

WORD!

Inside This Issue

Spring graduates

New publications

Balancing parenthood with the Master's degree

Orsetti on *Jeopardy!*

Poynter's fellowship

Special topics course in Fall

Vanasco's new book

Being an intern with G.I.V.E.

Welcome to Spring 2022's edition!

First, I want to offer congratulations to **Sara Alexander**, **Nathanael Buckman**, **Imani Cauthen-Robinson**, **Abiola Johnson**, **Kellie Johnson**, **Briana Richert**, **Briana Searfoss**, and **Jake Solyst** on graduating this semester with their M.S. in Professional Writing.

We also have a number of faculty members earning tenure or promotion this semester! Dr. **Zosha Stuckey** earned full professor, Dr. **Halcyon Lawrence** & Prof. **Jeannie Vanasco** earned tenure and promotion to associate professor. Well done; we are lucky to work beside you.

Awards

Under the guidance of Prof. **Jeannie Vanasco**, *Grub Street* 2021 has again won gold crown (the highest honor) from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association. A total of 817 publications were eligible for the competition. Columbia Scholastic Press Association awarded **Jola Naibi's** essay "There are Things that Your Privilege will Not Let You See" a certificate of merit. There were hundreds of nominations, and only four winners in the essays category. **Alexander Eikenberg** got third place in free-form poetry for "In the Shower I Feel the Welling in My Eyes." The newest issue of GRUB STREET (#71) can be found here: <https://wp.towson.edu/grubstreetlitmag/>. A launch party was held May 13 at the Ivy Bookstore.

Coty Poynter won a fellowship to Skidmore College's prestigious 2022 New York State Summer Writer's Institute. Alumni **Sean Sam** won Terrain's 12th Annual Contest in Fiction.



Sara Alexander '22 (center) after presenting her guest lecture at Trinity University

Last, congratulations to PRWR Alumni Dr. **Chen Chen**, who will be joining Utah State University as an assistant professor of technical communication & rhetoric, coming from Winthrop University.

New Publications

New creative pieces out by **Ashley Wagner**, **Chloe Williams**, **Julz Harvey**, **Tyrone Barrozo**, **Katie Iser**, **June Locco**, **Sean Sam**, **Andrea Doten**, **Coty Poynter**, **Kathleen Wallish**, and **Travis Tyler Madden** this spring in multiple venues. See our LinkedIn page for the complete list and links.

Sara Alexander M.S. '22 recently presented a guest lecture at Trinity University in Washington, DC, discussing Black language and how hip hop has influenced popular culture. She also discussed the book she wrote during her time in the Professional Writing program.



New publications (cont)

Students **Chloe Williams** and **Elizabeth Epps** are both presenting research from Dr. Zosha Stuckey's PRWR 611 course at *Rhetoric Society of America* in Baltimore (May 26-29). Chloe will present "A Feminist Rhetoric of Tarot with Regard to the Tradition & History of Romani Women." Liz will present "The Disquiet of African American Oratory: A Sampling of the Beginnings, Legacy, and the Souls In-Between."

Prof. **Leslie Harrison's** new collection of poetry, *Reck*, will be published by University of Akron Press, forthcoming in 2023.

Drs. **Halcyon Lawrence** & Laura Gonzales will lead an *Association of Teachers of Technical Writing* workshop, "Fostering Honest Conversations and Taking Actions Toward Redressing Language and Accent Bias in Technical Communication" Dr. Lawrence is also featured on a new episode of the podcast *Pedagogue*, talking with Liz Hutter about inclusive and accessible design, technical communication, usability, and pedagogical literacy frameworks.

Dr. **Carrie Grant** will present "The Challenge of Digital Upkeep for Local Grassroots Organizations" at *Computers & Writing* in May. She also had a recent article published, "Collaborative Tactics for Equitable Community Partnerships Toward Social Justice Impact" in *IEEE Transactions in Professional Communication* April issue.

Dr. **Sherita Roundtree** presented at *Conference on College of Composition and Communication*: a roundtable discussion entitled, "Sustaining Institutional Change and Antiracist Work as Writing Teachers and Administrators" and a research presentation, "Reconceptualizing Antiracist Labor in Composition Classrooms." She is co-presenting at the Digital Media and Composition Institute and *Rhetoric Society of America* (RSA) in May. The presentations are titled "Noise Inside and Outside the Classroom: Sound as a Critical Pedagogy" and "'Life in Rehearsal': Abolitionist Praxis, Institutional Transformation, and Doing the Work."

Prof. **Michael Downs** recently published multiple interviews and essays in *Baltimore Review* documenting his writing time in Poland.

Dr. **Zosha Stuckey** recently published "Ghostwriting for Racial Justice: On Barbara Johns, Dramatizations, and Speechwriting as Historical Fiction" in *Peitho*, a journal of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric & Composition. She was also nominated for a University of Maryland Board of Regents Award for Excellence in Public Service.

Dr. **Sarah Gunning** will present "Undergraduates' perceptions on data visualization consumption versus production: It's communication, but is it "writing"? at PROCOMM '22 in Ireland this summer.

Thea Robertson, M.S. '21, got a job as the Grants Coordinator at Restorative Response Baltimore

Imani Cauthen-Robinson, M.S. '22 accepted a position at Georgetown University as a Communications Specialist in the Office of the President.

Alumni **Byron Lin**, **Manny Peart**, **Jessie Tepper**, and **Denelle Joynse** visited with current students about their career paths since graduating from ENGL and/or Professional Writing in April. We look forward to welcoming more alumni to talk to our current students!

In this issue:

Briana Searfoss balances full time parenting, work, and writing coursework. **Candace Orsetti** talks about her experience as a *Jeopardy!* contestant. We interview **Coty Poynter** on his upcoming fellowship and hear about **Bob Ward's** plans for PRWR 670: Noir in film and in print. Prof. **Jeannie Vanasco** talks about her upcoming books, and **Stephanie Anderson** talks about her time working in G.I.V.E..

Briana Searfoss talks balancing life inside & outside the classroom

Tell us about your path

I started at Frostburg University in 2012 in the Wildlife and Fisheries program. I was there a semester and a month before my mental health declined, and I returned home. I started studying at CCBC. I ended up completing three associate degrees (English, Psychology, and General Studies). I returned to Frostburg in 2015 for one more semester with the goal of getting straight As.

I had my son in January 2018; I returned to school two weeks later. I finished my bachelor's in August 2019 and immediately started the PRWR program. I took a year off after my first semester, again for mental health reasons, but I came back Spring 2021, stronger than ever. Now, I am looking towards graduation this spring.

Spring 21's classes were all online, Fall 21 were face-to-face. What were the major differences in your life?

I was a classified essential employee during the pandemic; I never had the option to work from home. My work-life balance was far better when classes were online – I was able to see my son and have him follow along with what I was learning. Truthfully, I miss it. It's hard working 60 hours a week, having night classes three times a week, plus an internship.

Granted, I absolutely enjoy being able to directly interact with fellow students and my professors, but some days are harder than others, especially when you are coming home long after your little one has fallen asleep only to offer a kiss on the forehead.

What is a typical day like when you have work, child care/school for your son, and your own classes?

Early mornings and late nights. I wake up before he gets up. I collect myself, complete small house cleaning projects, and get ready. Once he wakes up, I get him ready and out the door to my Mom's. Fortunately, he attends preschool where I work (a park), so I get to see him a few times a day.



Briana and her son.

I am fortunate to have a strong support system and family care. I leave straight from work to school. Once done, I head home, use whatever energy I have left to do homework, and head to bed.

It isn't easy. No one prepares you for what it's like to be a parent, a student, and a worker wrapped up into one determined, but very tired, individual.

(continued on p.4)



Editor
Dr. Sarah Gunning, PRWR interim director

Writers
Briana Richert, Daniella Bacigalupa
PRWR graduate assistants

Design and Layout
Briana Richert, Daniella Bacigalupa

Masthead logo
Brianna R. Rostkowski,
PRWR alum (2018)

WORD! is the newsletter of Towson University's Professional Writing graduate program.

For additional information about the program, write to prwr@towson.edu or contact Sarah Gunning, program director, at sgunning@towson.edu

Briana Searfoss (cont.)

Are there things you wish your professors or program directors, bosses knew?

I wish more hybrid classes were offered. Those few days at home make a WORLD of difference as a parent. I'm able to spend time with my little guy, get a few home-related tasks done during breaks, and I don't have to worry about the time taken away by driving to and from campus.

Check in on your students who are parents. Just letting them know you're there and you're listening makes a world of difference.

Hold the advice. When I was planning on pursuing a master's degree, I sat at a conference and asked panelists about parents pursuing a degree. Five out of six panelists told me to not even bother or otherwise have someone else raise my child. ONE, my professor, told me it was possible because she did it, too. Had she not been on that panel, I may have left feeling defeated and incapable of pursuing this degree. This goes back to offering support, both emotionally and with school/community-provided resources. We are students, too. We need you to believe in us, because sometimes, it's hard to believe in ourselves when everything we do is questioned as parents.

"we need you to believe in us, because sometimes it's hard to believe in ourselves."

Speaking directly to students who are parents/caregivers: perfection doesn't exist and the laundry can wait. I am still learning this concept. Ask for the help. Take a nap with your child. You will have days where all you want to do is feel your pain and be angry, sad, scared...and that's ok. Just like you teach your children about big emotions, you have to remember to feel, acknowledge, process, and move forward.

Seek resources to help yourself. Talk to professionals. I gave up on seeking help after years of unsuccessful medication therapy, but my postpartum depression almost broke me. The resources are there. If you can't find them on your own, reach out. Think about what you would tell your child, and then tell yourself to do the same. Forget the laundry for tonight, grab your loved ones, and enjoy the time you have.

—Dr. Sarah Gunning, Interim PRWR Director

Candace Orsetti takes on *Jeopardy!*

Candace Orsetti, PRWR '19 alum, fulfills lifelong dream of competing on *Jeopardy!*

Orsetti got a fortune cookie that said, "You will pass a difficult test that will make you happier and financially better."

Three days later she received the invitation to take the proctored Zoom test to get on *Jeopardy!*

"I was 11 years old when *Jeopardy!* first started coming on, and 14 or 15 years old the first time I auditioned. That was for *Teen Jeopardy!* in the 1980s," says Orsetti. She nostalgically recalls how it used to be much more difficult and complicated then to be selected to play. Nowadays, Orsetti explains, anyone who wants to be on the popular trivia game show can take the "Anytime Test."

Aptly named, the Anytime Test changes the selection process landscape by allowing anyone - so long as they haven't been on *Jeopardy!* before - to take a test once every 365 days, as opposed to the scheduled *Jeopardy!* test, which is held periodically on a scheduled date and time. "Since they changed it to the Anytime Test, they've had 250,000 people take it in 2 years, and only about 10% of those who pass the test are randomly selected to begin the process for getting onto the show," says Orsetti.

In early January, Orsetti's phone rang on her way into a meeting. She looked down at it and saw the phone number. "This is the call I've been waiting for," she thought to herself.

Orsetti was accepted onto *Jeopardy!* Coincidentally, just that morning Orsetti was reading the chapter in Ken Jennings's *Brainiac* about the day he got the same call. At that moment she received the call, Orsetti was elated. But the feeling was thin and was stunted by a hulk of panic; the clock ticked and time slipped by the second.

(continued on p.5)

Orsetti on *Jeopardy!* (cont.)

Orsetti now had only 3 weeks to prepare for the long awaited opportunity of a lifetime. And though the selection process is random once your name is in the candidate pool, she had the returns from years of studying in her pocket and earned this opportunity nonetheless.

"The only TV I watched for the next 3 weeks was *Jeopardy!* I also crammed on current events, sports, and my weak spots," says Orsetti. Three weeks later, she was on the set of *Wheel of Fortune* (yes, that is right) getting hair and makeup done, socially distanced. Next door on the set of *Jeopardy!*, that same day, Orsetti spent the morning doing mock episodes - focused on the implications of the buzzer - and acclimatizing to the physiological stress responses of being on set. "You can know everything," Orsetti explains, "but if you don't have your hand on the buzzer you don't get it."

Orsetti recalls her favorite moment of the real competition with glee: She got to do a true Daily Double. She briefly wagered pros and cons in her mind, then wagered it all. Orsetti, a detailed and investigative persona, isn't one to normally sacrifice the thoughtful, meticulous analysis that is 'Daily Double strategy.' But in this once-in-a-lifetime moment Orsetti threw caution to the wind. Anyone might make the same choice given the same circumstances.

What's next for Candace Orsetti? Until this year, one could only be invited back to *Jeopardy!* if they won; however, this year *Jeopardy!* will be hosting the Second Chance



Jeopardy! host Mayim Bialik (left) and Candace Orsetti (right)

Tournament. Orsetti hopes to be invited to participate. She plays Pub Trivia and is a part of a selective online trivia community. She'll keep on playing trivia games, no matter what. Orsetti is featured on Season 38, Episode 143.

PRWR spotlights

Coty Poynter used to believe his writing held no merit. But after earning a nomination and an exclusive scholarship for Skidmore College's prestigious 2022 New York State Summer Writer's Institute, Poynter's confidence gained a well-deserved boost.

"When I got nominated, it caught me by surprise that somebody thought enough to consider I had potential," says Poynter, "which then made me feel like I actually have potential."

Thanks to an anonymous PRWR professor who saw this potential and sent in the nomination, Poynter (a PRWR student in the creative writing track) is set to spend two weeks writing in an intensive virtual workshop. Out of 260 candidates, he is one of the 56 to receive a tuition scholarship.

He used the non-fiction essay he wrote in Professor Jeannie Vanasco's PRWR 641 *Theory of Creativity* course in his scholarship application.

Poynter says this course is the reason he chose to enter the Institute's creative non-fiction track.

The Institute—founded by Pulitzer Prize-winning author, William Kennedy—also allows Poynter to rub elbows (via Zoom) with some of the biggest names in literature. Notable professors and visiting writers include Joyce Carol Oates, Jamaica Kincaid, Phillip Lopate, and Robert Pinsky, amongst others. But Poynter says what he's most excited about is a chance to get a better sense of who he is as a writer.

"That focus of having two weeks dedicated to working on something that isn't going for a grade, isn't going for any application, it is just two weeks of working on a piece with feedback from people who are established," says Poynter. "I've not been in that kind of situation where that's what you're focusing on, that's your job. That's always been a dream."

(continued on p.6)

Poynter (cont.)

Following his nomination and awarded scholarship, Poynter says he's now realizing all the opportunities—like grants, fellowships, and other writing programs—for writers who are early in their career. He recommends that both undergraduate and graduate writers search for these opportunities and apply, so long as they meet the criteria.

“The opportunities are out there, just not many people talk about it,” says Poynter. “And once you start looking, you start seeing more and more that's out there.”



Coty Poynter



Bob Ward

Sneak peak into Fall '22's

Noir in print & onscreen

PRWR peeks behind the Venetian blinds of the literary and film noir genre in Fall '22 with a special topics course taught by author and TV producer, Robert Ward.

When Ward was 15 years old, he saw the 1946 Howard Hawks film *The Big Sleep*, a story of blackmail, murder, and love, starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. He says at that moment, he thought the film was the greatest thing he'd ever seen. *The Big Sleep*—amongst other mystery/crime-drama movies and novels—helped grow Ward's passion for noir stories. French for “black” or “dark,” noir defines a subgenre of crime fiction characterized by cynical antiheroes and seeped in themes of existential despair.

“As a kid, you're kind of rebellious, naturally, and we were really sick of seeing John Wayne movies where John Wayne saves the American West every week,” says Ward. “Then film noir movies started showing good guys who might also be bad guys. I found myself rooting for these guys who were dark characters.”

In his PRWR 670 course, *Noir in Print and on Screen*, Ward says he hopes to inspire his students with that same excitement for noir. He says he plans to teach literary noir classics including *The Big Sleep*, *Strangers on a Train*, *Deadline at Dawn*, and many more thrilling tales. After reading each book, the class will watch the equivalent old-Hollywood film noir adaptations.

As an author of several acclaimed noir novels and a former producer and head writer on crime shows like *Miami Vice* and *Hill Street Blues*, Ward has ample experience in putting the noir genre into creative practice. He says that toward the end of the semester, he wants to have the class write their own noir piece so they can learn how to construct noir stories as well as analyze them.

“Once you've read these stories, you just naturally want to write one because they're so much fun to write,” says Ward. “I'm excited to turn people onto this whole genre.”

—Briana Richert



Still from *The Big Sleep*, (c) Warner Brothers

Jeannie Vanasco previews her new memoir, *A Silent Treatment*

In her upcoming memoir, *A Silent Treatment*, PRWR Professor Jeannie Vanasco explores the complexities of weaponized silence, reflecting on a time when her mother stopped speaking to her.

The silences began in 2017 when her mother moved from Sandusky, Ohio to Vanasco's Baltimore home. Vanasco says that her mom had a difficult time adjusting to the move and whenever she felt upset, she locked the door of her basement apartment and solely communicated through written letters. The silences would last anywhere from two weeks to a month.

To learn more and to distract herself from the situation, Vanasco started researching the origins of the silent treatment but found she wasn't satisfied with the results. She says that most sources on the subject do not attempt to empathize with the one inflicting silence as punishment, but instead default the behavior as malicious and sociopathic.

"I recognized that my mom was in pain," says Vanasco. "She was feeling left out. She was going through a hard time, and so I didn't like to see that portrayal." Eventually, her mother broke her silence and recognized her fault. But in the absence of research reflecting the duality of the silent treatment, Vanasco decided to start writing her own take on weaponized silence. *A Silent Treatment* is set to release in 2023, published by Tin House.



Professor Jeannie Vanasco

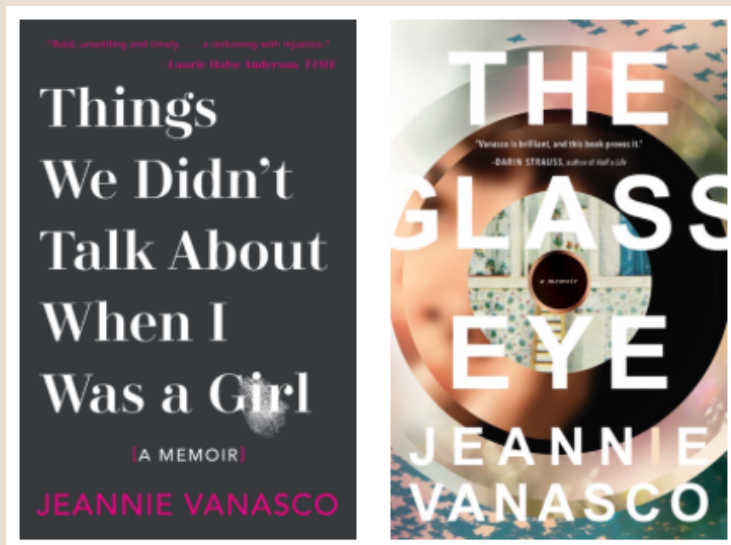
"I would say, of all the books I've done, this one scares me the most," says Vanasco. "Writing a book for someone who I love, who is still alive and who I very much want to read it, but knowing that to build her as a complex character on the page I'm going to have to show her flaws...it's an interesting challenge."

Vanasco says she views this project as a collaboration with her mom. She plans to interview her mother and use her mother's old journals to help tell this story. Her mom grew up in a time when women's voices were silenced. During her childhood and first marriage, she experienced physical and verbal abuse. Vanasco says her mother was constantly made to feel unimportant, and that at 80 years old, she still lacks self-esteem and believes that no one wants to read a book about her life. With this book, Vanasco hopes to change perceptions about the silent treatment and show her mother that her voice is valuable.

"I recognized that my mom was in pain," says Vanasco. "She was feeling left out. She was going through a hard time, and so I didn't like to see that portrayal."

"Whenever I meet women of my mom's generation, especially those who weren't encouraged to get higher education...it breaks my heart," says Vanasco. "So, my hope is for her to see herself as interesting and valued."

--Briana Richert



Vanasco's earlier memoirs

G.I.V.E. Spotlight

Life is ironic - most people spend their whole lives searching for the missing puzzle piece. What most don't realize – what Stephanie Anderson *does* realize – is that the missing piece is right here, under our unassuming noses.

Anderson is a G.I.V.E. (Grantwriting in Valued Environments) intern. When asked what a 'day in the life' is like as a G.I.V.E. Intern, she says that she starts G.I.V.E. work in the evening because she works another job and is still a student. "G.I.V.E. work is entirely on my own schedule,"

Anderson explains. On Wednesdays there is a weekly meeting with the entire team to discuss what everyone has done so far in the current week and what they will do the upcoming week.



Stephanie Anderson

Whether she is touching up revisions on a grant proposal, is writing quick reference sheets for a partner's website to help streamline donations, or is triaging communication with organizations while grant deadlines approach like barreling steam engine trains, Anderson loves her role with G.I.V.E. She has her own understanding of what this niche writing means to her. Reflecting on her internship, Anderson states, "What I love about working with G.I.V.E. is that it's so mission-driven. I've been searching for so long for a way that I can make ground-level effective change, and this is one of the only places where I can know that what I'm doing is making direct impact on people's lives. It's such a practical application of an understanding of rhetoric." When she puts her head on her pillow at the end of a long day – a job, school, an internship in tow – Anderson knows her place in the puzzle is as a writer.

--Dani Bacigalupa

A colorful poster for a 'Family Survivor Network Housewarming Fundraiser'. The text is in various colors and fonts. It says 'FAMILY SURVIVOR NETWORK' in purple, 'Invites you to our' in cursive, 'HOUSEWARMING FUNDRAISER' in large green letters, 'Saturday, June 4th 2022' in yellow, '9am - 12pm' in yellow, 'Tour our new family house, and join us to LOVE MORE & LOVE BETTER' in purple, '1706 LAURENS ST. BALTIMORE, MD 21217' in black on a white background, and 'Rain Date: Saturday, June 11th' in black on a yellow background. The background features a stylized illustration of colorful houses.

One of G.I.V.E.'s partners, Family Survivor Network

Interested to hear more about what PRWR students and alumni have been up to? Join our TU English & Professional Writing LinkedIn group at <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8983473/>

A screenshot of a LinkedIn group profile. It shows '162 members' and 'Including Laren Milburn and 127 other connections'. There are four circular profile pictures of group members and a '+124' button. At the bottom is a blue button that says 'Invite connections'.