

The University Writer

New Chair Seeks Transformations

LuMing Mao Wants to Energize and Grow Writing & Rhetoric Studies

LuMing Mao sits in his office overlooking the Wasatch range. He's been thinking about Michelle Obama's book, *Becoming*. "The title intrigues me—because I'm still becoming. I'm in a new place." He came to the U from Miami University of Ohio, where he was the English chair. Now he takes the reigns of one of the University's newest and fastest growing departments.

Mao has always been interested in how languages form systems of meaning – and how these systems don't merely passively represent but allow us to do things. He is especially interested in the concept of hybridity, an idea he explores in his book *Reading Chinese Fortune Cookie: The Making of Chinese American Rhetoric*. "We are no longer a pure anything, which is exciting. What is American culture? What is Chinese culture? They are many cultures, influenced by forces that make us who we are. I use the fortune cookie as a metaphor — it is a hybrid phenomenon."

Now in Utah, he wants to energize



LuMing Mao will begin teaching this spring, leading a section of WRTG 7740, Rhetoric I

Writing & Rhetoric Studies, create signature programs, and mentor future leaders. "We have a vibrant, diverse student body, which gives us the freedom to be bold. It won't always be perfect, but I'm excited about working together."

As a child in Shanghai, he says he learned the value of humility. "I look at things I wrote two or three years ago and think, *Is that what I wrote?* Every time I finish a work, I'm fas-

inated by how this process is both energizing and frightening. Sometimes when I begin, I don't know much about it. Then, something will come out... [that's why] I encourage my students to pay attention to revision."

He has found Writing's faculty and students to be deeply committed. "It's a department that prides itself on diversity — of people, of thought, of ways of knowledge making. It's very collegial and collaborative." He says it's a place for new ideas that can germinate, coalesce, and grow. Writing is a process of transformation, of emerging — and he adds "whatever we do, our work will always be in the process of becoming."

—Matthew Landis

Writing Students Shine on the Conference Circuit

One student reports back on her conferences experience with department faculty

Behind a long desk in a room that seemed vaguely reminiscent of a high school literature class, I nervously



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Conference Circuit, cont.

took a seat beside a fellow Writing student and Romeo Garcia, our WRS Professor. We were at the University of Louisville for the Twelfth Biennial Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, and we were minutes away from delivering our talk.

I was anxious, but friendly faces in the audience told me I was among friends. From the last row, grad student, Charissa Che smiled back. Weeks before, she'd told me about how she first met her scholarly influencers at this very conference years before. She told me about how she discussed their work with them, and how they

offered her research advice – advice that has guided her ever since.

Beside me, Professor Garcia had also been a steady source of support. Writing faculty at the U encourage students to participate in conferences like Watson, and sometimes even include them on their own panels. About our presentation, Garcia said “I wanted to find a way for all the voices to shine through...[and] I'm glad we found a way to do that.”

This facet of learning is part of what makes these collaborations and the Writing department so rewarding. In the end, our well-attended panel resulted in an engaged audience that asked loads of questions and took

notes when we answered. I later realized that some of those asking questions were the very authors we read in my classes. As a final triumph, our panel was mentioned by the Conference's scholar-in-residence in the closing remarks.

The opportunity to speak back to influencers as an undergraduate is unusual. But the Department of Writing & Rhetoric is creating a culture of scholarly collaboration with its majors. To learn more about your professors' research or get involved with conference panels and teams, please contact Lisa Shaw at l.shaw@utah.edu or speak to your professors directly.

—Joanne Castillo

A Journal by Students, for Students

An exciting new start for undergrad student pub

How can students gain experience in the career they want without an internship? They can take a class on it in the Writing and Rhetoric Department. Professor Maureen Mathison has developed a technical editing class that gives students real workplace skills. “The department needed it, and students need the experience,” she says.

Instead of a class full of exercises that have little impact on the world, Mathison wanted a class where students could create a real undergraduate journal with an international and national audience. That's how *The Undergraduate Journal of Contemporary Issues and Media* was born, and it's the first of its kind to exist at the University of Utah for the Writing & Rhetoric Department. “I wanted students to have the experience of editing real-world documents that have an impact on readers.”

Unlike the other 300 undergraduate journals published in the US already, this one exist completely online in a multi-modal format. Alongside traditional texts like essays, short

stories and poems, the *Journal* features soundscapes, videos, and images. According to Professor Mathison, this better reflects the richness of the field—and the different types of media important to rhetoric.

“I wanted this to be run entirely by our undergraduates,” Mathison says, and from the very beginning, students have created everything—from the journal name to the themes, and website design. Students also work closely with the authors to make each work the best it can be. In the end, students have something they have helped craft that Mathison calls “dynamic, exciting, and relevant.”

The current issue (<http://epubs.utah.edu/index.php/>



[ujcim](#)) features works on the theme of inequality from writers across the country, from California to Virginia. A second issue on the theme of Identity will soon appear and a third planned issue will accept submissions soon at undergraduatejournal@utah.edu. The editors welcome essays, opinion pieces, and nonfiction, as well as research papers, creative writing, radio/podcasts, music, videos, and other forms. For more information, contact the *Journal* faculty editor, Maureen Mathison at Maureen.mathison@utah.edu.

—Stacy Nguyen

Academic Advisor or Caped Crusader?

Meet Lisa Shaw, Writing's Amazing Academic Advisor!

Lisa loves people. Lisa loves writing. That's why she fights so hard for student and department success.

The Academic Advisor for the Department of Writing & Rhetoric Studies, Lisa Shaw, is a native Utahan. She graduated from Kearns High, then received her associates degree from SLCC in General Education. She completed her undergraduate degree in Gender Studies, and earned her Masters in Public Administration at the U. She says, “Because of my educational path, I admire any student who is willing to put in the work to earn a degree no matter where they are in life.”

Though not one to boast, Lisa was instrumental in bringing the department to life. She worked closely with then UWP director Maureen Mathison on research, writing proposals for the Board of Regents, and helping to create the major and minor in Writing.

Then she was asked to be the department's student advisor.

“When we first started, we'd never had an advisor before. There weren't any files or procedures.

I had to figure it all out.” Lisa says this close-knit department has stuck together while figuring out its identity along the way. Now she is focused on helping students and the department succeed.

Lisa's favorite part of her job is helping students accomplish their goals. “Working with smart people doing exciting things—that's what I love about working at the U,” Lisa says.

When not working, she spends time with her mechanic-husband of ten happy years. They have two beautiful and talented daughters, and three cats, Cal, Lucy, and Oscar. They love parties and time with friends. Lisa also enjoys painting, reading, and a girl's night out.

Lisa is a champion of students. “For a lot of students, this is their life, and when they come talk to me, we are talking about their life – it's rewarding to watch their growth. I'm here for you all!” Says Lisa.

Want to connect with Writing & Rhetoric's Caped Crusader/Student Advisor? Email Lisa at l.shaw@utah.edu

—Kelly Longmore



Shaw, Writing's resident superhero and Academic Advisor

Improving Online Writing Courses

Dr. Natalie Stillman-Webb is leading the charge to improve online classes for students

Have you ever taken an online class? Have you ever struggled to keep up with your online courses and felt like there was something missing? Associate Professor (Lecturer) Natalie Stillman-Webb of the University's own Department of Writing and Rhetoric Studies has been hard at work on these issues.

The Director of Online Writing Instruction in the department, Dr. Stillman-Webb has conducted a study designed to gain a better understanding of the students' perspectives in online instruction. With a \$10,000 grant from the Conference on College Composition and Communication, she and three co-researchers conducted a student survey administered to nearly 700 students from four different

universities: Indiana University of Pennsylvania, University of Maryland, Kent State-Stark, and University of Utah. The study was broken down into three separate categories that affect online courses: teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of student perspective regarding online courses as well as identify areas that can be improved.

All four institutions had similar results in their survey responses. Findings from the study showed that students valued teaching presence within their online courses the most: specifically, they prioritized instructor feedback and clear instructions. Dr. Stillman-Webb was pleased with how the study unfolded. She adds, "I hope that our findings may help online writing instructors like myself improve the

ways we construct an online teaching presence and facilitate student collaboration." She plans to host future



Dr. Natalie Stillman-Webb leads online Writing Instruction at the U

workshops where she can present her findings to other online teachers and help them apply the findings into their own courses.

Stillman-Webb earned her Ph.D. in English from Purdue University and has been a faculty member at the University of Utah since 2000. She is passionate about writing, and believes that "clear, ethical writing can help us to analyze and solve problems in our world." She volunteers one night weekly tutoring adult English learners at the Guadalupe School and outside of school enjoys playing tennis and hiking with her family. She even recently climbed to the top of Grandeur Peak!

Dr. Stillman-Webb is a valued faculty member and her research is already having a positive impact on the way online writing courses are constructed. To learn more about the courses she teaches, please visit her faculty page at www.facultypages/Stillman-Webb@utah.edu

—Connor Stone

Here Comes the Dean

Writing Professor, Joy Pierce appointed new Associate Dean for Humanities

If you've had the privilege of taking one of Dr. Joy Pierce's courses or know her personally, you understand how lucky we are to have her as our new Associate Dean. Dr. Pierce was named the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs for the College of Humanities this past August. She brings a particular experience to the position, having spent the last 12 years enriching students here at Utah as a professor in Communications and now Writing. Her experience teaching and serving on faculty committees has given her a deep appreciation for rich learning environments—and she plans to draw on these experiences in her new role.

Pierce spent her first 9 years at the University of Utah in the Department of Communication, rising to Associate Professor before moving to the Department of Writing &

Rhetoric Studies 3 years ago. As Associate Dean, Professor Pierce looks to spread her enthusiasm and genuine passion for education on a wider scale throughout the university. Her responsibilities will include overseeing the College's diversity initiatives, as well as Title IX compliance. She will also chair the graduate and undergraduate curriculum committees to support the University's efforts to improve



When she's not championing students, Prof. Pierce enjoys spending time with her son, riding horses, and cheering on the JAZZ!



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course programming campus-wide. And although she will continue to teach courses in Writing & Rhetoric studies (she's leading a Research section, WRTG 7770, this spring), she's looking forward to using her new position in the Dean's office to serve the needs of all Humanities students, ensuring they have every opportunity to succeed.

She says she's also looking forward to working with Dean Culver, department faculties, and students to "help this Research 1, Pac-12 university become diverse in all the ways it can be". Pierce sees "#Excellence" on the horizons here at Utah.

To learn more about what's in store for Humanities at the U, visit the college's webpage at <https://humanities.utah.edu/>

—Alex Bledsoe

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