

# WORD!

## A WORD! from Director Geoff Becker

By Geoff Becker

When I graduated from college I had a vague idea I might want to write, but I had no idea what. I'd published a couple of short stories in the college literary magazine, but I knew there was no money in that. I'd written a record review for the college newspaper. That was about it. I had an English degree (insert joke here).



I moved to Brooklyn, NY, where a musician friend of mine had found us an apartment, and where we planned to start a band, which we did. My girlfriend at the time had a roommate who was writing for magazines, and she told me about an editor at *Science Digest* who was looking for "amazing" stories. I headed over to the Brooklyn Public Library, found a bunch of science journals and did my best to read through them, mostly scanning for things I could understand. A few feet away, an aromatic drunk man with dirty clothes and a beard sat muttering at the backs of his hands. I eventually found an article about acid rain that said, basically, that it wasn't so bad. I rewrote the article, giving it a kind of

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“gee whiz” tone that I imagined was what *Science Digest*—which you could buy at the supermarket—wanted. And it turned out I was right—they bought the article. I was a writer! I did the same thing again, rewriting another serious scientific article, and again the editor bought it. I was on a roll, although this time I had to call an actual scientist on the phone to check a few facts, and at some point in the conversation he said, “You have no idea what I’m talking about, do you?”

Later that year, on the basis of my two articles, I interviewed for an internship in London at the *Economist* magazine. The interview went well, and I really thought I’d be moving overseas. But then months passed with no word. I called London and learned that the woman who had interviewed me was on sick leave. She never returned to that position, and I don’t know if they even took anyone that year. Meanwhile, needing something, I took a job doing people’s income taxes. Thus ended my brief career as a science writer.

As it happened, I did become a writer—of fiction. But if the call had come, I’d have moved to London in a heartbeat. Maybe I didn’t know what I was talking about, but I was hungry and eager to learn, and I like to think that I’d have done just fine as a science writer, at least for a while.

Writing is, after all, writing. I’ve never been a big fan of the walls we put up between fiction and poetry, between poetry and creative nonfiction, etc. As writers, we have to be open to new things, willing to constantly be learning and then taking what we’ve learned and expressing it concisely, and elegantly. This is just as true of technical writing as it is of the literary genres. One of the things I’m happiest about with the PRWR program is the range of types of writing our students are able to explore, and the work they produce. A program is only as good as its students and ours have proven to be, semester after semester, amazing.

Good writing to you!

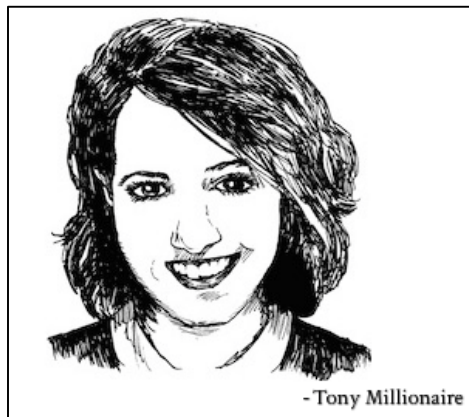
## New Faculty Spotlight Q&A: Jeannie Vanasco

By Michelle DeMarco

Jeannie Vanasco, a professor at DePauw University, will be joining the Professional Writing Program at Towson for the fall 2016 semester. She will be teaching PRWR 705—Writing Creative Nonfiction. On her website, she says that before teaching at DePauw, she “cleaned motel rooms, helped manage a citizen journalism project based in Sudan, waitressed the night-shift, volunteered at a carousel museum, worked as a magazine editor, collaborated with a French philosopher, and conducted research for a documentary television series about media accountability.”

**Q: Why nonfiction? Or, more specifically, why do you write nonfiction?**

The genre is so large and so diverse. A nonfiction work can be lyric or feels extremely freeing to me. Of course fiction and poetry can be all



those things, too. A lot of categories exist on a spectrum: from genre to sexuality to race—you name it. So while I technically write creative nonfiction, I like to lean on the techniques of poetry: associative leaps, white space that allows for artful juxtapositions, a close attention

to syntax and to the way sentences organize sound, extended metaphors and images found through the discovery of patterns. Really I try not to let categories disrupt the process. I try to let my writing find the form and genre it wants.

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(Vanasco Q&A, continued)

**Q: What has most influenced what you write about?**

My own experience inevitably informs my writing, and I like to write about my life and through my life. My forthcoming book is a memoir. It's called *The Glass Eye*, and it explores my father's loss of his sixteen-year-old daughter Jeanne (pronounced the same as my name but without an i) and my loss of him. I use his loss of his left eye as a metaphor for grief, which is why the manuscript is titled *The Glass Eye*. The book is held together by a sound: *eye, i, I*.

But my nonfiction "I" is sometimes simply a device to talk about the real subject of the work, which is not always myself. For example: I just started drafting an essay about the history of pets with disabilities. I'm using the personal as an entry point: I have two three-legged cats. But the essay isn't only about them. I'm not yet sure what it's about. And I think that's why I enjoy creative writing in general. I can let my curiosity and confusion drive the process, and I can show that process of discovery on the page.

**Q: What other writers have most influenced you?**

More than a dozen books are pitched like tents around my office. So let me mention some of their authors: Christine Schutt, Claudia Rankine, John Keene, Eula Biss, Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, Jamaica Kincaid, Amy Hempel, Hilton Als, Maggie Nelson, Annie Ernaux, Sarah Manguso, Joan Didion, Harryette Mullen, Tomas Tranströmer, Sylvia Plath.

Also, my cats are named Bishop and Flannery—after two of my favorite writers: Elizabeth Bishop and Flannery O'Connor. Another writer I love is

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(Vanasco Q&A, continued)

Catullus, and I think Catullus would make an excellent name for a cat.

**Q: What's it like to be published in *The New Yorker* and *Tin House*?**

It's extremely encouraging. But I will say that I'm less interested in the prestige of a magazine. I'm more interested in who my editors will be. I'd allow my writing to appear deep inside an Apple product agreement, if it meant the editor was someone I trusted.

**Q: What do you want PRWR students to know about you?**

I'm not a writer who teaches to support her writing. I teach because I love to teach. Also, I embrace experimentation. If you want to write creative nonfiction in the form of a play, perform standup comedy, film a documentary, then that's fine by me. Let the form energize you.

**Q: What can students look forward to in your Writing Creative Nonfiction class this fall?**

I'm assigning books that don't resemble one another too much stylistically. Books by writers such as Claudia Rankine, David Foster Wallace, and Amy Leach. That's because I'm less interested in subject matter than I am in how the writer explores the subject matter by using different styles and modes.

Also, instead of editing our work mostly on our computers, we'll use some scissors and glue to move around our sentences and paragraphs. I want us to consider how material, how thing-like words can be.  
us to consider how material, how thinglike, words can be.

## Technical Collaboration

*Professor, former PRWR student find synchronicity in medical research*

By Karyn Spellman

Dr. Elizabeth Angeli and former PRWR student Christina Norwood's decision to collaborate on a research project culminated in an ambitious schedule this semester—presenting their work at three conferences.

The two combined their mutual interest and expertise in technical communication and medical rhetoric to start researching communication about Ebola. They specifically wanted to examine how the Johns Hopkins Medicine Ebola Crisis Communications Team communicated internally, to the media, and with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

They presented their findings first at the Symposium for Communicating Complex Information (SCCI) at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C., in February. In April, they traveled to Houston for the annual Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW). Dr. Angeli also presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Houston, which was also in April.



Christina Norwood and Elizabeth Angeli

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*(Technical Collaboration, continued)*

While Dr. Angeli has conducted her own research before, this project marks the first time she collaborated with a graduate student.

"It's been so much fun working with her," Dr. Angeli said.

The idea to work together started with a classroom discussion while Norwood was in Dr. Angeli's graduate Technical Writing and Information Design class in the fall of 2014. They began their research after securing the necessary approval from Towson and Johns Hopkins, which finally came after Norwood graduated in May 2015.

"For me, working with Liz was a continuation of my education," said Norwood, whose PRWR track was scientific writing.

"What this also did teach me was that my view of what a technical communicator could be was very narrow," Norwood said. "Working with Liz and doing research with her ... made me more aware of opportunities. It also made me more ambitious and expanded my career goals a little bit."

Norwood has already been working in the scientific and technical writing field for the last six years as a biomedical editor for ICF International in Rockville.

Now that the research and analysis is complete, the next step is for Dr. Angeli and Norwood to write up their findings and submit the final work to a journal. But Dr. Angeli is leaving Towson at the end of the semester to take a position at Marquette University in Milwaukee, so the two will need to finish their work long-distance.

While Dr. Angeli and Norwood don't have immediate plans for another research project, both agreed at they're open to working together in the future because of how well this project went.

"Liz is definitely a mentor to me," Norwood said.

## PRWR Internships

*Students in the PRWR program are required to complete an internship before graduating, unless they apply to the Director for a waiver. Here are some examples of recently completed internships:*

**American Federation of Government Employees**  
Associate Editor

**Brookes Publishing Co.**  
Administrative asst./editing

**Apprentice House**  
Acquisitions Editor

**CCBC-Eastern Family Resource Center**  
Teacher

**b free daily (Baltimore Sun)**  
Writer/editor

**Caroline Center**  
Grant proposal writer

**Baltimore Magazine**  
Intern

**Catholic Charities Welfare Advocates**  
Editor/interviewer

**Baltimore City Paper**  
Editorial writing intern

**Champlain College**  
Grant proposal writer

**Baltimore Symphony Orchestra**  
Assistant Editor

**DCTV**  
Assistant editor

**Bancroft Press**  
Assistant

**DiJulio & Associates**  
Copyediting assistant

**BrickHouse Books, Inc.**  
Manuscript critique assistant

**Eastern Technical High School**  
Technical Manual Writer

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## PRWR Internships, continued

### Fallston High School

College-prep teacher in English

### Harford Hills Elementary School

Poetry teacher

### Ronald McDonald House Charities of Baltimore

Interviewer/story writer

### Family Thyme

Marketing plan developer

### Johns Hopkins University

Communications associate

### Soujourner-Douglass College

Admissions office

### Fandango Productions

Promotional writer/editor

### Mr. Rooter Plumbing of Greater Baltimore

Social media intern

### Towson University/Dr. Cheryl Brown

Teaching assistant

### Gene Logic, Inc.

Business document editor

### MTV's Noggin

Research/development intern  
assistant editor

### Towson University/Dr. Jane Neapolitan

Assistant editor

### Greater Homewood Literacy Program

ESL teacher

### Premier Bride Magazine

Content editor

### Towson University College of Business and Economics' Writing Proficiency Program

Writing Coach

### Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance

Assistant

### Rakai Health Sciences Program, Kalisizo, Uganda

Interviewer/story writer

### University of Maryland Medical Center

Writer/editor

## WORD!

### Editorial Board:

Michelle DeMarco  
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Geoff Becker

Have any questions, comments, or news about your accomplishments? Feel free to email us:

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