am I not one of you? Is not *my* happiness important as well?”

“Not more than the entire township, Nikitu, no,” one said. “One person does not mean more than twenty families.”

“But, mamas, those families are only groups of individual people,” Nikitu said. She was straining now, her arms bent at right angles. They continued in this way, Nikitu questioning the mamas, the mamas responding in kind. Mama Sitole remained quiet. She stood away from the group of mamas, between them and Nikitu, looking upon them all as though apparitions in a dream from which she could not wake. The high grass behind her leaned away, pulled by a slow-moving wind, bowing to a deity she could not see.

This is what Mama Sitole did not want, the township at enmity with itself. They faced enough burdens in the township, from the government, the cities, the migrations of homeless women and children sleeping in their streets. There was no need to crumble from the inside.

For this reason, she wished Nikitu would surrender: for peace. Agree with the mamas; wear the dress as it was; leave the sleeves be; change nothing. Were this to happen, she knew there would still be damage between Nikitu and the mamas—smoke was still the remnant of fire—but such pain would, in time, heal.

Yet another part of her knew Nikitu was right. She was, as a mama, supposed to protect the township. But from whom was she protecting it here?

“Enough already!” the mamas said. “You cannot do this, Nikitu. You will lose all of us.”

“I must,” she said, quietly. She spoke with a newfound resolve, as though revelation had demanded she stand strong. Her eyes wanted to fall to the ground in deference, but she held them upright. “It may not seem clear to you, but I must do this.”

“I will not go to the wedding of the one who does these things,” a mama said, turning to the group.

“We will not go,” the group said among itself. “None of us will go.”

“You will be all alone, Nikitu,” a mama said. “All alone at your own wedding. And who will you have once the ceremony ends? Just Bobalu? You will be a building made of only one wall. One cannot

survive like that. You need us.” They were right, Nikitu thought; she did need them. She had never needed them before, for she had always had them. With the sight of their protection and influence nearly out of reach, Nikitu felt panicked. She grasped at the hem of the cotton shirt she wore, twisted its loose, dry fabric. The mamas had shaped her life, guided her, protected her. Nikitu realized that it was this that was so frightening to them: one of their own, a girl they had so thoroughly influenced, seemingly turning against them.

With their threat made, the mamas turned to leave. Mama Sitole held a moment longer. Stalks of grain around them scraped against each other, each hit sounding like a small clap. Mama Sitole looked at Nikitu. Nikitu’s eyes were fire-red, her face nearly crumpled, battle-tired hands loosely hung at her side.

Mama Sitole said nothing. She knew she should speak, but could not find words either to tell Nikitu to maintain her resolve or to give in. Only silence came, a long gap filled with emptiness.

After a few moments, Mama Sitole walked away from Nikitu, following the dirt paths to the center of the township, followed by soft sobs.

## 8

Late in the night, Nikitu walked the township paths to Mama Sitole’s shanty. Normally, the trip pleased her. She had loved to walk late at night, alone with the bareness of the township, the quiet hiss of the slow-moving river, dogs pawing at the plastic of shanties in the cold. She would look at closed doors with happiness, knowing that those who slept within would greet her later that morning with a firm embrace. But now, as she walked, her heart slammed against its cell. And though the mamas would have been asleep, she felt the gaze of their shanties upon her as though she were walking to her death.

She woke Mama Sitole and quickly told her that she would not change the dress. She would give in, go along with the dress as it was. There would be peace.

When the mamas heard of Nikitu’s change of mind, they were pleased. It was not, however, considered a victory among them. The very fact that the battle needed to be fought constituted a failure. They tutted along, quietly chiding themselves and Nikitu with a calm “One of our own....”

Mama Sitole broached the idea of the wedding with the mamas.

“I believe we should go,” she said, “and show our support. Let her know that we are still there for her.”

“Of course,” they said, “of course. We gave our word. We will keep it.” It was settled; in two days the mamas would attend the wedding, sit like the rest of Nikitu’s family in calm anticipation for the dinner to follow.

Nikitu’s threat of disobedience having been eliminated, the mamas settled into comfort again. Mama Sitole, however, remained worried. She felt unsure of everything as she worked through the day, having to stop and re-wash, re-plant, and re-cook. “Your mind has run off today, Mama Sitole!” the other mamas said. She thought back to Nikitu, who sat alone in her shanty, ashamed to show herself. What took place remained mysterious to her; she searched for a cipher, some way of translating the events into ones that made sense.

Would others in the township be hurt by Nikitu’s actions? Mama Sitole knew they would not. There might have been a couple whose hearts stung for a moment at the sight of the dress, but when the wedding was over, she could sew the sleeves back onto the dress.

Eight years before, when the dress was purchased, things were different, and Nikitu was only just beginning to understand the nature of the changes. Before, families would move from the township weekly, in large droves, having heard prophecies of a large harvest near Cape Town or Johannesburg and believing they could make it there and find a job before anyone else. The ever-constant change of families made the township unstable. One’s neighbor could move in the night without ever telling a soul, and the next morning their shanty would be filled by another family. The dress was an investment, a sign of permanence. It was no wonder the mamas sought to protect it so strongly.

Somewhere in the night, deep in thought, staring through the slit on the ceiling of her shanty at a dead-black sky, Mama Sitole realized she wanted Nikitu to cut the sleeves from the dress. It was not that she simply recognized it would happen; she found within herself an active, virulent desire for the sleeves to be cut. There was no use pretending. The floods had sent five families from the township, and not half

an hour had passed before other families raided the remains of the shanties for half-dry boards and nails to rebuild their own houses.

The wedding was the following morning. Huddled under two loose, long blankets, Mama Sitole thought of all the brides who wore the dress. She remembered their names, knew the names of their children as well. She had been by many of their sides as they delivered. She thought of those who remained in the township and those who had left, sought jobs in the city or in a township near the Eastern Cape. She felt as though she would cry, but before a tear fell, she passed into sleep.

## 9

The night was cold. Families slept close together in their shanties. Wind forced itself against walls, beating the plastic in waves. Fires stood in the streets, hands grazed over the flames with care, like hands of healers moving over broken bones. Clouds covered the moon, the only light came from the fires. Nikitu sat in her shanty, back against the wall, her body at a near-perfect right angle. The bushy skirt of the dress scratched against her bare right arm. It hung on the wall like a ghost, the hem two feet from the ground.

On the mat beside her, Nikitu's mother slept, snoring loudly, the sound escaping the trap of her throat. She had drunk all day, Nikitu was sure. Tomorrow she would be fine, her hair pinned back, a green dress wound around her thin body. Her red eyes would hardly move.

Nikitu nearly fell asleep four or five times during the night. She did not want to stay awake, but every time she neared sleep, she pulled herself back into the woken world. A dozen padded feet tapped past, a troop of dogs heading for the warmth of a fire. The wedding was hours away. Soon, light would scrape over the ranges in the distance, form a pink-yellow hue in the sky and then, like a forgery, in the river's reflection. And she was not ready. Not to face them, not now. Through the night, she told herself that her decision had to stick. She could not go back on it now. The dress must remain as it was. Yet, each time she repeated this to herself, she knew it to be less and less true. Revelation came with the ease of water being poured.

She moved quickly, reaching for scissors and bringing them close. She pulled the dress from the wall and laid it across her lap so it bridged her thighs. It cut easily. Euphoric, Nikitu sheered through the fabric above the thick shoulders. She breathed heavily, each tug of air wheezing through her teeth. The scissors' hinge was loose and made a squeak with each cut, yet Nikitu formed this into a rhythm and continued. In only moments, the deed was done. The severed arms lay at her sides, their openings against the tip of her fingers.

She did not worry about the mamas, nor about the wedding. Somewhere nearby, a bottle smashed against the ground. She curled her knees to her chest, the sweat of her forehead draining down to her upper lip, and there, in the heat of that cold night, she fell asleep.

## 10

A council of smokestacks overlooked the township. Large, metallic cylinders, they were visible from every house, every street. Black smoke puffed from the stacks, one hundred feet in the air. The mamas smelled the smoke as they hurried into the church.

They were uncomfortable with the wedding services held at the church. Traditional Xhosa weddings were very different, but since so many, including Nikitu and Bobalu's family, had joined the new church the missionaries started, they had begun to use the missionaries' services.

The day had warmed; the church was hot. With bodies too close to each other, the tangy ping of sweat reached every nostril. There were no worries in the church. All held the calmness and serenity of a sacred event. It was uncommon for them to see each other in this vein. Normally, they were a raucous group who needed little encouragement to begin a loud celebration. But here they sat, molded by the unwritten agreement of silence signed at the entrance.

There was not a concern among the mamas as to how the wedding would go. They sat with the assurance of recent victors, on their faces a cemented smile, hands stitched together in their laps like those of a guru. Mama Sitole, who sat on the other side of the church, was not so sure. The night before, as she lay awake, trying to count the small shoots of light in the sky, she realized that their plans would not



work. Nikitu was stronger than that, she thought. The girl learned her stubbornness from the mamas and would now, Mama Sitole thought, turn it back on them.

The missionary invoked the service, a long prayer in Xhosa, the clicks of a white man nearly making them laugh, so soft, so prolonged. The missionary prayed for wisdom and for discernment, for an aura of peace to fall over the service and over the couple.

As she stood outside the door, Nikitu offered a prayer to her ancestors. Though they were long dead, she asked them to help her now. When she raised her eyes, the doors opened. The light of outside was replaced by a person-filled tunnel. The aisle led to Bobalu standing near the front, the missionary beside him. Her eyes attempted to adjust. The altar was framed by the doorway, an odd painting, waiting for its subject.

Nikitu stepped into view, and the mamas gasped. Where they had expected white, there was black. Long, thin black arms hung from the dress, angel-haired strands of fabric draped against them and sashayed as she moved, like grain in the wind. The halo-stained armpits still remained, the mud-drenched hem as well. Pins held the sides of the dress tight against her body. She looked like a movie star, the young girls thought; their little sisters thought she looked like a princess, a real one.

She found it hard to smile, as though recognizing her happiness would be lessening that of others. So she stood stoic, waiting for the missionary to extend his hand so she could come forward.

As his arm began to move, chairs rustled on the right-hand side of the church. It was the mamas. They were leaving. One by one, they loudly scooted the chairs against the cement floor, stood, and walked down the center aisle. Nikitu stood at the door still, directly upon the threshold. The group stood bottlenecked. They waited for Nikitu's figure to move and allow them passage out. But she did not move. She stood, her eyes fountains of tears, with a calm resolve.

"You lied to us, Nikitu," they said quietly. Anger filled their voices, the clicks slammed from their tongues like gunshots.

"I am sorry," Nikitu said.

"No more," they said. "You will have no more to do with us." Nikitu withstood for a moment more. Then, like a cracked dam behind so much water, she stepped aside and the mamas passed. Some demanded her eyes, staring with such pointedness that Nikitu feared it would be that look she remembered. Others refused her even a glance. They held their heads taut and straight, and moved quickly through the door.

When the whole of them had left, the room stood still, save for Nikitu's sobs. Another chair rustled. Nikitu raised her head and saw Mama Sitole making her way back.

"No, no, no, no, Mama Sitole, not you, too," Nikitu said. The cries came louder now, her face folding in on itself, her eyes disappearing into thin slits from which water drained. Yet, Mama Sitole had not stood to leave. As she moved to the back, she raised her large, rounded arms and wrapped them around Nikitu, whose breath left her. Nikitu breathed deeply to recover, her arms craned around Mama Sitole, her eyes wetting the shoulder of the Sunday dress they rested upon.

"Come, now. Walk with me. We must go on," Mama Sitole said. Her arm hooked Nikitu's side and pulled her slightly down the aisle of the church. A mass of chairs were empty to their left.

At the front, Bobalu stood with ignorant confusion and silence. The missionary, having not known what to do, stood still. Mama Sitole stood with Nikitu two feet from the altar.

"I will make it right again, Nikitu," she whispered. She smiled at the girl. Nikitu could not force a smile. Instead, she turned to the missionary and nodded. The service began.

Mama Sitole sat alone in her row. She had not expected this, though she recognized, even after it had happened, that she had wanted it. She could not help but smile. Pain would follow. A stream of hatred and anger so virulent would flow through the township at her and at Nikitu. But they would survive it. What influence she had over the mamas would be gone, but such a thing was worth being lost.

For now, Nikitu would stay by the river, endure the shouts and curses from the mamas, wash alone in early morning light, move through the paths of the township with great care. But one day she would join them. One day when a new government policy united all the mamas or a disease took another newborn, they would find each other again. She would wash with them, gossip with them, cook with them, laugh with them. She would be a mama.

And for the first time in many years, Mama Sitole felt as though she had done what a mama was meant to do: she protected the township.

# Searching: A Collection of Poems

Rachael Blaylock

Tyner Prize for Poetry

Nominated by C. Vincent Samarco, Professor of English



Rachael Blaylock is from Saint Charles, Michigan, and graduated in May 2015 with a major in graphic design and a double minor in creative writing and art. A Roberts Fellow and a former Writing Center tutor, she received the Seitz Creative Writing Scholarship in 2014. The idea for this collection of poetry came out of her creative writing seminar course; she then developed the pieces independently with the help of Dr. C. Vince Samarco and fellow creative writing student, Allison Sterken.

Poetry, Rachael says, allows her to explore personal questions of identity and purpose through the lens of the written word. This process results in pieces that go beyond a specific experience to resonate with the unique questions posed by whomever is engaging with her work at any given moment. This idea of engaging with personal struggle to answer larger questions also inspires her artwork and the young adult novel that is her current writing project. Rachael's future plans are to have her novel ready for publication by the end of this year and to seek adventure and new questions wherever she can, both in her personal and professional life.

## Treasure Hunt

I left work early, headed home, slid the deadbolt into place and went upstairs to stare at myself in the mirror. I stared until my eyes burned, bulged. Watched my hands pluck off my clothes, then start to peel away my skin. It took a while. There were lots of layers.

Finally, I was open. Inside me was a pile of tangled objects, knotted together like a squirrel's collection of shiny things. I reached between my ribs, dug around with hungry fingers. It took hours to find everything.

There were at least a dozen keys. Rusted beyond use and one without a handle. A tortoise comb, teeth broken, gnarled. A scrap of white satin, stained brown at one corner. Two baby rattles on a ring: one of pewter, one of plastic. Nubs of crayons with odd names like "Utah Bee-Utah-Ful" and "Screamin' Green." A pocket watch that had a chain and that still ticked. A light switch with nothing attached.

My reflection handed me each piece. I touched every side before I set it on the floor. Each one to its own spot, rippling out from where my naked toes were burrowed into the carpet.

There were rocks at the very bottom. Bits of gravel that had sunk between the bigger baubles like water falling through oil. They were the color of clay and smelled of salt. I held the rocks in both hands, arms rigid in front of me. I watched my fingers creak apart and the dust begin to slip out. A pebble waterfall trickled to my feet.

When all the rocks were gone, I crossed my arms, looked at my design. I stared until I could read all the invisible lines of my past. I frowned. They told a story I didn't want to hear.

I looked back up at my reflection, a question in my eyes. It couldn't help me. We were both empty now. So I smoothed the layers back over the hole under my ribs, locked the door behind me as I walked out of the room. Out to find new treasures. I didn't notice the dusty red handprints I'd left on my arms.

## Looking through Rose Windows

She shatters in my embrace. She's become stained glass, beautiful despite the sharp, jagged edges left in her design. My arms are a sanctuary where her sadness can be safely released. I wince as sobs

clench around her ribs, punching more shards out of place. I'm near enough for slivers of hurt to reach me, cutting dangerously deep.

This woman of glass is precious to me. As children, we made our bunk beds a time capsule. We became Anne Shirley and Diana Barry or the Pevensie sisters. We conquered Middle Earth, created worlds where we were both the distressed damsels and the heroes. But not even my imagination is strong enough to give this story a happy ending.

Her surrender doesn't last long. She pulls away, locks up all the tears she isn't ready to release. Her fragile hands flutter against her black dress. She strokes her too-soon flattened stomach with a soft, protective gesture. She was made to hold sunlight, reflect it as a rainbow onto everyone around her. But stained glass seems useless when the sun is gone.

Heat burns up my throat and behind my eyes. Five months isn't long enough. Five months is a broken ritual that leaves you with nothing but questions.

"She's in heaven now," she whispers to herself.

I can't answer. I just keep staring at her stomach, hoping that colored light will pour back through the glass if I watch close enough.

### Tag

Settle your dirt-caked messenger bag securely on your hip. Listen to the spray cans clink inside like pirate gold tapping together. Move confidently, carelessly.

Slip/walk down the steep bank, turned hazardous from days of rain. Feel the grey sludge seep through boots still too big for you. Slosh to the bridge through half-frozen trash and tired cattails. Slide close to its underbelly, the moldy bricks marked by travelers here before you. These designs in the dark are your Bible, better than human arms.

Curl your fingers around a dented can. The touch of its cold skin shoots up your arm. Pull it out. Shake it. The wet hiss of air washing color over stone. The only light reflected street lamps. It's all you need.

Endless cars rumble above you. Count the thuds as each set of tires hits the metal grating of the dying bridge. They overlap, syncopate. A drumbeat inside your head.

You watch your hand follow that beat in choppy, memorized strokes. Curved line at the top, then sharp turn. Go back in to add a shadow in the iris. Soon, the wall is staring back at you. You've given it a soul.

It's a soul both known and unknown. It's where you came from, only it never bothered to tell you that. A soul you search for, and until you find it, you mark all the walls you can find.

Until he understands he's it.

# Standardized Testing Anxieties: Problems and Solutions

Kelsey Setla

Robert S. P. Yien First-Year Writing Award, First Place  
Nominated by Sherrin Frances, Assistant Professor of English



A sophomore majoring in education, Kelsey Setla is a Foundation Scholar.

The following excerpt from Kelsey's prize-winning essay captures her own experiences with standardized testing in high school. The First-Year Writing judges appreciated that Kelsey's paper not only clearly presented a variety of issues surrounding standardized testing, but that it also offered possible solutions: "The level of critical thinking here is very high, and the voice she has adopted in the paper is both professional and readable. She has seamlessly woven together a variety of essay types, ranging from personal narrative to concept analysis to formal proposal, and she used relevant scholarly research throughout to support her claims. The paper shows a high level of skill in all areas."

"Good morning, students. Juniors, you will be reporting to the cafeteria for ACT preparations after the bell rings. Do not be late...." The familiar, unamused voice of my high school's crabby secretary continued on, but my mind had immediately gone blank once I heard the words "ACT preparations."

The buzz of the morning continued wildly around me. Freshmen were, well, being freshmen. Several rowdy girls stood near the entrance to the only decent bathroom, as they always did, gossiping about how they "absolutely adored" Robin Thicke's new song. A group of baseball boys was standing a few feet away from me talking about how they were going to "totally crush" the opposing team that night at the game—even though they all knew better than that. My best friend, Karlee, even disregarded the announcement and continued to ramble on about our terrible calculus teacher giving us a pop quiz the day before.

Everyone seemed to be unaffected by the announcement, but not me; I was in a complete swirl of panic. I had been so sidetracked for weeks in anticipation of the concert that I was attending the following weekend that I had totally forgotten about the ACT. I had not even looked at a single college, let alone an entire career. When I peered up at Karlee, her face had twisted in confusion. I opened my mouth to speak, but I did not even know how to explain the jumbled thoughts running around in my brain. Just then, the morning bell started to "ding" to signal the start of the day. I mumbled under my breath "here we go" and took the first of many dubious steps toward the cafeteria. Everyone had quickly scattered in a rush to get to class. Now just Karlee and I were in the silent hallway, our footsteps echoing on the solid concrete beneath our feet.

As we reached our separated seats, we looked at each other across the room in disappointment. The staff had decided to organize our seats alphabetically to "discourage distractions." Did they not know that I had no idea what I was doing? Of course not. How could they possibly know that I had overlooked the most important test of my life? I felt sick to my stomach. The combination of rancid school food and my nervousness was unbearable. I could have easily risen from my seat and made a run for the nearest toilet.

Instead, I took a deep breath, held it in for a second, and then let it go with a loud gust of air. I looked to my left and saw a thin, freckled girl who seemed almost too calm, and I looked to my right where a large boy with several facial piercings sat uninterested. I shot each of my neighbors a sheepish smile. There were strangers on both sides of me, which intensified my uneasiness about the whole situation. All of a sudden, the boy on my right, Andrew—I knew his name because I had read the top of his paper—reached over and tapped me on the shoulder. "Hey, girl. Can I have a pencil?" he inquired.

The first thought that came to my mind was a sarcastic one: “I don’t know, *can you?*” But I held back and reluctantly handed him my only extra pencil. I knew I would never see it again. After several moments, my demeanor changed drastically. That immense stress I was feeling over the ACT and choosing a career, and eventually a college, had faded. I wanted to reach around and hug that boy to death and tell him he was a lifesaver—not because I am a weirdo, but because I had just experienced the greatest epiphany of my life in that moment.

I knew what I wanted to do with my life! I knew exactly what I could be great at. The fact that Andrew had asked me a simple question and my initial reaction was to correct his grammar was all I needed. I wanted to be an educator. It had always been something I wanted to do as a child, but I had never seriously considered it before. After all, “teachers do not make a lot of money and they have to go to school forever,” or so they say. Suddenly however, all those snide remarks had become irrelevant. I knew that I was passionate about assisting people, and I wanted to pursue a career where I could make an impact on people’s lives as well as continue to gain knowledge. What career is better for that than teaching? I hastily bubbled in my career choice and selected a couple colleges that sounded like they could be interesting.

When I finally peered up from my paper, I felt a sense of relief. It felt like the weight of the world had been lifted off of my shoulders, literally. I was baffled and refreshed at the same time. I felt my mouth slowly twisting into a proud and triumphant smile as I stared at my one-of-a-kind mentor, Andrew. He must have felt my stare because, not a moment later, he rudely remarked, “Can I help you with something?” I just smiled, stood up, pushed in my creaky chair, and replied, “Nope.” As I left the empty halls and pushed through the large metal doors, the only things on my mind were lunch, a nap, and that all-too-distracting concert.

# Work Application Portfolio

Kara Stedry

Diane Boehm e-Portfolio Award



Kara Stedry is a student in SVSU's Master of Science in Occupational Therapy program. From the small town of Hemlock, Michigan, she graduates in December 2015 and plans on working in pediatrics. Kara is a member of the Student Occupational Therapy Association at SVSU and is involved in the occupational therapy mentor program.

She created her e-Portfolio to show potential employers what she has accomplished during her graduate studies at SVSU. The challenges she faced while constructing her portfolio included learning to use the website and organizing her content. Her e-Portfolio can be accessed at <http://karastedry.weebly.com>.

# Classroom Portfolio

## Jordan Boulier

Diane Boehm e-Portfolio Award



Jordan Boulier is a graduate student in the Master of Science in Occupational Therapy program at SVSU. With special interests in pediatric and mental health practices, she plans to apply for a full-time position as a traveling occupational therapist upon graduating in December 2015.

Jordan initially created her e-Portfolio to fulfill a course assignment for Occupational Therapy 660 (Professional Role Transitions) in the winter semester of 2015. Jordan feels that the process of developing her e-Portfolio improved her writing skills, her ability to self-reflect, and, above all, her patience with technology.

She advises other students who are interested in creating a portfolio to “[s]ave everything. Keeping all earned certificates, brochures, verifications of attendance for conferences [and] lectures, and pictures organized is crucial... when trying to determine what to highlight in your portfolio. Uploading more visual stimuli, [like] certificates and brochures, will help give the viewer further insight into what you’ve accomplished, which is important because there may be times when you won’t be able to guide an interviewer through the portfolio verbally.”

Jordan believes e-Portfolios serve as a showcase of technological and design skills and are far easier to update than printed portfolios. She has already used her e-Portfolio in fieldwork-related correspondences, and she intends to continue updating her e-Portfolio for future job applications. Jordan’s e-Portfolio can be accessed online at <http://jordanboulrier.weebly.com>.

# Crop Report: Sugar Beets

Landon Zwerk

S. K. Yun Science Award

Nominated by Holly Little, Lecturer of Biology



A junior studying business management, Landon Zwerk is a fourth-generation farmer, working weekends at his family's 7,000-acre operation that grows sugar beets, wheat, corn, and beans in Vassar, Michigan. Landon's passions for business and farming complement one another, forming the basis for his long-term goal: owning and managing Zwerk & Sons Farms. He says, "I think many people have the misconception that farming is just a bunch of big machinery and growing crops, but that is only half of it. What many people don't see or consider is the business aspect of farming. There's so much going on behind the scenes, [like] marketing, management, economics, accounting and so on." This paper was written for his Fall 2013 BIO 104 plants and civilization course, in which each student had to present a report about the journey of a plant—from weed to domesticated crop—and its economic, nutritional and cultural uses. He received the Yun Award in Fall 2014.

Renowned English writer Samuel Johnson once said, "Agriculture not only gives riches to a nation, but the only riches she can call her own." Since the beginning of time, agriculture has been the epitome of life, and historically speaking, when families needed to survive, they didn't turn to law school, Wall Street, or Hollywood; they depended on agriculture. Although crops such as corn and beans had undeniable significance in the development of agricultural society throughout the years, sugar beets are in a league of their own. With beet sugar accounting for about 40% of the world's commercial sugar, it is safe to say that the sugar beet is essential to life as we know it (Asadi 18). Sugar beets play an essential role not only in Mid-Michigan's tri-counties, but in the state, America, and the world as a whole.

The first step in understanding the sugar beet's importance involves knowing about its structure and physical characteristics. The sugar beet is similar in structure to a carrot or turnip. Beets have a cluster of dark-green leaves protruding out of a short, stocky stem known as the crown (Wyse 962); beneath the crown is the cone-shaped root known as the beet (962). Sugar beets are known as taproots because of their root system. Taproot systems have one main root that is produced from the seedling root (Mauseth 30). This large, fleshy root is what the farmers harvest. This taproot can extend anywhere from two to five feet into the soil, allowing the plant to obtain water that lies far underground (Wyse 962). Branching off of the taproot are smaller roots called root hairs. These root hairs aid in extracting water and nutrients from the soil to provide for the rest of the plant.

The next step in understanding the sugar beet's significance is analyzing its origin and history. The sugar beet is said to have received its scientific name, *beta vulgaris*, from the Greek letter *beta* because the swollen, turnip-like root resembles a Greek *B* (Harveson). The oldest known beet type, chard, was domesticated around 2000 B.C. and was grown by both the Greeks and Romans (Harveson). The people of ancient Babylonia and Egypt also grew sugar beets (Wyse 962). It is said that beets were offered to Apollo, the Greek and Roman god of sun, light, music, medicine and healing, because they were considered an aphrodisiac ("Beets"). Additionally, one source reminds us that according to "mythology, Aphrodite is said to have eaten beets to retain her beauty, and in folk magic, if a man and woman eat from the same beet, they will fall in love" ("Beets"). Leaving the worlds of myth and magic, we find that in 1799, a German man named Franz Achard developed a practical method of removing sugar from sugar beets, which resulted in multiple factories springing up throughout Europe and Russia (Wyse 962). Beet sugar production finally made its way to the United States in 1838, with the first successful U.S. beet-processing factory being established in Alvarado, California, by a man named E.H. Dyer (962). Early attempts at creating a beet sugar factory in Michigan failed in 1838 in the White Pigeon area, but beet sugar production reappeared in Bay City in 1898 (Henley and Ojala 4). Thus, it can be said that Michigan's beet sugar industry originated in Bay City (4). Since then, huge advances have been made in the sugar beet industry. To help put this statement into perspective, here are a few statistics: the average



yield per acre of sugar beets in 1900 was 8.2 tons per acre in Michigan, as opposed to 28 tons per acre in 2012 (18). Michigan's average sugar beet production in 1910 was 940,000 tons compared to 4 million tons in 2012, and Michigan's average beet sugar production in 1900 was 67,500 tons, which has grown to 535,000 tons in 2012 (18). This historical information, facts about sugar beet background, and numbers detailing production growth are all important if we are to understand the sugar beet's current role in our society.

Another component in the sugar beet's story is the planting process. In Michigan, sugar beets are generally planted in early April, weather permitting. Most farmers harvest sugar beets after their first growing season, or after vegetative growth. In this sense, they are known as perennials. If the beets are not harvested for vegetative purposes, they will eventually grow flowers, which, in turn, produce seeds (beets are naturally biennial). These seeds have developed greatly over the years. Perhaps the most ground-breaking development came about six years ago with the introduction of Roundup ready beet seed. Prior to this breakthrough, farmers had a difficult time killing weeds in their fields. They could spray different variants of herbicides on their fields, which would kill the weeds but also slightly harm the beets in the process, lowering overall yields. Roundup-ready beet seeds brought a solution to this problem. Now farmers can spray the Roundup herbicide on their fields and kill the weeds without damaging the beets because the beets are now resistant to Roundup. This advancement has had a huge effect on the sugar beet industry, contributing immensely to the rise in production growth stated earlier.

Throughout the growing season, sugar beets require great amounts of maintenance to achieve maximum yields. This required maintenance is necessary to counteract the many hazards that can affect sugar beets. There are four main yield-limiting hazards that affect sugar beets' growth: weeds or other plants, fungus or diseases, insects or other pests, and weather. Weeds and other plants can be controlled by spraying herbicide chemicals on the crops, which kills the unwanted weeds. Such an example, as previously recognized, is Roundup. Fungus and other diseases, which present the greatest threat to beets, can be controlled by spraying fungicides. Insects and other pests, such as ringworm, can be controlled by chemicals known as pesticides. Weather is a risk to sugar beets because it cannot be controlled. Conditions such as hail, insufficient rain (which can be countered by irrigation), excess rain, and early and late freezing temperatures all pose a threat to sugar beets' growth.

Perhaps the most publicly recognized part of sugar beets is the harvesting (cultivation) process. Sugar beet harvest is generally started around the second week of September, depending on when processing plants open. Many Michigan residents have become accustomed to seeing, at this time of year, semi-trucks piled high with sugar beets hogging the road, or orchestrated farm equipment bustling about in the fields. There is a method to this madness though. The harvesting process begins with what is known as "topping" the beets: a piece of equipment that has spinning rubber strips beats the leaves off of the beets, leaving only the crown and beet root. Next, the harvester comes and digs the beets out of the ground. For each row of beets, the harvester has two angled discs that dig into the dirt and pluck the beets out of the ground. After the beets are pulled from the ground, the harvester removes as much dirt from them as possible before dumping them either into a beet transportation cart or a semi-truck. If the beets are dumped into a beet transportation cart, the cart then transports the beets to an awaiting semi-truck. This truck then takes the beets either to a beet piling ground or to a sugar beet processing plant.

On Friday, November 1, 2013, I had the unique opportunity to take a tour of the Michigan Sugar processing factory in Bay City. Through this tour, I learned the entire procedure of beet sugar processing from the field to the shelf. The process starts as trucks arrive at the factory from the fields. The sugar beets are dumped and taken up a large tower known as the dry-screen. This process removes most of the dirt from the beets, as well as any fieldstones that are mixed in with the beets. From the dry screen, the beets enter the factory and go to the washer. The washer adds water to the beets while spinning and churning them to remove any remaining dirt. After the beets exit the washer, they enter the slicers where they are cut into French fry-like strips called cossettes. From the slicers, the cossettes are fed into extracting towers known as diffusers. In the diffusers, sugar is removed from the cossettes by osmosis. To start, the cossettes are put into a large tank with a small amount of water. As water is added, the sugar moves from the higher sugar concentration areas (cossettes) to the water where the sugar concentration is lower. This process is repeated three times to extract as much sugar as possible. The sugary liquid that results from this process is known as raw juice. When the remaining depleted cossettes are removed, ground up, and cooled, this creates the sugar by-product known as pulp. Next, lime is added to the raw

juice, which filters out one-third of the sugar's impurities. Carbon dioxide is then eventually added to remove the lime from the raw juice. The liquid that remains after this extraction phase is called molasses, the second by-product of sugar beets. By the time this phase is complete, 92% of potential sugar has been extracted. When the raw juice then exits the diffusers, it moves on to the evaporators, which heat the juice to remove the majority of water. This leftover syrupy-liquid is then taken to the crystallizers, which play a very important role in purification. The crystallizers boil, stir, and cool the juice, and sugar crystals then form. After the crystallizers, the sugar crystals enter the centrifugals with a brownish color. According to one source, the centrifugals spin at a rate of 600 revolutions per minute while spraying bursts of water onto the sugar. The outward force pushes the water through the sugar, cleaning it until it is bright white in color. The sugar is then scraped off of the centrifugal walls and moves on to the drying and cooling phase. From there, the sugar is packaged and shipped, making it the third by-product of sugar beets (Pfenninger).

While touring the Michigan Sugar factory, I was amazed by the number of workers there. It is hard to fully comprehend the magnitude of the impact sugar beets have on the economy: "The beet sugar industry plays an important role in the economy of sugar-producing countries, which employ large numbers of people to grow sugar beets, to produce sugar, and to support sugar-related areas such as sales, service, and research" (Asadi 18). In 2007, about 77,000 U.S. jobs depended on the sugar beet industry (18). This number becomes even more meaningful when one considers that sugar beets are only really raised in about eleven states: North Dakota, Minnesota, Michigan, California, Oregon, Idaho, Washington, Colorado, Nebraska, Montana, and Wyoming (Harveson). In these states, and in the other sugar beet-producing countries, sugar beets play a huge role in society and culture. To these people, sugar beets are more than just a crop; they are a way of life.

It is safe to say that just about everyone likes sugar, but not everyone knows where their sugar comes from, or how big of a role it plays in their lives. Sugar is a carbohydrate, meaning that it provides energy for the body (Mauseth 317), and there are seemingly endless uses for sugar beet by-products. Pulp is mainly used for livestock feed. Beet molasses is also used for livestock feed as well as in yeast production. (The molasses seen in stores comes from sugar cane.) Sugar is by far the most versatile by-product of sugar beets. Sugar is used in food and drinks (alcoholic and non-alcoholic), hygiene products, medicines, cleaning supplies, and many more things. Sugar often has a negative reputation, typically linked to obesity and tooth decay, but these problems lie solely with the consumer. Eating anything in excess is bad for the human body, so poor health is not just limited to sugar. Sugar is a large component of numerous everyday products and is a vital nutrient in a human's everyday diet; it just needs to be consumed in moderation.

After examining seemingly every aspect of the sugar beet from its origin to its characteristics, cultivation processes, nutritional value, and nearly everything in between, I have more insight as to why the sugar beet is significant to life as we know it today. The sugar beet industry has grown right alongside this nation, prospering through the hard work and determination of its growers. When looking back at Johnson's wise words, "Agriculture not only gives riches to a nation, but the only riches she can call her own," it seems clear that he had the United States in mind. And what makes these riches so sweet? Easy, the sugar beet.

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# Spotlight on...

## Scholarships and Prizes

Because of its generous donors, SVSU sponsors several scholarships, awards, and prizes for its students. Two prizes geared specifically to writers are the Seitz Creative Writing Scholarship and the Theodore Roethke Student Writing Award, both of which are coordinated by SVSU's English Department.

**The Seitz Creative Writing Scholarship** was created by Jim and Melissa Seitz to acknowledge excellence in the writing of poetry and/or fiction. The scholarship, worth \$1,000, is awarded annually. A graduate of SVSU, Melissa Seitz is a retired member of the English Department much respected by her students and colleagues. During her time at SVSU, Melissa served as both student editor and faculty advisor of *Cardinal Sins*.

Named after American poet Theodore Roethke (1908-1963), a writer with strong ties to the Saginaw Valley, the **Theodore Roethke Student Writing Award** is a \$2,000 award given in conjunction with the Triennial Theodore Roethke Poetry & Arts Festival. The prize is graciously sponsored by The Friends of Theodore Roethke, an organization dedicated "to promot[ing], preserv[ing] and protect[ing] the literary legacy of Theodore Roethke by restoring his family residences in Saginaw, Michigan, for cultural and educational opportunities."

Both prizes require students to submit, among other things, a portfolio of their creative writing. Following are excerpts from the portfolios of the 2015 prize recipients.

# White Oak Barrels

Allison Sterken

Recipient of the 2015-16 Seitz Creative Writing Scholarship



Allison Sterken is a creative writing and professional and technical writing major and a gender studies minor. Upon graduating in May 2016, she hopes to pursue a doctorate to teach creative writing at the college level.

Allison's passion and interest in writing began at a young age. With the help and support of others in the creative writing program, she has learned to write in multiple genres, her pieces growing more and more diverse. One of the classes that most inspired her was Dr. C. Vincent Samarco's English 306 (Creative Writing: Fiction), which birthed one of her favorite pieces, "White Oak Barrels." Thanks to the hard work of Dr. Samarco and several close friends, "White Oak Barrels" was one of the pieces included in her application for the 2015-2016 Seitz Scholarship.

The air in the diner is stale and heavy with grease, but I've been driving for ten hours straight and there's nowhere else in sight. I shift on the squeaky vinyl, surveying the frayed menu that offers vague choices like "donut," "eggs," and my personal favorite, "spuds." A waitress makes her way to my table, flipping open a small spiral notebook and balancing a pen in her arthritic claws.

"What'll it be, hon?" she asks. She snaps her gum.

I point to the beverages section of the menu. "Can you please tell me what exactly 'cola' is?"

She narrows her heavily painted eyes. "What it says it is. Cola." *Snap.*

"Okay, but what kind? Coke? Pepsi?"

"Walmart." *Snap.*

"Alright." I clear my throat. "I guess I'll have the orange juice and scrambled eggs, then."

The waitress scribbles it down and shuffles away.

I begin rifling through the condiments on the table. For a joint that caters almost exclusively to truckers, it has a ton of them. Ketchup, mustard, red and green hot sauce, two kinds of relish, and—

I pick up the bottle. Tabasco sauce. I smile. I can almost see Neil leaning across the table in the darkened Tex-Mex restaurant we always went to at three in the morning after a night of struggling to meet our deadlines. "*Do you know how they make Tabasco?*" he asks. "*They age the peppers and vinegar in white oak barrels. If it's not aged in white oak barrels, it's not true Tabasco.*"

My throat tightens. I'm embarrassed to be getting emotional over a glorified bottle of hot sauce, but it seems that anything that reminds me of Neil can get me emotional.

Neil is the reason I'm wandering the country with nothing but my wallet, a change of clothes, and a stack of notebooks.

Neil is the reason I've spent every night either driving until the sun comes up or getting wasted on cheap beer in whatever grimy bar I happen to find.

In short, Neil is the reason I'm sitting in a dusty diner off Route 66 in Texas instead of my comfortable apartment in Maryland.

I twirl the bottle across the edge of the table. The light hits the glass the same way it hit Neil's foggy, drunken eyes on that night, The Night, the night that changed everything and sent me running across the country.

It was just a kiss. Okay, several kisses and more, but we never got the chance to have sex, or at least not in the conventional sense. It definitely wasn't enough to scare me or make me feel guilty. But it was enough to scare him, enough to make him start ducking into the men's bathroom every time he saw me for a week straight, right up until the day he finally broke down and sent me a long, painstakingly crafted email. "*I love Lizzie,*" it had said, almost pleading. "*I don't want to screw things up with her just because of one stupid mistake.*"

Being called a stupid mistake may not have been the most painful thing I've ever felt, but it was definitely in the top five. Two days later, I packed my bags and left a note to my roommate on the kitchen table. *"Be sure to feed Scooter,"* it said, referring to my angel fish. *"I'll call every couple days to let you know I'm safe. Don't be worried. I'll be back eventually."* I left my phone on my nightstand; the last thing I wanted was to field five calls a day from my roommate and my mother. I told my boss I had a sick aunt in Nevada that I had to go take care of. He didn't ask questions. He also didn't tell me if I'd have my job when I got back.

My roommate, Naomi, sounded pretty upset the first time I called her from a pay phone in Virginia. *"Kara?! Jesus fuck, Kara, where are you?! Your mom has called me like eight times already. What happened?"*

I told her I was safe. *"Remember to pay the rent,"* I reminded her. *"If we're homeless when I come back, I'm going to kill you."*

*"When are you coming back, then?"*

I hung up after that. I didn't want to tell her that I didn't know.

My original plan was two months. I figured that would give me enough time to sort things out. I needed to get away from Neil, from his pending nuptials, from the life I didn't know if I could keep living without him in it. I figured that once I returned to Maryland, Neil would either have set the date for his wedding or broken it off with Lizzie. Either way, I'd have an answer. I'd be able to move on with my life.

I pick up the bottle of Tabasco and examine it. The paper label is fading and the plastic top is caked with gooey, red residue. It was probably bought at the same Walmart as the cola.

Last year, Neil bought a twenty-five-dollar bottle of Tabasco. I laughed at him when I saw it sitting on his kitchen shelf and asked what the hell you would eat with twenty-five-dollar Tabasco sauce. *"You don't eat it!"* Neil said, looking scandalized. *"You just keep it. It's like a collector's item."*

*"What is the point of keeping food you can't eat?"* I asked.

*"It's like people who buy action figures and never take them out of the box. It's just... what you do. You just enjoy the knowledge that it's there."* He had smiled at me. *"You can enjoy having something without really having it. It's about willpower, you know?"*

I snort quietly to myself. I still think it's ridiculous, but I've learned to appreciate the sentiment over time.

If there was one thing Neil had, it was willpower. He never stole a single song, put off a single article, or even snuck a single piece of candy into the movie theater. *"You're more of a law-abiding citizen than Superman,"* I told him once when I saw him looking over a Nirvana CD.

*"Laws are there for a reason,"* he said with a grin. *"I'd rather be a Boy Scout than a criminal."*

*"But what if you have to break those laws to get what you want?"*

He thought for a second. *"You can't always get what you want, Kara."*

Neil has always wanted more. It was his number one complaint during every three-in-the-morning dinner at El Honcho's. More from his job, more from his friends, more from Lizzie. *"I swear to God, Kara, sometimes I think you're the only thing I've done right."*

I still remember that night, when he started crying into his tequila shot. *"What the fuck am I doing? Where am I going? I fucked everything up, and I don't know how to fix it."* He had thrown his arm around me, weeping into my neck. His tears dripped down my chest, pooling in my cleavage. The bartender stared. *"Just tell me what I'm supposed to do. Please. What am I supposed to do?"*

*"Let's go outside and get some air,"* I'd said. I wasn't even tipsy, but I pretended to be worse, trying to stumble along with him, make him feel better. He tried to go for his car, but I tugged him away, taking his keys out of his hand. He barely seemed to notice, still sniffing and wiping his eyes on his sleeve. I poured him into the passenger seat of my car.

It had been four months after I first realized that I felt anything but friendship for Neil. After two years of late-night dinners, inside jokes, heartfelt phone calls, four-hour games of Risk, hundreds of bad foreign films, and almost ridiculously detailed conversations about each other's sex lives, I finally saw that the pang in my chest every time he talked about his frustrations with Lizzie wasn't concern. It was jealousy, and it burned brighter each day, right up until I broke down and confessed my love for him to my steering wheel while driving home from work. I tried not to let him see, but it wasn't easy to hide. I stopped telling him to appease his fiancée. I stopped telling him to try to be content in his life. *"If you're unhappy, you're unhappy,"* I'd say, trying to sound innocent. *"That's not your fault."*

I said the same thing that night, and he just kept shaking his head. *"I'm in too deep,"* he moaned. *"This is my life. This is my forever. I can't change it anymore."*

*"Yes, you can,"* I said, gripping the steering wheel until my knuckles whitened. *"You can always change, Neil. You can't change what happened, but you can change what you're going to do."*

And before I knew it, he was kissing me. His lips were sweet with alcohol and spice, and I grabbed him hard, twisting his jacket in my hands and prying his mouth open to reach his tongue. When he pulled away, I thought he was going to be angry (with me or himself, I wasn't sure), but instead he wrapped his arms around me tightly, his nose digging into my neck, his breath hot on my collarbone.

*"I can't believe it,"* he kept whispering. *"Being able to reach out and touch everything I've wanted for so long..."*

He pulled my shirt and jeans in different directions, his tongue and hands traveling across my body. His lips found my breasts while his fingers worked past my waistband and inside of me. He gasped along with me when I came.

We stayed like that for God knows how long, his lips making their way across my neck and jaw and back again, his body warm and comforting on top of mine. A century could have passed and I wouldn't have noticed. We might never have stopped if his phone hadn't gone off.

We jumped away from each other. I heard him sigh. *"It's Lizzie. She's wondering where I am."*

*"Oh."*

He wiped his fingers off on his jeans and cleared his throat. *"I should go."*

*"Okay."*

I turned the key and the car roared to life, all of the sound wiping away the beautiful quiet that we had just shared. I drove him home without another word.

I haven't spoken to Neil since. Part of me hopes that I never will again. Most of me is living for the moment I do.

I jump when a plate of eggs and toast is dropped in front of me. The orange juice follows, and I look up into the leathery face of my waitress. "Thanks," I say, almost certain she spit in my food for some offense I still can't fully identify.

"Enjoy." *Snap.* She saunters away.

I look down at the squishy, pale eggs, framed by burnt white toast. I should have known better than to eat at a diner called The Pit Stop, but my stomach is churning with painful hunger.

It isn't until I reach for my fork that I realize I'm still holding the bottle of Tabasco. Almost without thinking, I snap the top open. I take an experimental sniff. It smells strangely chemical. Unthinking, I tip my hand and pour the sauce over my plate. It gushes out faster than expected, but I don't let up until everything is covered in red. By the time I'm finished, the eggs have completely disappeared beneath the tiny, pungent sea.

"Good lord, child." A woman with a beehive hairdo at the next table stares. "You must love that stuff."

I flip the cap closed. "Never had it," I tell her, and I bite into a forkful.

My mouth is on fire, but that doesn't stop me. It tastes tangy, bitter, and hot, but it's the underlying sweetness there that makes me take another bite. Beneath the burning pain, I can taste Neil.

After I gulp down the spongy eggs, I turn to the toast. It's somehow soggy and crisp at the same time, and I swipe it through the remaining pools of Tabasco, crunching down every bite. I'm desperate to replicate some piece of that night, trying to replace the feel of charred bread with his soft tongue. I'm surprised when I finish that I've managed not to cry, even though my face is hot and my eyes are watery. I can't tell whether it's from the food or the memory. Both of them are burning.

The waitress slips me the bill. The food is four dollars, but I leave a ten beside my untouched orange juice. "You want any of this back?" she asks, and I shake my head. I start gathering up my things, and she says, "You should take a drink. Your mouth must be hotter'n hell right now."

"No thanks," I say. My voice is calm. "I don't need it."

She shrugs and turns away. While she's walking to the cash register, I slip the bottle of Tabasco into my purse.

Outside in my car, I consider taking a nap, but I decide it's not worth the dreams. My tongue is swollen and moving it brings fresh pain, but I roll down my windows and turn the radio up anyway, screaming along. The burn runs from my throat down my arms, to my fingertips and back again. It fills

my entire body as I drive, and part of me wonders if, when the fever ends, I'll wake up back at home in a life that no longer feels right.

I hope that I don't. Wherever I wake up, I hope that there are white oak barrels and streams of blood-red pain. Wherever I wake up, I hope there's cheap tequila and twenty-five-dollar bottles of liquid fire. Wherever I wake up, I hope that it tastes like him.

# Blooded Vein, A River to Cross

Kathryn Karoly

Recipient of the 2015 Theodore Roethke Student Writing Award



Born in Bay City, Michigan, Kathryn Karoly graduated from Bay City Central High School and will be entering her fourth year at Saginaw Valley State University in the fall of 2015. In 2014, she received the Tyner Award for Poetry for “The Burying Hand.” She is a creative writing major and English minor who hopes to pursue a career as a creative writing professor. “Blooded Vein, A River to Cross” was one of the pieces she included in her portfolio for the Theodore Roethke Student Writing Award.

Like the voice of a dove  
in an afternoon still as Sunday,  
she hums. Her sudded arms climb  
from the water to the skirts of her dress  
and she tells me without looking,  
*Too much makeup*, then comes  
touches my hair. The suds thicker  
than her touch  
her touch, like water  
forming around me without shape  
without breath.

*Don't you leave me*, I say.  
Her hair like when she was young  
her skin dark without blood  
and her eyes seeing through things  
like bats seeing nothing

she tells me how water  
carries images  
and how the wings of birds  
are like spirits  
rather than parts of a body.

Long after  
the sink water sits graying  
and flat

and her smell  
clean perfume  
crisp as a nurse's uniform,  
yet sweet  
knowing not how to swim.



# Spotlight on...

## The National Day on Writing

The National Day on Writing has been celebrated for years—across America and at SVSU—as a way to recognize writing across the disciplines. Dr. Kim Lacey, co-chair of SVSU’s University Writing Committee and assistant professor of English, is not only continuing this proud tradition, but has also been working to push the influence and benefits of the event beyond the walls of SVSU.

Although English majors “get” the need for strong writing skills, many students in other majors may find writing less important. This is the perspective the National Day on Writing events are meant to change. These events, which include an open mic reading, an online “Wall of Writing,” and author talks, have been gaining more and more attention from students, especially this past year on October 15, 2014.

The growing awareness about the National Day on Writing comes, in part, from the innovations that Lacey has begun putting in place to highlight professional writers. Typically, in the past, a single author was brought to campus to speak to students, but in 2014, Lacey brought several alumni authors to SVSU. These alumni not only came from creative writing backgrounds, like blogger Jason Wolverton, but from majors that many people often fail to associate with strong writing. One such discipline was nursing, as Sandra Wilbanks spoke about her book of medical crossword puzzles.

This is just one part of Lacey’s push for accessibility and interdisciplinary writing. As a student, Lacey felt passionately about writing across many different fields, especially those that were often ignored. “Academics can be bad writers,” she joked, noting that academic writing can be difficult for the inexperienced to access for a host of reasons, including dryness, jargon, and lack of clarity.

This belief informed her graduate work at Wayne State as well as her work at the online publication *Guru Magazine*; at *Guru*, she honed her ability to write about “science without the lab coat”—to deliver an easy-to-read, easy-to-understand article about science for the layperson. Lacey brought this same cross-discipline approach to her work at SVSU when she became involved in the Gender Studies minor, which draws from a wide range of disciplines. Learning is interdisciplinary, she believes, and information should be accessible to everyone in the community—not just writers and academics.

This passion is one that she is excited to bring to the National Day on Writing. In future years, she particularly wants to develop a greater focus on community engagement. “You don’t have to be at the university to be validated,” Lacey says. It will take more time, work, and negotiations to bring these plans to fruition, but Lacey is excited for the program’s future.

The University Writing Committee coordinates SVSU’s National Day on Writing. Helping Lacey, in 2014, were committee co-chair Helen Raica-Klotz and members Karen Brown-Fackler, Pat Cavanaugh, Jennifer Chaytor, Monika Dix, Mark Giesler, Chris Giroux, Amy Hlavacek, Emily Kelley, Weiwei Liu, Julie Lynch, and Deb Smith. Winners of the 2014 contests, some of whose works are profiled in the following pages, included Kelly M. Schram and Kayla Langmaid, who were recognized for their submissions to the Wall of Writing. Open mic winners were Kathryn Karoly (poetry), Eddie Veenstra (video), Lucille Kalinowski (story), Bria Gregory (humor), and Julisa Atkins (song).

To learn more about the National Day on Writing at SVSU, visit <http://www.svsu.edu/writingprogram/universitywritingcommittee/nationaldayonwriting/>.

# Girl Scout Cookies

Kayla Langmaid

National Day on Writing, Wall of Writing Winner for Fiction



Kayla Langmaid is a senior, majoring in political science with minors in history, French and creative writing. Her hobbies include reading, writing and watching Netflix—but not always in that order; she dabbles in art as well. Although her aspirations include one day writing a best-selling novel, traveling to the moon and curing cancer, she would settle for one day entering the State Department as a foreign service officer.

Mrs. Taylor was a widow, had been for many years. Her children had moved from home and had children of their own. They rarely visited, mostly only on holidays, but she didn't mind. After all, although she loved her brood, they lent a certain degree of chaos to her otherwise orderly home. This morning, for example, started as many others had. She woke up precisely at six a.m. She reached for her watch, tightening it around her wrist. She took a deep breath and sat up. Her shoulder creaked. She set her feet on the floor and sighed at the cold. Then she stood. Her knee creaked. Fifteen steps to the bathroom. The door creaked. She put her teeth in and curled her hair. Then, she went down the stairs. *One, two, three...sixteen, seventeen.* She stopped. She reached out her left hand and straightened the picture of her husband, Ryan. She brushed her hand along the worn wood of the frame, the oldest on the wall. *Eighteen, nineteen.* She turned to her left.

The kitchen was clean and sparse. Nine steps to the cupboard. She pulled out the third mug to the right. She took two steps to the sink and filled the mug with water. The microwave was to her right. One and a half minutes, exactly. She pulled the mug from the glass plate.... Fifteen years, and she still didn't know what it was called. A turntable? She sighed and reached for a tea bag. She dangled it over the edge in the water. Seven steps to the refrigerator. Two taps on the handle. She opened the door and pulled out the small cup of lemons. *One, two, three.* She dumped them into the mug. She shut the door. Two more taps. Three steps to the trashcan. She dangled the tea bag over the cup. Seven drips of tea before it landed in the trash. She grabbed a saucer and carried the tea, carefully, carefully.... She sat the saucer on the small table by the front door and tugged on a housecoat. It was cold out now, winter almost setting in. It would snow any day now. She picked up the saucer.

Two taps on the doorknob. She twisted it to the left once, then the right. She opened the door. Six steps to the swing. She sat. The rusted metal chains creaked. She pushed off lightly with the ball of her left foot. She took a sip and swirled the tea in her mouth. *One, two three.* She swallowed. The tea was hot in her throat. She sighed. Mr. Thomas was late today. She glanced at her watch, her eyes following the second hand as it circled the face. Her hand tightened in her lap, the silk of her housecoat clenched tight beneath her fingers. Her foot tapped the ground. *One, two, three.* She counted the revolutions. She was on the fourth when she heard his door open. She unclenched her hand.

She took a sip of tea. Mrs. Kurama across the street started yelling at her son. Right on time, as usual.

Exactly forty-nine seconds later, her son, a messy-haired boy just out of high school, stomped out of the house, and hopped on his bike. She watched him pedal down the driveway. His messenger bag bumped against his thigh. He reached into the bag and grabbed a newspaper, flinging it onto the sidewalk across from her house. Two feet too far. She sighed. Her heart was fast in her chest as she stood. Her knee creaked.

Six steps to the stairs. Three steps to the pavement. Her feet were cold against the sidewalk. Soon, she would have to wear her slippers. Not for six more days, though. She glanced at the sky. Hopefully the snow held off that long.

It took eight steps to reach the sidewalk. She tapped her foot against the cement. *One, two—*

"Mrs. Taylor! Mary! How have you been?" Mrs. Taylor froze, a sweat breaking out at her hairline. What number was she on? "Mrs. Taylor?"

“Same as always, Mrs. Kurama. How’s your husband?” She struggled to calm her breathing as she spoke. She reached her hand out for the paper. Her fingers shook. Her shoulder creaked. Her skin skimmed the plastic. She gripped it hard in her hand and straightened up. Breathe. Breathe.

A car turned the corner. It was driving too fast. What if it hits that pothole? What if it skids? It could jump the curb. It could hit her. She should be on her porch now. She shouldn’t be standing here. She knew it would hit her. Oh God, she didn’t want to die. She wasn’t ready. Her hands clenched to fists. Blood beaded on her lip where she gnawed it. Her lungs ached from the strain of breathing. Oh God, Oh God.

The car drove by and she unclenched her fists. Mrs. Kurama was saying something; she only caught the last few words. Her husband was at work, or just started work, or was home from work.... She wasn’t completely sure. “That’s nice, dearie. If you’ll excuse me?”

“Oh, of course! But I almost forgot to tell you, my daughter has those cookies you ordered. If you want, I can run in and grab them? Just give me a second.”

“No!” But Mrs. Kurama was already inside. Mrs. Taylor shifted her weight. She tapped her finger against her palm. Was that a bee? No, it was surely too cold out now. But what if it was? What if it stung her? She thought she might be allergic. Her eyes shifted from right to left, scanning the air. She just knew she was allergic. Last time she’d been stung, the bite was the size of a quarter. It would be worse this time. She could already feel her face turning red. Was it hot out? Maybe it wasn’t too cold for a bee. She couldn’t breathe. Was her face swelling up? Had she already been stung? She tried to remember. She took a deep breath. *One, two—*

Mrs. Kurama stepped outside, waving a box of sugar cookies in her hand. “Silly me, I set them on top of the fridge!” She hurried across the street. Mrs. Thomas rocked back on her heels, away from the box. What if she got a paper cut? She could already feel the cardboard slicing her skin. And what if the cut got infected? She could lose a finger. She could lose an arm! She shouldn’t have ordered them. She’d never ordered them before. If she hadn’t ordered them, she would be inside by now. Abani had knocked twice before Mrs. Kurama had opened the door. The little girl had looked so sad holding the cookies that Mrs. Kurama had broken down. Ryan had loved Girl Scout cookies.

Mrs. Taylor had known when she signed the receipt that something terrible would happen. She’d waited all day but nothing had happened. As her breath froze in her lungs, she knew she had been right.

Mrs. Kurama stopped a few feet from her, a frown on her face. “Mrs. Taylor? Are you feeling alright? You’re a bit red.”

She opened her mouth to speak but her tongue was heavy. Her heart skipped a beat. Oh God, if only she hadn’t miscounted. She’d be inside right now, watching the morning news. Now she was dying.

“I’m fine, fine.... I’m just a bit warm. I think I’ll head outside.... I mean inside. Goodbye.” Mrs. Kurama looked confused. She didn’t have time to explain. A dog barked, and she jumped. She’d heard yesterday on the news that someone had dropped off a few pit bulls in a suburb in California. She was only in Nevada. Maybe they dropped some off here too. Her daughter had almost been mauled by one once. The ugly thing had nearly torn her face off. Thankfully it had only gotten its tongue out; she’d kicked the thing down before it brought out its teeth.

She stumbled up the driveway. There was a sidewalk next to it, but she didn’t have time to watch for the cracks, not today. She counted the steps up the porch and grabbed her teacup. She sloshed tea on the swing but didn’t bother to clean it. The news would be starting any minute.

Two taps on the door. Left, then right. She opened it with shaking fingers. She untied her housecoat and hung it on the hook, third from the left. Then she took two steps to the kitchen. She froze for a moment. She needed to wash the teacup. But if she washed the teacup, she might miss the news. If she didn’t wash the teacup, who knows what manner of bugs and disease it would attract. But if she missed the news, what escaped convict or upcoming tornado would she miss as well? She glanced at the cup. Ryan had gotten food poisoning once, when she hadn’t washed the dishes on time.

Fourteen steps to the kitchen. She counted carefully this time. Seven steps to the sink. She set the cup in the sink. Two taps on the plug before she twisted it, once to the left, once to the right. She opened the cupboard beneath the sink. Where was the bleach? She knelt down. Her knee creaked. She pulled out seven bottles, but no bleach. Her hands shook. She’d used it yesterday and emptied it. Hadn’t she had a spare? She’d bought two the last time; she was sure of it.

But she hadn't; she remembered. She couldn't afford both bottles of bleach and the toothbrush and the magazine. She changed her toothbrush every three months, even though she couldn't use it. But if she had company, she knew she'd need one. Ryan used to love company. And what would she read during dinner without the magazine? She swiped her hand across her face, her nails scratching the skin. The pain was a balm.

She stood. Her knee creaked. She glanced at her watch. The news would play again in an hour. She could run to the store if she was quick. She would only miss her game show. It was a rerun today. She took a breath. Twenty-one steps back to the door. She looked down at her nightgown. She hadn't showered, so she couldn't change. She grabbed her housecoat and wrapped it around her. Better. No one need know. She slid on her sandals. Left first, then right. She picked up her purse and slung it over her shoulder. She gripped the door handle. Two taps, left right. She opened the door.

Three stairs, five steps. She tapped the car door twice before sliding onto the seat. She slid the key into the ignition. *One, two, three.* She slid the shifter into reverse and eased her foot off the brake. The car moved slowly down the driveway. She pulled onto the street. She switched her foot to the gas and pressed. She watched the speedometer. *Five, ten, fifteen....* She slowed down.

The store was only three blocks away. She knew she should walk. But Ryan had liked the drive. He used to tell her that driving helped him feel in control, like he could go anywhere, do anything. She'd never understood, but now she couldn't think of anything else. She turned her blinker on. Left, then right. The car behind her blared its horn. She turned into the small lot. Fourth row, fifth spot. It was taken. She idled for a few minutes until the young dark-haired woman who left the store opened the back hatch and tossed in her groceries. Mrs. Taylor watched the SUV leave and then slowly pulled into the spot. She tapped her steering wheel twice and then shifted the car into park. She turned the key in the ignition. She glanced at the clock. Twenty-three minutes. Two taps. She opened her door, stepped outside, and took a breath. There was a burning in her chest.

Forty-two steps to the front door. She paused outside it, heart pounding. It opened automatically. She stood to the side, waiting for it to close. She jerked her arm out and tapped it twice before it could open. She walked into the store. The bleach was in aisle seven. She passed each aisle before it. Third shelf down, seventh from the left. She grasped it carefully. It was heavy, almost too heavy. She used both hands to clasp it to her chest. Twenty-seven steps. She approached register three, setting the bleach on the belt. It didn't move.

"I'm sorry ma'am. The belt's broken, you'll have to slide it down." The young man smiled at her, but she didn't notice. She felt her breath quicken. This was her fault. She shouldn't be at the store on a Monday. She only came on Wednesdays. If she hadn't been here, it wouldn't be broken. She shifted her weight. She swiped a hand through her curls. The boy just stood there. Was he judging her? She glanced at the man behind her, his suit expensive. Was *he* judging her? He looked like he was in a hurry. He had a cartful of groceries. It would take him forever to slide them down to the cashier. This was her fault. Maybe he was a lawyer. He certainly looked like a lawyer. Because she'd broken the belt, he would be late to his trial. He looked like a trial lawyer. Her heart sped in her chest, and she tightened her hands into fists. Her foot tapped on the floor. It would be her fault he was late for trial. It would be her fault he lost. Maybe he was defending a murderer.

She gasped at the thought, sweat beading on her hairline. She had let a murderer walk free. Oh God, who would he kill next? Maybe it would be her? Just to punish her. It was her fault he was released into the world. She glanced over at the cashier. He looked nervous. She glanced back at the lawyer. The man behind him held a pop in his hand. He looked impatient. Was that a gun in his pocket? He was going to hold up the store. She took a step backwards, bumping into the shelf holding candy behind her. It crashed to the ground. What if someone tripped and fell? What if they got hurt? Oh God, what if she killed someone? She fell to her knees and began grabbing each piece of candy. Her hands shook. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't mean it. Please don't die!" she cried as she grappled for each package. A young boy went running past. She screamed, "You'll fall and break your neck!" The boy skidded to a stop.

The cashier knelt in front of her, saying something she couldn't hear over the pounding of her heart. "It's my fault," she pleaded with the boy to understand.

The lawyer knelt behind her, and she whimpered, "Go in front of me, just go! I don't want him loose; just go, please!" Her hands shook as she grabbed at his pants, trying to shove him forward.

The armed man took a step closer. “Don’t shoot! I won’t say anything! Please, oh God, someone help!” She let go of the first man and tucked her head in her arms.

She heard someone say something, and then someone gripped her arms tightly. Her eyes swung wildly around her. White. White everywhere. Something hard on her arms and ankles. Lots of movement. A van. A room with white walls. A man in a white jacket. Someone saying her name.

“Mrs. Taylor?” She blinked. She stood in her living room. Her right hand still clasped the doorknob. Little Abani stood on her doorstep, her brown eyes matching the brown dress and sash. “Would you like to buy some Girl Scout Cookies?”

The door closed. “Mrs. Taylor?” Abani called. Mrs. Taylor didn’t answer.

# Tattered Atlas

Kelly M. Schram

National Day on Writing, Wall of Writing Winner for Poetry

Kelly M. Schram is a third-year Honors student majoring in psychology and minoring in Spanish and creative writing. Born in Alpena, she has a soft spot for free verse filled with raw emotion. She aspires to one day see her poems beside those of Sylvia Plath, Charles Bukowski, Emily Dickinson, and Andrea Gibson, by whom she has been inspired.

I never really thanked my father  
for the tattered, coverless atlas  
he handed down to me  
before my cross country trip.  
I wonder if Wanderlust is  
genetic.  
I can imagine my mother,  
her eyes bright with the  
defiance only a teenager can harbor,  
cheeks flushed from the  
chill of an autumn night, past curfew,  
watching the moon come up  
over Lake Huron  
as her mind is thousands of miles away—  
In the narrow streets of Montmartre,  
swallowing art whole,  
climbing the stairs to Sacré-Coeur  
at the top of the day,  
the church bell shaking God  
into her bones  
for the first time in her life.  
Driving straight through Montana,  
thirteen hours,  
eyes burning from the  
dust and desolate,  
until the sun begins to fall  
and the coral collides with the mountains  
and you realize how  
*small*  
you really are.  
Sleeping in the Redwoods,  
jumping through waves of the Pacific,  
pulled by the tide as she clutches  
her best friend's hand,  
silently thanking her for all the times  
she'd kept her afloat  
when she was being swallowed  
by her own salt water before.  
Sitting at the edge of a  
cavern in Washington,  
the water a sheet of glass,

poems falling off the tip of her tongue  
and crashing into the clouds  
beneath her dangling feet.  
I wonder if she could  
make a home out of cars, camps, and hotel beds—  
suitcases always packed.  
I wonder if she could  
ever make a home out of herself.

# Confession

Lucille Kalinowski

National Day on Writing, Open Mic Winner for Fiction



Lucille Kalinowski is a theatre major and English minor. Because she has loved books from a very young age, it only seemed natural for her to start writing them. Her specialty is the horror genre, and she is thankful for her parents reading to her before she could read to herself. “Confession” started from a simple prompt—your character tells a secret.

“Dad?”

Andy peeked into the dimly lit room.

“I have something to tell you.” Andy slowly approached her father’s desk. He was working, as usual, in his study. He looked up and smiled.

“Sure pumpkin, take a seat; I just have to finish this.” He went back to typing, the smile easily slipping from his face.

Andy tucked her long, brown hair behind her ear as she took the seat across from her father. It was quiet as Andy listened to the soft ticking of the keys. She reached to her neck and fiddled with the black scarf she had worn for many years. The waiting made it worse. She wished this were already over.

After a few more minutes of agonizing delay, Andy’s father closed the laptop and took a drink from the glass sitting on the desk. It was filled with a brown liquid Andy knew wasn’t pop.

“What’s up, sweetheart?” he asked with a sigh.

Andy tensed at his words and dropped her hands, suddenly exceedingly nervous. She looked at her dad in the soft light of the lamp in the corner. His eyes had deep shadows underneath from many late nights working. She saw the slight flush in his cheeks from the drink. Andy’s hand had returned to the scarf. She looked to the floor, now unsure what to say.

“Andy?” her father questioned. He looked at her, wondering why she was silent for so long. After another brief pause, Andy began.

“Do you remember Mom’s wake?” she asked, nearly whispering.

Andy’s father sat back in his chair, surprised by the question. It had been many years since she had brought up the unpleasant memory.

“Yes,” he responded, almost emotionless.

“I overheard you talking to Grandma in the back, after everyone had left.” Andy confessed.

Silence.

“You two were arguing about Mom’s ring, her wedding ring.”

Andy’s father stood up to pour himself some more alcohol. Andy waited for him to finish before speaking again.

“Grandma was saying how Mom wanted to be buried with it, it said so in her will, and you wanted the ring to remember her by.”

Andy’s father laughed once; it was harsh and humorless.

“Turns out the hag wanted it for herself.” Andy could hear the spite in his voice. It made her wince.

“Because at the funeral, it was missing,” Andy finished. “And that’s why we don’t talk to Grandma anymore, right?”

“She blamed me when it went missing, but I know she took it,” he spat, fire in his eyes. He was clearly still bitter, and that only made this harder.

Andy reached for her scarf again. She closed her eyes.

“I was thinking about what you said, ‘something to remember her by.’ I thought you had so much—memories, belongings, all of her jewelry—you didn’t need her ring too. I was only six. I didn’t think. I just wanted a piece of her; I wanted to remember her too. I just....” Andy stopped; she knew she



was rambling. Andy took a deep breath. Finding her courage, she looked into her father's eyes. "Grandma didn't take mom's ring, Dad."

"Then where...", Andy's father began, but he stopped as Andy removed her scarf to reveal a simple silver necklace on which hung the silver band of a diamond ring.

# Brothers Don't Cry

Kathryn Karoly

National Day on Writing, Open Mic Winner for Poetry



Kathryn Karoly was born in Bay City, Michigan. She graduated from Bay City Central High School and will be entering her fourth year at Saginaw Valley State University in the fall of 2015. In 2014, she received the Tyner Award for Poetry for the series of poems called “The Burying Hand.” She is a creative writing major and English minor who hopes to pursue a career as a creative writing professor.

My crying brother  
takes my hand  
as he once did on undeveloped  
mornings. Mornings  
that held hope  
through sleepy grapefruit suns.  
    We never even knew  
    hope was rare.

He takes my hand now  
as he did to lead me to breakfast  
    sugared toast and OJ  
    a United States placemat  
    and a Come, Lord Jesus poem  
“You do the prayer, Katey.  
You do it best.  
Which presidents were generals, Katey?  
Which president got stucked in a tub?”

My follower leads me  
as he once did, through the dark passing  
of our neighborhood’s Boo Radley yard.  
He held me, limply—  
afraid of what holding too tightly  
might mean.  
He holds me the same now  
leads me to the ashen rose  
of our father’s body—  
    too straight  
    like the petrified stem,  
    color still holding the petals.  
The petals are the blood color  
of someone you love—

My confused brother  
leaves me  
like he did in the high school hallways—  
    the same way my father leaves  
looking back,  
but mostly moving forward.

There's nothing worse than hearing screaming  
and not knowing it's your own voice.

I suppose it must be similar to being a mother  
or a father—  
    cursing the wrong actions of your child  
    but knowing it is your seed that, inside them,  
    grows crooked.

The paramedics brush the remaining rose  
into the wind of the door—  
where I will never find him again.

My teacher of laughter,  
my brother's painting of a man  
dances now, on a dusty Saginaw River

    the petals both floating  
    and drowning.





## Spotlight on... Students

No matter the college in which they find themselves, SVSU students write regularly in their courses. As members of a university that, per its mission statement, “creates opportunities for individuals to achieve intellectual and personal development,” SVSU students write in different genres, learn different documentation styles, and find themselves weighing the various options they carry in their rhetorical toolkits. No matter their major, they must consider issues of medium, message, and audience.

Because their majors do vary, students find different venues and avenues in which to grow as writers. No publication can capture all those stories. In the following pages however, you’ll find stories about five students, representing SVSU’s five colleges, who have found in success in their studies as writers—because they are writers.

In this section, you’ll also find profiles of the editors of SVSU’s two student-run publications, *Cardinal Sins* and *The Valley Vanguard*. Founded in 1967, *The Vanguard* is SVSU’s official student-run news source and has been the recipient of numerous awards. Its online presence can be found at <http://www.valleyvanguardonline.com/>. *Cardinals Sins* is SVSU’s fine arts and literary magazine. Produced by the school’s faculty, staff, and students, *Cardinal Sins* has been honored by the American Scholastic Press Association (ASPA); it features work by members of the SVSU campus and by artists from around the nation. More information about *Cardinal Sins*, including back issues and submission deadlines, can be found at <http://www.cardinalsinsjournal.com/>.

# Spotlight on...

## the College of Arts and Behavioral Sciences

Faith Chapman

English Major

Though she is not the ice cream scooper she dreamt of becoming when she was younger, a goal inspired by summers in her hometown of Onaway in northern Michigan, Faith Chapman is pursuing what she loves now that she has graduated from SVSU: a career in literature. Chapman has always loved reading; her parents encouraged her to read at a young age, but she really fell in love with literature because of an outstanding fifth-grade teacher. During high school, Chapman says literature provided a challenge, and once Chapman invested in that challenge, her love for literature grew into an interest in English education. She decided to major in English while at SVSU and was named the Outstanding Graduate in her field when she graduated in May 2015.

A fan of pop fiction, Chapman was drawn to the analytical work involved in studying “serious” literature at SVSU, and the work of analysis brought new challenges; writing became more important to Chapman as the number of papers she had to write for her literature classes grew. As a result, her mindset on writing changed. Chapman says that she began to use writing assignments in her own way. Instead of thinking of papers as just required work, she used them to “expand [her] understanding of a subject” that piqued her interest. This is advice she gives to other writers at SVSU: not only does researching your topic allow you to “stay on top of what scholars in the field are saying,” but the process of drafting and re-drafting also allows you to “get a clearer understanding of how you really feel [about your subject].” Moreover, by reading back through your own work “you better understand your thoughts on a subject, and how someone would react to [your thoughts].”

Chapman recommends that other writers view assignments as opportunities to explore. She argues that when given a prompt for an essay, the best thing to do is NOT to doggedly stick to the prompt and take it at face-value; students need to make it their own and write about topics that excite them. Chapman’s attitude towards writing proved beneficial in her classes. Assignments that were difficult for her peers were a “breeze” for her, because she had learned how to use writing as a tool to “express [her] understanding” of any topic easily.

Currently working as a substitute teacher, Chapman is exploring the various opportunities her degree has allowed her. She claims her double minors of computer science and communication stemmed from a decision she intentionally made to make herself more marketable. Communication seemed a natural fit since it relates well to writing and the desire to express herself competently. Describing herself as someone with a lot of opinions, she values being able to share those with others in a way they will understand. And that computer science minor? “Let’s be honest,” Chapman argues, “that’s where the world is heading.”

She is still juggling career options—maybe she’ll work in a library, maybe she’ll pursue teaching in the schools, maybe she’ll pursue an online master’s degree and then work at a tutoring center or a community college. No matter where she lands, literature and writing will remain front and center because writing allows her to display her competencies. As Chapman says, it’s not enough to be knowledgeable—you must also communicate that knowledge to others in a professional way. It’s not ice cream, but writing, for Chapman, still provides her life with sweetness.

# Spotlight on...

## the College of Business and Management

Zack Gibson

Marketing Major



At first glance, Zackary “Zack” Gibson, a senior in the College of Business and Management, appears to be the type of student who has always been successful. He works as a research assistant to Rama Yelkur, the dean of the College of Business and Management, and also as an English 080 tutor at the Diane Boehm University Writing Center. Gibson is a student who seems to excel at everything he tries; he impresses with his experiences, accomplishments, and his confidence. However, this has not always been the case. Gibson had a rough freshman year, and he argues that had it not been for the developmental course English 080 and the SVSU Writing Center, he would never have had the successes he has had—he might not be in college at all.

When Gibson came to SVSU from his hometown of Davison, Michigan, he says that he, like many college students, took advantage of the freedoms that university life afforded him. The transition from high school, he says, hit him the hardest—not having someone to tell him to go to classes and to stay on top of homework was a difficult realization of adulthood. It was his English 080 teacher, Suzan Aiken, who sat him down and said, “You’re smarter than this.” She told him that she saw in him the ability to succeed in writing, and she asked Gibson whether he saw it too. “I didn’t see it before then,” Gibson says. After that, he started to care, to develop something he never had before—intrinsic motivation. He told himself to go to class and to do his homework. When Gibson was recommended to work at the Writing Center as a part of a new initiative in which former English 080 students were embedded as tutors in sections of the course, Gibson told himself to apply, even though he had never imagined himself as a writing tutor.

Gibson says that working in the Writing Center completely changed the direction of his academic career. “My writing took off as an 080 tutor,” he says. “Being able to identify and talk through [problems in others’ work] helped identify [problems] in my own writing... [and] my writing increased tenfold in quality.” Moreover, he credits his success in the College of Business and Management to his work in the Writing Center; as Gibson points out, when applying for opportunities like his position as a research assistant to the dean of his college, a cover letter and resume are the first things people see. Although he has always been able to “sell” himself in person, Gibson says he would have never succeeded in his field unless he was also able to sell himself through his writing.

When asked about the advice he would give to other beginning writers, he says that they have to recognize how important writing is. He says that writing is kind of like student loans: something most people cannot escape. But more importantly, as Gibson’s experience shows, both are an investment in future success.

# Spotlight on...

## the College of Education

Elizabeth Hurd

English Secondary Education Major



When presented with a list of controversial topics, one would hardly expect to encounter the item “poetry.” The highly polarized results of mentioning poetry in casual conversation with a stranger or suggesting it as a classroom topic, however, show that poems are like anchovies: people either love ‘em or hate ‘em. Elizabeth Hurd, an English secondary education major and biology minor from Port Huron, recently participated in a project that aimed to help people better understand and appreciate poetry. Along with fellow student Dominique Crowley and English professor and Writing Program Administrator Dr. Pat Cavanaugh, Hurd co-authored *The Ghost and the Poem* during the summer of 2014. The children’s book, an excerpt from which appears below, centers on a fourth-grade student named Dexter who hates poetry. On a visit to the Saginaw home of Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Theodore Roethke (1908-1963), Dexter encounters a friendly ghost named Benny and, through a series of events, comes to better appreciate poetry, much more than he ever thought he would.

Hurd was invited to join the project by Cavanaugh, who wanted to write about a real-life Saginaw setting like the Roethke House after having written another story with some of her students that was inspired by and set in a SVSU landmark, the Marshall M. Fredericks Museum. Hurd, Crowley, and Cavanaugh worked on the project from different locations, sending their files back and forth to review and edit. Hurd said that was the hardest part: blending three distinct voices and styles into a singular piece and trying to make it as seamless as possible. The project helped her understand the importance of each writer’s individual voice. She learned how to incorporate various tones and personas into creative and academic writing, as well as into teaching.

According to Hurd, the education major program is academically rigorous, requiring mostly traditional papers—essays offering a thesis and topics sentences, making arguments and counterarguments, and involving research. *The Ghost and the Poem* offered a change from her coursework. Moreover, as a creative writer, Hurd was excited to participate in Cavanaugh’s project because journalistic fiction and prose can be difficult genres for many people to master (just like poetry is for many).

Hurd’s goal with the project wasn’t to change the way that the world sees creative writing, but to change the world of creative writing for one person. Her desire was that, someday, one person would read the book and discover that poetry isn’t “all bad.” When she was in middle and high school, Hurd explains, many teachers and students made poetry into a “huge, complicated, scary thing”; as a result, many students learned to fear everything poetic, from Shakespearean sonnets to haikus.

Hurd hopes that *The Ghost and the Poem*, which is available at the Roethke House, located at 1805 Gratiot in Saginaw, and at the SVSU bookstore, will make the process of reading, writing, and appreciating poetry accessible to people of all ages and will help others understand that poetry—like all writing— isn’t as scary as it can seem. Unlike anchovies, poetry can be something that everyone likes.

### An excerpt from *The Ghost and the Poem*

After talking about pranks, Benny changed the topic of our conversation to poetry. He asked me if I found any poets that I really liked, and I told him about Shel Silverstein. I thought that he might like Shel Silverstein, because the poems are funny. When I read some of the poems to him, Benny laughed. He laughed so hard that I was afraid he would wake up my mom, but then I remembered that I was dreaming, so I laughed along with him.

“So,” Benny asked me, “have you written any other poems besides the one I read?”

I made a face and nodded. “They’re not good,” I told him, “but I had to write them.”



Benny asked if he could read them, so I showed him my journal. He went through it and read them. He thought that “Farts” was really funny, but his favorite was “My Papa’s Drill.”

“You are a really great poet,” he told me. “You should write some more.”

I shook my head. “I don’t want to,” I said. “People make fun of me for it. I think I’m going to stick to reading them.”

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# Spotlight on...

## the College of Health and Human Services

Valerie Adams  
Exercise Science Major



It started out as an everyday chat with a professor, developed into a fulfillment of a request, and, after two years of work, culminated in a comprehensive educational nutrition and intervention program. Valerie Adams, an exercise science major and health sciences minor, began this daunting journey as part of her Honors thesis. According to Adams, the project started during her sophomore year when she met with a professor she particularly admired, Rebecca Schlaff, to discuss ways to immerse herself in the Kinesiology Department and gather ideas for a thesis topic.

Adams worked alongside coaches, athletes, and peer mentors from Kinesiology to create an inclusive curriculum, focusing on the idea that “food is fuel.” Her goal was to increase nutritional knowledge for athletes, but the project grew beyond its initial form and became a set of activities open to both athletes and the general public designed to boost self-efficacy in health and nutrition.

This ongoing project has created nutrition “field trips” that were made available to 465 college athletes. Adams also helped compile an 82-page cookbook, containing both recipes and educational infographics gathered from Athletics Department professionals, faculty, students, athletes and local community members in the field of health and/or movement sciences. The program has hosted *Jeopardy*-style nutrition information nights open to the general public as well. Adams said that her goal was not to produce “just a packet of paper,” but to fully engage a variety of people and teach them that healthy eating is important, that it isn’t just for professional dietitians, and that it can also be easy and enjoyable.

In the program’s initial format, the Kinesiology peer mentors in Adams’s project had an unstructured, open-ended approach to consultations with their student-athlete clientele. Adams wants the program to evolve, so that students can engage in more structured, “prepackaged” consultations with their mentors, choosing from a list of basic topics such as healthy eating on a budget, vegetarianism and veganism, hydration, vitamins and minerals, pre- and post-workout snacks, and carbohydrates and fats, and then focusing on one key area per month. Personal training clients at Campus Recreation will have the opportunity to sign up for an individual, free, thirty-minute nutrition consultation with a nutrition peer mentor. Club sport teams can elect to participate in a year-long version of the program with each team matched to one or two nutrition peer mentors. Additionally, in the new model, every month, the peer mentors will offer an educational lecture or field trip related to sports nutrition and fueling for performance. This “prepackaged” experience will make it easier to “open up lines of communication” between the various involved departments.

Although it was not her main goal, Adams developed her writing and communications skills throughout her work on her thesis. Coordinating communication between the Athletics Department, coaches, Kinesiology peer mentors, and the athletes themselves was the most overwhelming challenge of this experience. “I live on my email,” Adams says with a laugh.

Despite all of the challenges related to the project, Adams remains enthusiastic about her professional development. “[This project] made the biggest difference [in] my SVSU collegiate experience,” she states, describing this thesis project as her first exposure to truly academic writing: her first time conducting empirical research via surveys, securing IRB approval, doing a literature review, targeting an audience, and preparing to submit a comprehensive Honors thesis. This thorough investigation has helped Adams in other classes by teaching her a variety of hands-on skills. She maintains that the project “definitely pushed [her] out of [her] comfort zone,” but refined and developed her communications skills in a way that she had not expected.

Adams’s professional development began her freshman year when she turned in her first paper and received a C. She realized she needed to take a step back and evaluate her writing, become receptive to criticism, and learn how to communicate on an academically advanced level. After her first freshman

English class, Adams used those lessons in many other areas, including a team-based investigative learning class in advanced exercise physiology that brought together her passions for exercise science and writing. Developing an understanding of professional communications has been an extensive, yet constructive, process that Adams knows will never be “finished,” just like the project itself.

Adams has truly created more than just an Honors thesis; she has drafted a living legacy of education and health. For her contributions to the field, Adams received the 2015 SVSU Future Alumni Award. This fall will find her at Duke University, where she will work toward her doctorate in physical therapy, specializing in women’s health. This outstanding student has experienced professional communications development from the ground up, and portions of her thesis project have been presented at regional and national American College of Sports Medicine conferences. Adams plans on taking her project far beyond the bounds of SVSU, teaching her core philosophy through word and deed: “Food is fuel.” In Adams’s case, writing has also been fuel for success.

# Spotlight on...

## the College of Science, Engineering and Technology

Miranda Strasburg

Biology Major



Resident assistant, researcher, conference presenter, Outstanding Graduate in Biology, recipient of a Dow Student Research and Creativity Institute grant—these are all ways to describe Miranda Strasburg, a 2015 alumna of SVSU's College of SE&T. This fall, the Millington native adds Ph.D. student to that list as she begins graduate studies in ecology, evolution, and environmental biology at Ohio's Miami University. One common thread that runs through all these different identities is Strasburg's adeptness as a communicator.

These skills as a speaker and writer have opened the door to many professional opportunities during Strasburg's time at SVSU. One that stands out in particular was a presentation she did at a national biology conference, "The Society of Integrative & Comparative Biology," in West Palm Beach, Florida. This 2015 presentation, "The Effects of Hypoxia in the Crayfish, *Orconectes rusticus*," allowed her to showcase her abilities as well as strengthen others. "Making my presentation helped me understand what it means to do scientific research and writing," she says. "I have become a more confident public speaker, and my ability to communicate in a condensed and efficient manner has improved drastically. In my career, I will always be presenting my research, whether it be verbally or written, so being able to have the opportunity to present research as an undergraduate will definitely give me a head start in graduate school and in my career." Strasburg has also presented at conferences related to her second major, Spanish.

In developing her skills as a writer, Strasburg found a passion for passing her gifts on to others. She helped students of all majors and skill sets during her work as a tutor at the SVSU Writing Center, where she once again wore many hats: she served as a specialized tutor who was embedded in sections of developmental English courses, as a "regular" tutor available to all SVSU students who visit the Center, and as a mentor to the Center's new hires; she even took a turn as an online tutor. In these various roles, she refined her own writing skills, learning of rhetorical strategies from different disciplines, but her writing, at its core, remained geared towards her career. This focus ultimately culminated in her participation in a Writing Across Campus presentation that she led with Dr. Scott Kowalewski of the Department of Rhetoric and Professional Writing. "For the presentation, we talked about key aspects of scientific writing, different types of scientific articles, and how to write a lab report," Strasburg explains. "It was a fantastic presentation, and we had a great turnout. I think the students who attended gained a lot by having a peer present the information."

Strasburg acknowledges that what she has learned at SVSU about effective communication will stay with her. Her hard work taught her a great deal about writing, and she is grateful that she learned seemingly disparate practices—science and writing—not only can work together, but can create a unique skill set, one that has had immense value: "Being able to write in my field helped me get into graduate school, which is, by far, my greatest accomplishment. Because I am a first-generation college student, just getting my bachelor's degree seemed like a stretch for me when I started, but now I am confident that I will earn my Ph.D." And Miami U., where she will specialize in amphibian conservation, shares that confidence—the school has offered her a graduate assistantship.

Strasburg recognizes that feedback she received from others was crucial to her success: "It's important to have people in your life that will give you advice on how to make your paper better. At SVSU, I had that in professors, friends, and, of course, the Writing Center." Valuing advice from others is a lesson she hopes to share with her future students. In addition, Strasburg has advice for other writers going into the sciences: "1. Take notes. The more notes you take the easier the writing will be. 2. Practice.

Don't give up. Keep trying until you get it. And finally, 3. Work hard. It's not an easy field, but if you put your mind to it, you can do anything."

# Spotlight on...

## *The Valley Vanguard*

Rachel Stocki

Editor-in-Chief



Popular media equates college writing with students generating paragraph after paragraph of arguments and analyses, scouring over page after page of research, and immersing themselves in footnotes, endnotes, bibliographies, and parenthetical citations. For one privileged individual, SVSU annually provides the opportunity to engage in much shorter essays—albeit still produce pages and pages of text—as the editor-in-chief of the *The Valley Vanguard*. For 2014-15, that individual was St. Clair native Rachel Stocki.

*The Valley Vanguard* was the first extracurricular activity in which Stocki became involved at the university, and involvement with the publication was ultimately revelatory. At first, she says, she tried play to it safe. Her second year at *The Valley Vanguard*, however, provided a turning point. She “had gained enough exposure to feel confident in taking on any article, even those that were more demanding or could prove controversial.” Moreover, her blooming confidence as a communicator influenced her other extracurricular activities: Moot Court, Law Club, the Political Science publication *The Sovereign*, and the Writing Center. Eventually, Stocki took on the role of editor-in-chief at *The Valley Vanguard* as she completed a degree in general business with a minor in political science. Writing, in short, became the ticket to campus involvement.

As editor-in-chief, Stocki was not only a regular columnist, but was responsible for leading a team of more than twenty writers, photographers, advertising reps, and section editors. Stocki is proud of the work she did and the end product that she and her team, under the guidance of advisor Brian Hlavaty, completed Sunday evenings throughout the school year: a high-quality, weekly newspaper that was both diverse in coverage and honest in reporting. A member of the 2014-15 class of Roberts Fellows whom faculty named Outstanding Graduate in Business in April 2015, Stocki describes the work of editor-in-chief as largely “trying to manage something that was very big and fluid, without a clear set of standards or expectations.”

Despite the challenges and the ambiguity of the position, Stocki found this rewarding work contributed to her own growth as writer and professional; she learned a great deal about stress management, her ability to work with others, and her own strengths and weaknesses as a communicator. Journalistic writing, unsurprisingly, also provided Stocki with the opportunity to learn and write about a variety of topics quickly and accurately. Stocki admits that prior to this she had a tendency to be wordy in her papers, but learning to write effectively and concisely, and on more diverse topics than she previously had, is a skill set she’s honed and taken to her new position at an automotive supplier in the greater Detroit area, where she works alongside an engineering team.

Below is a *Vanguard* article, “Undergraduates May Don Red Caps and Gowns,” by Kylie Wojciechowski, that reflects Stocki’s own philosophy as editor-in-chief. She explains, “I believe that journalism is about reporting current happenings in a fair and accurate manner. That’s what this article represents—the change in the color of the graduation caps and gowns was a topic that generated a lot of buzz and that people were interested in hearing about, and we communicated the facts about the issue to campus. Providing that kind of information to the community is an important role, and it’s one I’m proud that *The Valley Vanguard* staff and I were able to fulfill this year.” Fair, accurate, interesting—these are the hallmarks of Stocki’s writing and of all good writing done at SVSU.

## Undergraduates May Don Red Caps and Gowns

Students may soon be able to display their red pride during their final moments as undergraduate Cardinals—as they walk across the stage in the O’Neill Arena to receive their diplomas.

Beth Darling, an elementary education major set to graduate in May and member of Forever Red’s board of directors, has proposed changing the graduation cap and gown colors for undergraduates from black to a subtle red.

According to Brian Copenhaver, director of the University of California, Los Angeles, Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, the graduation gown is traditionally black but has been subject to colorful makeovers in recent years.

While attending her brother’s graduation from Michigan State University in 2010, Darling was inspired by the graduates’ green gowns that, to her, reflected pride in their institution.

“I think the red gowns will really portray a more encompassing view of our Cardinal pride,” Darling said.

Other universities have academic regalia that reflect their school colors.

Central Michigan University graduates wear maroon, Michigan Technological University graduates wear black and gold, those from Grand Valley State University wear royal blue and those from Northwood University wear navy.

Graduates of Eastern Michigan University, Michigan State University and Northern Michigan University wear green gowns and robes.

To gauge student opinions on her initiative, Darling conducted an online survey during a two-week period in December 2014 with assistance from the Office of Institutional Research.

She asked 1,800 students about their preference for the color of their academic regalia and received 415 responses.

About 58 percent of respondents said they would prefer red caps and gowns, 35 percent said they would prefer black and 6 percent said they had no preference.

She has presented her proposal to President Donald Bachand and Joe Vogl, chairman of the commencement committee for graduation, both of whom she said were impressed with her idea.

“It’ll lighten up the scene at graduation,” Darling said. “I’m a huge advocate for spreading red pride, for being proud of where you come from.”

Now, all graduates wear black gowns and the color of the tassel on their cap corresponds to the college from which they received their degree.

Graduates of the College of Arts and Behavioral Sciences earning their Bachelor of Fine Arts wear brown tassels; those earning their Bachelor of Arts wear white.

Graduates of the College of Business and Management wear drab tassels. Graduates of the College of Education wear light blue tassels.

Graduates of the Crystal M. Lange College of Health and Human Services earning their Bachelor of Science in Nursing wear apricot tassels; those earning their Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy wear gold.

Those earning their Bachelor of Social Work wear citron tassels.

Graduates of the College of Science, Engineering and Technology earning their Bachelor of Science wear gold tassels and those earning their Bachelor of Science in Engineering and Technology wear orange.

Bachand and Vogl will assemble students and faculty members to form a committee to address lingering questions and concerns.

Darling estimates the final decision will be made by the end of February. She hopes that May graduates will be able to sport the red academic regalia.

Reprinted by permission of the author, Kylie Wojciechowski, and *The Valley Vanguard*. “Undergraduates May Don Red Caps and Gowns” appeared on the *Vanguard* website on January 20, 2015.

# Spotlight on...

## *Cardinal Sins*

Nathan Phillips

Editor

Nathan Phillips has always been a reader.

"When I was in first grade, I'd check out books upon books from the school library, and I never looked back," he says. "But I never thought about being a writer [because] it was just far too abstract."

That mindset stuck with him until David Baker, 2011 recipient of the Roethke Prize, spoke to an English class in which Phillips was enrolled.

"He came in to talk about his poems," Phillips explains. "There was an odd moment where I realized he was just a normal person. Though I'm embarrassed to say it took me eighteen years to realize, it dawned on me that writers were just people who were devoted to their craft."

Phillips went home that night and began working on a story.

"It was just horrible," he remembers. "After a couple of months, it was less horrible."

Just like that, Phillips became a person devoted to his craft: a writer.

A May 2015 graduate, Phillips studied literature and creative writing at Saginaw Valley State University and was editor-in-chief of the university's arts and literature publication *Cardinal Sins*.

"*Cardinal Sins* is SVSU's only real literary outlet," he says. "Writers are known as solitary creatures, so [the publication] grants a space for like-minded people to gather and work on producing material of high quality."

Under his leadership and that of its faculty advisor, Peter Barry, professor of philosophy, the publication received submissions for its Fall 2014 issue from all fifty states and nearly a dozen countries.

The issue was complemented for the first time by an audio version of selected written works, read aloud by SVSU theatre students.

"Very few journals have an audio version available; those who do are journals of the caliber of *The Paris Review* and *The New Yorker*," he argues. "The audio version is time consuming and it is sometimes difficult ... to spend so much time on something that isn't editing or writing."

As editor-in-chief, Phillips has made great efforts to expand *Cardinal Sins*' readership by being more involved online and utilizing resources available on campus.

Continually frustrated by the nature of most journals and literary reviews, he has made a commitment to publish pieces that really move him.

"So many places are entrenched in a certain aesthetic," he explains. "I wanted our aesthetic to be defined, as Emily Dickinson says, as something that takes the top right off your head."

He believes his work with *Cardinal Sins* has taught him a great deal about his personal writing.

"It's easy to look at a poem or story and immediately diagnose ... flaws," he maintains. "But having the distance of cutting apart someone else's work shows you things that you need to work on. I'm [now] able to apply those editing principles to my own writing and fix a number of problems."

Although he is currently seeking full-time employment and has plans to apply to master of fine arts (MFA) programs in fiction in the next year, Phillips will leave *Cardinal Sins* with fond memories of time spent with colleagues and friends.

"And, as selfish as it may sound, I will always remember seeing my name in that fixed, black ink," he reflects.

One work from *Cardinal Sins* that Phillips published during his time as editor and of which he is proud is Aran Singh's flash fiction piece "Move Along," which is reprinted below. Phillips describes his rationale for publishing this piece in this way: "David Foster Wallace said that we are not what we think of ourselves or even what others think of us; we are what we think others think of us. In a few short pages, Aran's story narrativizes this adage beautifully. Though the piece is infused with Aran's trademark humor and pop-culture knowledge, the ending turns sharply inward and explores the fragile attempt of a



young person to rectify his image of himself with those images thrust upon him by others. ‘Move Along’ is a story that could only have been written by Aran Singh.”

### Move Along

Wendell stared at Kenobi’s face for what seemed like longer than twelve parsecs. He looked straight at little buck-toothed, curly-haired Davey, who scratched the side of his head. If Wendell wanted to low-ball him, he could’ve offered Ponda Baba without including Dr. Evazan. There were several solid Dark Side cards on the table here, mostly Cantina aliens.

“Ok, I guess,” Davey sighed.

Before any transaction could be finalized, Davey’s band-class buddy Franklin chimed in.

“Obi-Wan’s too good to give up,” Franklin said.

“Don’t butt in on my deal,” Wendell said.

“You’ll regret it,” Franklin said.

“Shut up and play with your clarinet,” Wendell said.

“You shut up, ratface,” Franklin said.

A crowd gathered around Wendell and Davey. Wendell waved his hand over the cards. “This is a good deal.” Davey bit his lower lip. He looked at the strange faces around him and then stopped on Franklin’s, who slowly shook his head.

“I could use an Imperial-Class Star Destroyer,” Davey said, impishly. “And Greedo and Djas Puhr.” Franklin closed his eyes and nodded in approval. Everyone’s attention shifted to Wendell, who looked annoyed. He let out an aggravated sigh.

“Alright, fine. Don’t want to part with Djas Puhr, but the Star Destroyer and Greedo are yours. Plus, I’ll give you seven bucks. You could buy two more packs.” The gawkers now zeroed in on Davey. Never before had this amount of attention been paid to him. He instinctively grabbed his collar as if being choked by invisible hands.

“Hey, Davey,” Wendell said. Davey’s eyes locked in on Wendell’s. “This is a good deal,” Wendell said as he waved his hand. Wendell could sense Kenobi was his.

Blake, one of the gawkers, stuck his head over the desks and pointed to a card.

“What’re those big, circled numbers in the top corner there?”

Nobody immediately answered. Eventually, Franklin said they were called Destiny Numbers.

“What’s a destiny number?”

Everyone remained silent. Better to plead ignorance than get made fun of.

“I want to know what a destiny number is!”

Franklin pointed toward Wendell and told Blake, “He knows more about this game than *anyone*.” The bell rang and Wendell let out a sigh of relief. Davey quickly gathered his things and said he’d “probably” do the deal later that day.

By the time eighth hour rolled around, Wendell was feeling good. He was the proud new owner of Obi-Wan Kenobi; his Light Side deck had zero holes now. Wendell sat at his desk with a smile on his face, half-heartedly engaged in busy work. A few seats behind, Blake told his buddy how school sucked, but his classes were mostly alright. Except first hour. “Bunch of retarded *Star Wars*-card-trading faggots and losers in there.” Wendell slowly shook his head in disbelief as if part of Blake’s intended audience. Wendell kept his head down and doodled on his worksheet until the bell rang. After the class let out, Wendell walked down the crowded hallway and went into the bathroom. There were a few other kids in there. Wendell pretended to use the urinal until the room was empty. He washed his hands and then looked into the mirror.

“You aren’t ratfaced,” he said. He waved his hand. “You’re not a loser.”

Reprinted by permission from the author, Aran Singh, and *Cardinal Sins*. “Move Along” appeared in the Winter 2015 issue of *Cardinal Sins*.



# Spotlight on...

## Faculty

In the following pages, we profile the work of three SVSU faculty members known for their work in and outside the classroom. Innovative teachers and scholars, they are also successful writers who strive to help their students find their own success as writers. As recipients of various SVSU faculty awards in 2015, they share here insights into their work as writers and as teachers of writing.



The 2015 winner of the Franc A. Landee Teaching Excellence Award, **Tami Sivy** joined the SVSU faculty in 2008 and currently serves as the chair of the Chemistry Department. She has been a member of the University Writing Committee and mentored many Honors students on their theses. In her essay, “What Does ‘Morphology’ Mean Anyway?,” she discusses the need to demystify language for students and to make them adept practitioners of their respective discourses.



**Paul E. Teed** has served the university in various capacities—professor of history, former chair of the Honors Program—and been recognized for his work as a writer and teacher on various occasions. He is a former Braun Fellow, winner of the Landee Award, and a 2012 Michigan Distinguished Professor of the Year. In 2015, he added recipient of the Earl L. Warrick Award for Excellence in Research to his list of accomplishments; in his essay, he talks about his work as a writer of history and what that means for his work in the classroom.



An instructor within the Department of Criminal Justice who has served as associate dean for the College of Arts and Behavioral Sciences, **Carol Zimmermann** is the 2015 winner of the Innovative Writing in Teaching (IWIT) Award. The IWIT Award is coordinated by the University Writing Committee, and in her essay, Zimmermann outlines her philosophy of teaching writing and the tenets she draws on to help her students become better writers.

# What Does “Morphology” Mean Anyway?

Tami Sivy

Associate Professor of Chemistry

Winner of the 2015 Franc A. Landee Teaching Excellence Award

Niels Bohr, one of the most important scientists of the twentieth century, known for his contributions to quantum theory, said “What is it that we human beings ultimately depend on? We depend on our words. We are suspended in language” (as cited in Petersen, 1963, p. 10). Even though we scientists have our charts and graphs and figures, we are still reliant on the words that explain them. An understanding of language is necessary for one to do well in our discipline—all disciplines—something I stress in all of my classes.

I suspect that the old proverb “actions speak louder than words” is applicable in many of the disciplines we teach our students, but I would argue this is especially true in the sciences. (I’m sure you would suggest this of your own areas, but we’ll just talk about mine, as I am the writer here.) All of our communication, within and outside the scientific community, is based on language. As an example, if people are involved in a conversation and someone doesn’t know what “transesterification” means, how can a serious discussion about the mechanism of RNA processing take place? How can this word be included in a written text if the writer or reader doesn’t understand its definition? We are unable to show others what “transesterification” is through an action; therefore, Bohr remains correct: we must make sure that participants in a dialogue about “transesterification”—whether written or oral—can use the word properly.

A few personal stories to illustrate my point.... I remember one of the first times I said “cleavage” to a classroom of students. Snickers could be heard from the back of the room, and I’m sure I turned bright red. I quickly recovered enough to remind them that to a chemist “cleavage” is the breaking of bonds, not the common reference to, ahem, part of a lady’s anatomy. I later decided to explore whether “cleavage” had other meanings and discovered its different applications in biology, geology, politics, dentistry, and other disciplines.

I also took a cell biology course as an undergraduate junior after completing only one other biology course during my freshman year. During one course meeting, the professor used the word “morphology” when talking about cells. My classmates, mostly biology majors, clearly knew what he was talking about. I, however, could not recollect having heard that word before and spent the rest of the lecture huddled in my seat, tuning out what was being discussed because I was stuck on that one word. I later looked up its definition, but during class I missed a lot of information that the professor had been trying to teach that day.

I have never forgotten these experiences and others like them. As a result, I try not to miss opportunities to ask my students whether they know certain words. When defining terms related to our topics, I often write them on the board so that they can see the spelling and associate the look of the word with the meaning. If I am unable to give an accurate description, I urge students to look it up, right then; this actually seems like a good use of cell phones during class! I don’t mind if I might look foolish by not knowing something, as it’s more important not to lose students because they are confused by something like “morphology,” which is, by the way, a word I never forget to define for my classes. Learning the language will always be an ongoing process for each of us, and it is necessary to practice it, both orally and in written form. Two questions to keep in mind while doing so are “Who is the audience?” and “Who is the source of the information?” These questions enable us to determine whether the interactions are taking place between those who understand the language or those who are less versed in it. In SVSU’s chemistry courses, our students are required to write formal reports and present structured talks to practice the way that communication takes place within our scientific community. They also read and critique primary literature to see how language is handled by more advanced scientists. This is something that happens in all our disciplines.

For me, a bigger challenge may be in helping students learn to communicate with people outside the scientific community. In the seminal *The Making of a Scientist*, psychologist Anne Roe stated, “Nothing in science has any value to society if it is not communicated, and scientists are beginning to

learn their social obligations” (1953/1974, p. 17). We continue to struggle with this responsibility, as it is difficult conveying messages to those who are not familiar with the language. Rarely are my students as excited as when they are able to explain believably, accurately, and effectively something they’ve learned in class to their non-scientist family and friends.

This linguistic demystification is all part of guiding students to ascertain whether a piece of communication is reliable. Do all authors who report information understand the language, or are some presenting things they don’t really get? Urging students to critique sources of all kinds is important for their fluency. To that end, I regularly give an assignment in which students compare information that is presented to the general public—through newspapers, TV shows, the Internet, etc.—to the primary literature from which the information originated. They’ve questioned old wives’ tales such as if turkey causes you to fall asleep (it doesn’t), examined reports on artificial sweeteners (they’re most likely not harmful), and explored the causes of serious diseases like Alzheimer’s (it’s not antiperspirant). They usually come out of this exercise realizing that many people can talk the talk, but it doesn’t mean the talk is trustworthy. I also remind them that they themselves must be accurate distributors of knowledge.

So it all comes back to language. To speak or write to a given audience, it is necessary to learn the vocabulary of that audience’s discipline. We, as teachers, are all linguists in this way, charged with helping our students become better communicators in their chosen fields. We should not take for granted that our students have a grasp on the lexicon of our disciplines, even though they have passed the prerequisites. It takes hard work to learn a new language, and we need to help our students however we can in this endeavor. We shouldn’t be afraid to step back and remember what it was like to be a student, to remember what our individual “morphology” was, and to demystify that “morphology.” Better yet, we should tell them that, at one time, we were the ones asking, “What does ‘morphology’ mean anyway?”

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# Writing and the Historian

Paul E. Teed

Professor of History

Winner of the 2015 Earl L. Warrick Award for Excellence in Research

Each year when I tell students in my early American history survey course that essay writing will be an important component of their work in the course, I can feel their discomfort rising even if they don't say a word. They sit a bit lower in their seats and exchange pained or fearful expressions with their classmates. Some students even complain about writing assignments on course evaluations, exclaiming angrily that "this is not an English course!" Yet at the same time, I find great satisfaction in the progress they make each semester, not only in the clarity of their expression and the organization of their thoughts, but in their ability to draw conclusions from historical evidence and to make analytical connections between past events. Though it is difficult for students to see it happening at the time, there is a sort of alchemy in writing that produces that most unnatural of activities: historical thinking.

I can sympathize with my students because it took a long time for me to understand how important writing was in my own development as a historian. As an undergraduate at New York University, I enjoyed my professors' lectures, I read all of the books and articles they assigned, and I regularly talked with my classmates about historical issues. But I still looked at written assignments as hoops to jump through or tests of intellectual strength rather than as opportunities to develop my own understanding of past events. I understood that history was an interpretive discipline and not just about memorizing facts, but somehow thinking and talking just seemed easier. It was not until graduate school that I fully realized that writing effectively about history was done to *generate* knowledge about the past rather than simply to report on it. As I read hundreds of pages of secondary literature and pored over countless primary source documents each week, I became increasingly aware that I was completely free to develop my own views about the meaning of the issues I was studying. At some point along the way, I recognized that writing was an exciting and quite personal process from which I could develop a distinct interpretive voice and find my own place within a larger community of students and scholars. Although it was never easy, writing became inseparable from my life as an historian.

Since that time, I have written three books and many scholarly articles in which I have tried to express my understanding of the interrelated issues of religion, slavery, violence, and civil war in nineteenth-century America. The process I have followed in generating these publications has involved writing at every stage, not simply as the final act when the research is done. Historical research involves the accumulation of documentary evidence, and I find it easy to become overwhelmed by the sheer volume of what is available for interpretation. It is therefore crucial for me to begin writing about my evidence almost as soon as I have begun collecting it, comparing what I have found to what other scholars have looked at and testing my interpretations against earlier traditions of writing on the subject. Sometimes this early stage of writing can be humbling because the lack of evidence or the difficulty of making sense of it becomes painfully apparent. However, that awareness, generated by the writing process itself, is essential. It identifies evidentiary gaps that need to be filled or interpretive principles that need greater depth or definition. When all of the documentary sources are assembled moreover, these early stages of writing can become the rough basis for the final product. This process has worked well for me over the years, and my advice to student researchers has always been to start writing at the earliest stages of their projects.

Another critical question I have faced as a writer, and one that I always ask students to think about it, is that of audience. There is a tendency for all academic practitioners to write for their colleagues rather than for general audiences, and although this is essential for the ongoing development of any scholarly tradition, it narrows the field of readers considerably. Specialized academic vocabularies, which are essential in applying advanced interpretive methods in the humanities and social sciences, can nevertheless be incomprehensible to all but a small community of scholars. At the same time, however, if more traditional modes of writing, such as biography or narrative history, go down well with general readers, they often lack analytical significance or gloss over very real problems in the evidentiary record. I have attempted to combine these approaches in my work, generally avoiding abstruse scholarly jargon

but employing robust analytical themes in studies that are either narrative or biographical. I am also honest with readers when unresolved issues arise because of a lack of source, and I have found that discussions of sources can be quite entertaining if they are well written. I encourage my students to write in this way as well, and although many of them find the balance between narration and analysis difficult to strike, the attempt to achieve such a balance makes them not only better writers but better thinkers as well.

The key result of all of this is that writing has become the most enjoyable and exciting part of my academic life. It is no longer a hoop to jump through or a test to be taken, but rather an exciting opportunity to make meaning from the written artifacts bequeathed by the past to the present. So when the discussion of writing produces consternation on the faces of my students each semester, I sympathize with them, but also recognize that writing is a path that, if embraced with discipline and commitment, inevitably leads to understanding.

# **“The pond is under water”: Lessons Learned from Undisciplined Writing**

**Carol Zimmermann**

Associate Professor of Criminal Justice  
Recipient of the 2015 Innovative Writing in Teaching Award

## **“The pond is under water”**

(Personal communication by  
[name of person withheld to protect the inept],  
circa 1994)

During my tenure as the assistant cabinet director of the Ohio juvenile correctional system, I read a number of critical incident reports. These documents were intended to convey information about events that could threaten the safety and security of our prisons and the surrounding community. However, I was often confounded by such statements as “The pond is under water” in these reports. It is true that the odd clause above was somewhat decipherable in the context of the time and the source of the report. I knew, for example, that this report came from the duty officer of a correctional institution that was in a flood plain, that the institution had a retaining pond, and that we had experienced an unusual amount of rain in the day preceding the report. In this instance, the near-flood status of the institutional grounds did not pose an immediate threat to safety and security, but it did expose the inability of my officers and other staff to write in a clear, concise, and correct manner.

## **“The assailant was hit”**

(Personal communication by  
[name of person withheld to protect the even more inept],  
circa 1994)

Critical incident reports were used in court or administrative hearings and, therefore, needed to be written well. I recall poring over the report from which the above quote was taken and trying to discern the identity of the assailant and his or her medical status. No joy there. Did the writer mean that someone, perhaps a responding officer, struck an inmate? Could the writer have been confused and actually meant that the assailant hit someone else? The report’s author had, after all, decided to call him an assailant. Finding the name of the “assailant” would have brightened my day, as would the discovery of the name of the person who hit... well... someone. On those mornings I spent reading scores of such poorly constructed, maddening, and puzzling reports, it is amazing that my secretary did not find me weeping softly while hiding in the kneehole of my desk.

This type of writing was not just frustrating for a reader; it presented serious challenges to our agency’s collective ability to diagnose systems issues, improve conditions, prosecute or discipline errant inmates or staff, and maintain the trust of those with whom we worked and the trust of the citizens we all served. In fact, I can remember being called to testify in one case involving such writing. The attorney asked me if I wanted to see the critical incident report to refresh my memory and aid my testimony. I declined with a soft murmur, all the while thinking that the report would only serve to muddy my testimony and embarrass the agency if the attorney asked me to read any part of it aloud. Poor writing contributed to more breaches of justice and safety than poorly executed weapons or contraband checks. Words matter. Evidence matters. Credibility matters. Writing matters.

My education about the need for good and compelling writing also came from my responsibility for all levels of staff. Sifting through stacks and stacks of resumes and cover letters to hire every sort of employee—from cooks to physicians—was another key part of my professional education. I quickly learned that poor writing skills doomed many people—potentially fine, creative, and trustworthy applicants—to the “oh my” pile and to the receipt of rejection letters.



Years of attempting to ameliorate the writing and the communication skills of staff in the corrections culture left me with a true sense of urgency and a missionary zeal to promote clear, correct, concise, and compelling written communication. In the profession, this meant I invested a good deal of time and resources in skill-building with the existing staff and strengthening hiring practices to select better writers.

The transition from correctional administrator to university professor provided me with an opportunity to channel my desire to inspire and equip students to become confident and competent writers. I continue to grow as a writer, and—importantly—to grow as a guide and mentor for student writers. My students have taught me a great deal and inspired me to create experiences that will show them why they should care about writing, as well as to take them, step by step, through skill-building experiences. Here are a few tenets that guide me as I try to inspire students to become both disciplined and passionate about the writing process.

### **Your voice is just fine.**

I will admit that student writing efforts early in introductory college courses do, occasionally, make me chuckle. Submissions often go something like this: “Amongst the most arrogant issues facing citizens today is the grandiose and nearly lack of public correlation of gun control laws with the raging and astronomically increasing rate of homicides and murders over the past fifty years.”

Oh, where to start? I generally start with a few assertions. The first—for each student—is that his or her voice is just fine. Second, this is not your voice. Third, who says amongst? Fourth, back away from the online thesaurus and nobody will be hurt.

As students make the transition from high school to college, they often tell me that they think they have to write like a college student. As they have no template for this, they tend to believe that the bigger the word and the longer the sentence, the more sagacious they will appear. The more they attempt to write as someone else, the more the loss of their true voice degrades their writing. This brings us to the next point.

### **Writing should be joyful and should focus on the reader.**

I find that many of my students come into my classes believing that writing is torture or—at best—an exercise to be endured so that one can turn in a paper, get a grade, and never have to see that submission again. This is a terrible misunderstanding of a process that should be productive and filled with joy.

One of the experiences that I love to present to my students is to have them play professor and have them read and grade sample papers. I have them work in teams, using my rubric. They are not to correct spelling or minor grammar errors; they are to read the work and—for each objective—indicate how well the author has done in meeting that key requirement. One paper (Paper #1) is worthy of an A. The other (Paper #2) is plagiarized and has all the qualities of a plagiarized paper. It has phrases randomly placed that, in the context of the paper, have no clear meaning. The voice is inconsistent. There could, possibly, be some valuable information presented, but extracting it is next to impossible.

The students are often quite disarmed by the exercise. We have to stop and process after they read the first two sections of the papers. The poor paper contains many big words (often statistical terms that the students do not understand). They find this impressive. The other paper is accessible, so they wonder if this paper is not worthy of a college student. We have to do some reality checks. Do you understand the key idea? Can you even find the key idea? Did you gather any useful information from this paper? Does reading Paper #2 make your head hurt?

Armed with trust in their own abilities, the students launch back into grading. They now are empowered to question the gibberish in Paper #2 and rejoice in the ease with which ideas drift from the words of Paper #1 into their open minds. Students will begin to raise their hands and ask if these are “real” papers. At first I will demur. Later I will share that these are actual submissions from actual students (from long ago, of course). As the mental lights dawn and the laughter mounts, the realization of the true value of a well-crafted paper and the agony of poor writing ripples across the class. One of my

favorite responses to the experience came from a gentleman who was a very undisciplined writer. After struggling to read through Paper #2, he came up and told me that he could not believe that I actually had to read papers like this. He threw his arms around me in an unexpected hug of sympathy and stated, “I am going to try not to do that to you.” He did not. Victory belonged to both of us.

### **Most good writers are built and refined (not born).**

Seeing examples of accessible writing and examples of writing that confounds and confuses the reader is a wonderful, motivational start to our collective process as a learning community. However, we cannot succeed in writing without building our skills. I find that processes that require short exercises with routine feedback provide the structure that many students need to focus on honing critical skills. Being accountable for a few, lovely sentences (complete with citations and references) is much like training for a long race by slowly building up endurance. This process of continually writing and then getting feedback from their peers and from me builds those important skills, as well as the confidence the students need to learn to love writing. As one student wrote of his experience in Criminal Justice (CJ) 100 (Criminal Justice Skills for Success) in Fall 2014,

I remember at the beginning of class I hated writing because I wasn't good at it, but now I don't mind writing because I know my writing skills have improved a lot throughout the year. For example (in class 7 on diversity) we had to review each other's work on the preparation exercise and write helpful reviews and good feedback that would help the writer answer the question better. This exercise boosted my confidence in writing because people took what I said and were able to use it to write a better assignment about diversity.

### **Editing is not optional.**

The discipline of writing is also linked to the need to save time and mental energy (and the good will of colleagues) to edit, revise, rethink, reread, and revise the written work. It will not come as a shock to most professors or students that writing a term paper often is much like a drive-by writing event. Students may assemble resources, but the “process” is often a deadline-driven adventure in which the mission is to get mostly correct information down on electronic pages until a specified page count is met. Proofreading and editing one's work is not considered key to this mission and is certainly not the glamorous part of the writing process.

I often assign a writing exercise that requires students to create one, lovely, well-drafted sentence—just one. I then select one of those sentences and redact the name from this submission; another student must read the sentence aloud. A fine effort will result in great celebration (generally by me and probably fairly embarrassing to watch the first time as I perform the professor version of the dance of joy). A less successful sentence results in the requests for a second reading and then a corporate diagnosis by the group. What is missing? What is not clearly stated for the reader? Is the key idea clearly stated? We never chide or shame. We listen. We think. We identify the writing muscle our (anonymous) author needs to develop. We learn.

Although not a particularly thrilling part of the process, leading students through multiple editing sessions on very short assignments teaches the students how to have power as a communicator and how to facilitate the flow of ideas easily and smoothly from the page to the reader's mind. I often use the term “disciplined writer” to describe this attribute. Once students begin to understand how to scrutinize and improve their communication and the communication of others in our writing community, they too begin to use this phrase to describe themselves. As one CJ 100 student noted in Winter 2014,

This course has helped me to become a more disciplined and effective writer.... It also helped me to make certain that the sentences I wrote were simply, correctly, clearly and fully representing the author's ideas, but still stating the material in my own words.... I worked diligently and took my time to paraphrase the material as well as [make] sure that I re-read and revised my writing numerous times before I submitted it.

### **The immediacy of current communication is a blessing and a curse.**

Our ability to text and thumb type our way through immediate discourse is truly amazing. Sending and receiving important (as well as frivolous) information in the blink of an eye continues to revolutionize the flow of information. However, this form of writing is not without its perils.

Zippping off a missive without hesitation or the nicety of even cursory proofreading can have terrible consequences. Unfortunately, our communication culture does not reward or focus on the discipline of reading, editing, and revising written work. One such writer was noticeably upset that she was assessed as poorly capturing the key idea. Her argument was that she had forgotten only one word. One word! How could anyone be so picky? Picky or not, if the word is “not” and you are explaining the outcome of a criminal trial, failing to put “not” before “guilty” is a matter of grave import.

As with any cultural change, I do not assume that students will read their work because I ask them to. Envisioning writing as an iterative process within a community of writers inculcates these skills.

### **Learning to take and to give helpful suggestions is an important gift.**

The idea that you need to embrace a community of fellow writers is foreign to many of my students. They are protective of their papers and fearful that helping others may increase competition for the almighty A. They are also fearful of looking foolish or stupid. I believe that part of my task in teaching writing means creating a safe place and a highly structured process that will allow each student to feel respected and supported. As a Fall 2014 CJ 100 student noted,

Before CJ 100, I hated criticism. I hated being criticized, but I also hated criticizing others. This class taught me to “leave my ego at the door” as Dr. Z put it. Peer reviews opened my eyes to the fact that I’m not criticizing this person because I hate them and want them to feel horrible. I’m making suggestions because I want them to succeed like I want myself to succeed. I won’t forget the time we peer reviewed each other’s briefings. Towards the end of class one of my classmates took time to read my briefing and make comments when it wasn’t required of her. She could have been one of those students who said “oh it’s perfect, no problems,” but instead she gave me feedback to better my paper. I knew from that briefing peer review that I had grown from this class.

### **Writing is sometimes the only way your voice is heard. Your voice matters.**

None of my students want to end up in the “oh my” pile of rejected job applications and have their dreams evaporate or to have their creative ideas tossed aside because a key decision-maker gave up the struggle to understand. Windows of opportunity will open for each of my wonderful students. I need them to know that I believe that their ideas and their voice matters, and that I will work with them to ensure that their voice can be heard through their writing.

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I often hear professionals and teachers complain about the state of the written communication. I understand the sentiment. One could argue that “The pond is under water” is emblematic of the sinking level of writing in our culture. However, I believe that students and teachers can learn a good deal from poor writing. We can use the frustration we feel when we trying to ferret out meaning in a poorly written missive. We can channel that into a new understanding of the true power of clear and compelling written work. We can reframe students’ views of writing—from seeing it as inflicted torture to honing it into a skill that helps their voices be heard and respected.

Building writing skills slowly and methodically, through respectful feedback, is a challenging task for teacher and student. Transforming a class into a community of writers, a group giving grace and expecting support, creates the environment in which these skills can be safely practiced, and the joy of writing can be discovered.

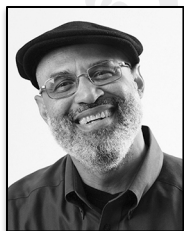


# Spotlight on...

## Visiting Writers

As part of its mission to enhance campus life and that of the larger community within which it resides, SVSU is committed to bringing guest speakers to campus. Sponsored by individual departments and colleges, Campus Life and the President's Office, student organizations and student support services, among various other groups on campus, these visitors create a richer learning environment at SVSU and speak to a host of interests and issues we face locally and globally.

Several of those speakers have been gracious enough to let us reprint some of their work in *Writing@SVSU*.



**Tim Seibles** visited SVSU in November 2014 as winner of the Roethke Triennial Poetry Prize. Sponsored by the Board of Fellows since 2011, the Roethke Prize is named after Theodore Roethke, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Saginaw poet, and its winner is selected by a panel of judges appointed by United States Poet Laureate. During his visit, Seibles, who teaches at Old Dominion University, participated in various events linked to the celebration, met with SVSU students, and gave a public reading of his poetry. A finalist for the National Book Awards, Seibles is the author of several books of poetry, including *Hammerlock*, *Buffalo Head Solos*, and *Fast Animal*. In the following pages, we reprint "Ode to My Hands," a piece that appears in *Fast Animal* and a poem he shared with SVSU students during his visit.



As part of the Roethke Prize celebration, American poet **David Baker** also visited campus. The 2011 winner of the prize and author of the poetry collections *Never-Ending Birds*, *Midwest Eclogue*, and *Changeable Thunder*, Baker returned to SVSU and worked with SVSU creating writing majors. He serves as poetry editor for *The Kenyon Review* and is the recipient of numerous honors, in addition to the Roethke Prize. Baker's "The Osprey" appears on the following pages.

While the Roethke Prize is awarded every three years, Voices in the Valley is an annual and longstanding tradition at SVSU that also profiles the work of creative writers. Dr. Arra Ross of the English Department currently directs the program and works to bring established and emerging voices to campus. Recent guests of Voices in the Valley include poets Jamal May, Tracy K. Smith, and Carolyn Forché, and memoirist Anne-Marie Oomen.



In April 2015, poet **Éireann Lorsung** visited SVSU as part of Voices in the Valley. Lorsung is the author of *Music For Landing Planes By* (Milkweed, 2007), *Her Book* (Milkweed, 2013), *The Book of Splendor* (Milkweed, forthcoming 2018), and the chapbook *Sweetbriar* (dancing girl press, 2013). Poems appear or are forthcoming in *jubilat*, *FIELD*, *TriQuarterly*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Colorado Review*, and *Women's Studies Quarterly*; excerpts from her novel-in-progress appear in *Two Serious Ladies*, *DIAGRAM*, and *Bluestem*. She runs MIEL, a micropress ([miel-books.com](http://miel-books.com)), and is residency director at Dickinson House ([dickinsonhouse.be](http://dickinsonhouse.be)).



**Peter Ho Davies** visited SVSU as part of the Voices in the Valley program in the fall of 2014. Davies is the author of the novel *The Welsh Girl* and the story collections *The Ugliest House in the World* and *Equal Love*; his newest novel, *Tell It Slant*, will be published in Fall 2015. Davies's work has appeared in *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, *Granta* and *The Paris Review*, and has been selected for *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Award* and *Best American Short Stories*. Born in Britain to Welsh and Chinese parents, he teaches in the MFA Program at the University of Michigan. "Darkness, Invisible," which appears below and was part of his reading at SVSU, concerns the early Chinese American movie star Anna May Wong and is from Davies's novel in progress.



As part of the Dow Visiting Scholars and Artists Series, Marquette University professor **Larry Watson** came to SVSU in April 2015. A writer of poetry and fiction, Watson is best known for his novels *American Boy*, *White Crosses*, and *Orchard*. He has been nominated for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award for his novels *Let Him Go* and *Montana, 1948*, a book that has been regularly taught by SVSU English faculty. In the following pages, we include an excerpt from his novel *Let Him Go*.

# Ode to My Hands

Tim Seibles

SVSU Visiting Poet, Winner of the 2014 Roethke Triennial Poetry Prize

Five-legged pocket spiders, knuckled  
starfish, grabbers of forks, why  
do I forget that you love me:  
your willingness to button my shirts,  
tie my shoes—even scratch my head!  
which throbs like a traffic jam, each thought  
leaning on its horn. I see you

waiting anyplace always  
at the ends of my arms—for the doctor,  
for the movie to begin, for  
freedom—so silent, such  
patience! testing the world  
with your bold myopia: faithful,  
ready to reach out at my  
softest suggestion, to fly up  
like two birds when I speak, two  
brown thrashers brandishing verbs  
like twigs in your beaks, lifting  
my speech the way pepper springs  
the tongue from slumber. O!

If only people knew the unrestrained  
innocence of your intentions,  
each finger *a cappella*, singing  
a song that rings like rain  
before it falls—that never falls!  
Such harmony: the bass thumb, the  
pinkie's soprano, the three tenors  
in between: kind quintet times two  
rowing my heart like a little boat  
upon whose wooden seat I sit  
strummed by Sorrow. Or maybe

I misread you completely  
and you are dreaming a tangerine, one  
particular hot tamale, a fabulous  
banana! to peel suggestively,  
like thigh-high stockings: grinning  
as only hands can grin  
down the legs—caramel, cocoa,  
black-bean black, vanilla—such lubricious  
dimensions, such public secrets!  
Women sailing the streets

with God's breath at their backs.  
Think of it! No! *Yes*:  
let my brain sweat, make my

veins whimper: without you, my five-hearted  
fiends, my five-headed hydras, what  
of my mischievous history? The possibilities  
suddenly impossible—feelings  
not felt, rememberings un-  
remembered—all the touches  
untouched: the gallant strain

of a pilfered ant, tiny muscles  
flexed with fight, the gritty  
sidewalk slapped after a slip, the pulled  
weed, the plucked flower—a buttercup!  
held beneath Dawn's chin—the purest kiss,  
the caught grasshopper's kick, honey,  
chalk, charcoal, the solos teased  
from guitar. Once, I played  
viola for a year and never stopped

to thank you—my two angry sisters,  
my two hungry men—but you knew  
I just wanted to know  
what the strings would say  
concerning my soul, my whelming  
solipsism: this perpetual solstice  
where one + one = everything  
and two hands teach a dawdler  
the palpable alchemy  
of an unreasonable world.

Reprinted with permission from the author. "Ode to My Hands" was first published in *Fast Animal*, a collection of poems by Tim Seibles, by Etruscan Press.



# The Osprey

David Baker

SVSU Visiting Poet, Winner of the 2011 Roethke Triennial Poetry Prize

or sea-eagle,  
what the guidebook says is  
white, grayish brown, and “possessed of weak eye-  
masks” in its non-migratory island

instance, is blue.  
Blue, riding thermal bands  
so low over the water it picks up  
the water’s color, reticulate

tarsi tipping  
the light crests; and picks up  
one of the silver fish cutting the surface  
there, so the fish is blue, too, flapping-gone-

slack in the grasp  
of its claws—as only  
the owl shares an outer reversible  
toe-talon, turned out for such clutching;

as the water,  
in turn, picks up the sky-  
depth reflective blue sent down from ages  
beyond, into which the osprey lifts now

without a least  
turning of wing-chord though  
“they are able to bend the joint in their  
wing to shield their eyes from the light”; what I

mean is, by the  
time I tell you this it’s  
gone: fish-and-bird, away, “bone-breaker,” brown  
or gray “diurnal raptor,” back into

the higher trades. Someday, too, this blue—

“The Osprey” first appeared in 2014 in *The Nation* and is reprinted with permission from the author.

# To Wear Their Own Clothes at All Times

Éireann Lorsung  
SVSU Visiting Poet

To be ordered to wear the uniform.  
To every two weeks be ordered as such.  
To receive as a result of refusal for instance  
a cell without furniture  
or plain tea, broth, and dry bread.

To be a prison governor is something else.  
To move through a prison like it is the digestive system of a big, invisible  
animal whose workings you are not responsible for.

This prologue to certain late-century movements.  
Geologic time has no marker for fifty-six days, fifty-nine days.  
The human body accords its own pardon, coma.

What is the difference between a criminal and a political criminal?  
For example the right to wear one's own clothes.  
Recently there has been a petition granted allowing the use of hunger  
as a mode of resistance.

After seventy-four days. After thirty days. After fifty-four days. At  
the intercession of family. On a doctor's advice. By force.  
Death. By medical intervention. After almost sixty days.  
Death.

In a room whose walls are smeared with one's own excrement.  
Underwater with no indication of an end time.  
With electrodes attached to hands, nipples, genitals, feet.  
Upside-down.  
Isolated, unidentified, on death row, extradited, in one's own clothes.

The pressure from the foreign secretary to change the name of the street.  
Something in me swells and threatens to overrun when I read whose name  
is written in Farsi on the wall of the former embassy.

To receive ministrations for the body and soul in one's own language.  
To feel the body anointed.  
Someplace the body still insisting on its ownness.  
To be visited but not with pain.  
To be recognised for correct action despite the official disdain for the body.

After three years. After a year. Two years. Five years. More than 400 days.  
According to psychologists, no longer than thirty days. The entire  
time he was held there. Intermittently for nearly a decade.

Reprinted with permission from the author. "To Wear Their Own Clothes at All Times" was first  
published in *ILK* and, in Dutch translation, in *nY*.

# Darkness, Invisible: Anna May Wong

Peter Ho Davies

SVSU Visiting Novelist and Short Story Writer

She bought her first movie ticket at ten with the tips she earned making deliveries for her father's laundry. This was Los Angeles—*Lo Sang* in Chinese—her birthplace. Cutting school, she walked for miles in the heat to avoid being seen by anyone she knew. Only when she hadn't passed another Chinese face for blocks did she duck into a theater—a *Biograph*, she later recalled. The ticket-seller gave her a narrow look, inspected the Indian head on the coin she held out as if it were a passport (this when Nickelodeon's still cost a nickel), and waved her through. The ticket stub is preserved on the inside cover of her scrapbook.

At first, she felt self-conscious, being the only Chinese, and a young girl at that, in the audience. She hid in the bathroom, terrified and lonely, tracing the pattern on the tin ceiling, until she heard the organist start up and then she slipped in and took a seat. But in the cool darkness she found herself relaxing, laughing with the rest at the short subjects, weeping with everyone else during the feature, emotions she would never have betrayed on the street, and which even here she glanced around furtively before giving vent to. But no one was watching her, all their faces upturned towards the screen, each one lit with the same silvery glaze. No one, not even she, could tell the difference. It was the first place she felt like an American.

When he found out, her father made her kneel and beat her with the broom.

But she kept going, sometimes seeking out movie-houses so far from home that the inter-titles were in Spanish. Pearl White in *The Perils of Pauline* was a favorite, perils which included villains called Wu Fang and Long Sin. Her own villainy included forging notes from her father to give to her teachers in an English he couldn't write, getting whipped first by him and then by them when discovered.

In the beginning it was the theaters' thrill of invisibility that she craved, that she couldn't get enough of, tired as she was of being stared at in the street, picked on in school. Outside, even the sun seemed to glare at her; inside it was all chill shadows. The flickers were the one place she didn't feel watched, the one place where she could watch others. Later though, she came to envy those faces and figures on the screen before her. Not to be stared at was one thing, but to be stared at as they were stared at, with love and awe, was something else again. She wanted to be like them. Every face on the screen was white, but in the dreaming darkness anything seemed possible. At home in the mirror she practiced their expressions and poses awkwardly. But in the dark, she made their faces her own.

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# An Excerpt from *Let Him Go*

Larry Watson

SVSU Visiting Novelist and Poet

Eventually the highway the Blackledges travel will lead through the fiery eruptions of rock that are the Dakota Badlands—mile after mile of jagged, sheered-off red and orange buttes and sudden deep-shadowed gorges and ravines—but the first few miles out of Dalton are as easy as a pony ride. This is prairie, rolling gentle country where black seams of trees and brush stitch one grassy hill to another. Barbed wire lines the highway, but with so much emptiness on every side, what the wire is supposed to fence in or out isn't clear. Here and there an unmarked dirt or gravel path branches off from the highway, leading no doubt to a ranch or farm, but these are far enough from the main road that it would take a soaring hawk's eye to find them. At one of the breaks in the wire—was a gate here once?—a turnoff barely as wide as a car appears, and George shifts down to second and turns the car hard off the highway, swerving so suddenly it seems as though he must be trying to avoid a collision.

A box in the back seat slides against the door, and cans and jars crash into each other. Margaret is pitched hard against her own door, but she rights herself quickly and reaches toward the steering wheel as if she means to take control of the car.

Don't, George! Don't do this!

But George pushes her hand away and concentrates on maneuvering the car up the narrow road, its soft dirt almost as difficult to negotiate as drifted snow. The dust the Hudson raises finds its way through George's open window, and he risks taking a hand off the wheel for the time it takes to roll up the window.

Margaret slumps back in her seat, powerless now to prevent her husband from taking them where he's decided they'll go.

At the hill's crest the road bends around a stand of bur oak before briefly widening and leveling out. Here George stops. If he didn't, they'd drive a curving route down the other side of the hill. The road eventually stops at a ranch huddled in the valley below.

I don't need to see this again, says Margaret, swatting her hand in the direction of a white frame house, a windmill, a small corral, and a barn and stable, their wood weathered to the color of a sparrow's feathers. Although the valley and a few cottonwoods shelter the ranch house and its outbuildings, every wall and fence post seems wind-worn and leaning, nothing quite plumb, square, or true, everything down there as temporary as a season.

Because you remember it like this?

What it is. What it was. Margaret looks at her husband. Did you think I could ever forget it?

You'd be better off if you did.

Might as well say I'd be better off not drawing breath.

We're talking about a *place*, Margaret. Boards. Nails. A few blades of grass and a hell of a lot of dirt in between. Eight hundred acres that never promised or delivered anything but hardship.

She rolls her window all the way down and hangs her head out as if she's going to be sick. When she draws back inside she says, Don't tell me what it is.

She'd protested coming here as urgently as if in mortal danger, but now Margaret Blackledge stares down into that valley so steadily her tremor seems to subside.

If he were not beside but behind her, George might be able to align his vision with hers, like sighting a rifle, and determine exactly the target of her gaze. The possibilities seem to be few. Give the mind the opportunity to work its memory-magic, however, and absences can be as evocative as presences. And this man and woman have reached the age when they are as likely to see what's not there as what is... the circle where the horse tank once was, the grass blades still furled after decades of being matted down. The indentation in the earth where the homestead's original sod house stood, but there the grass grows two shades greener for once having had the concentration of four lives lived within its rectangle. The bare space beyond the back door where the lilacs grew and gave the twins shade for their play and Margaret her smell of spring when she needed it most.

George once woke in the night and stood at the kitchen window, water glass in hand, and looking out saw a face, someone standing among the lilacs and watching the house.

Without turning on a light, grabbing a weapon or a robe, or putting something on his feet, George burst from the house and ran like a man heedless of danger and certain of the identity of the person hiding in the shrubbery.

Well short of the confrontation he appeared eager for, George stopped.

Margaret had given the children a few old dishes, and under the bower of the lilacs they would dig holes and fill the cracked, chipped cups, bowls, and plates with what they scooped from the earth. But there must have been something besides digging to the children's make-believe because they had balanced plates in the lilacs' branches. It was one of those that had caught enough moonlight to look like a face, pale and yearning and turned toward the Blackledge home.

The night was cold and his bed was waiting, but George remained in place, staring into the mesh of interlaced bare branches, the season for blossom or fragrance long past. And when the ranch's sale was final and the Blackledges were moving out, it was Margaret who insisted the lilacs be chopped down. We can't do that, George argued. They'd bought those as sure as the house and the barn and the land they were built on. And burn the branches, was her answer.

Now no sign, no scorch or char, marks the place where George built the fire. Remarkable, earth's strength to restore itself and erase human effort. But memory, stronger still, can send flames as high as the roof, and shift the wind and choke George and sting his eyes with smoke, lilac smoke, as though it could be differentiated from any other.

Margaret too is looking down less on a place than on a time ... when everything—house, barn, corral, lilacs, good grass, and winding creek—was in its place yet none were visible.

The first landmark to vanish was the hill they sit on now, as the snowstorm rolled down the eastern slopes of the Rockies, picked up speed as it crossed Montana, and everywhere in its wake left a featureless landscape, both distance and contours of earth erased. The windows of the Blackledges' house hummed and rattled in their frames, snow hissed against the outer walls, and wind whistled down the chimney. Her house was blizzard-besieged, but Margaret had her hands full with the people inside. Some kind of bug had bitten George and the twins, and all of them were sick, going off like Roman candles at both ends, vomiting in kitchen pots and scurrying to the toilet with diarrhea. George bore his illness with nothing but groans, but James and Janie called for Margaret with every cramp and convulsion. Between times when she was holding someone over the toilet or changing bedding, Margaret would glance out at the storm. And be glad. Their illnesses had come on during the night, and they all woke that morning unable to climb out of bed except to scramble to the bathroom. That meant that the twins didn't go off to school, and George didn't drive into town or ride off to mend a fence or feed stock. She didn't have to worry about any or all of them finding their way home through the storm. She and George had installed indoor plumbing two years before, so that problem was solved. The wind could howl and the snow drift high: Margaret Blackledge had her children and her husband safe—sick but safe—in rooms she could oversee. She'd have been a fool to ask for more from this life.

Margaret extends her arm out the car window and marks in the air an X. It's close to the gesture a priest makes, but if she were to speak, her benediction might be nothing but her father's original homestead claim. The southeast quarter of section 14, township 132, range 99, Dalton County, North Dakota. In Margaret's memory those numbers are as fixed as any dates drilled into the minds of schoolchildren.

She brings her hand back in and touches it to her long, slender throat. She continues to look outward but now it's to her husband she speaks. I've had enough loss, George.

You know that's what life is. Loss, fast or slow. Jesus, if the years teach us anything—

That doesn't mean I have to sit back and take it. Not while I have strength or will to do something.

Accept it or not. Nothing lasts. He slaps his hand against the Hudson's dashboard. Not flesh or steel. Not walls or possessions. Not friends or family. Hell, look around. This is the country of all that *isn't* anymore. You don't need me to make a list.

You're right, George. Her eyes flash like sunlight on window glass. I don't need a goddamn list. And I didn't need a trip out here as a goddamn reminder of anything.

But a list like that, once its enumeration has begun, has its own momentum. Comfort, but pain too. Certainty, but doubt too. Strength. Beauty. Desire. Love. And one day only the memory of all those ... and then not even memory.

George wrestles the gearshift into reverse and executes the turn that will take them back to the highway. It's a road they've driven thousands of times before but which they both believed they'd never travel again.

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