

# The University Writer

## Writing Welcomes New Professor to Faculty

Assoc. Professor, Joy Pierce brings her varied experience to writing

In August of 2016, the Department of Writing & Rhetoric Studies will welcome Associate Professor, Joy Pierce to its core faculty. Professor Pierce brings to Writing an eclectic range of experiences—from investigative journalism to intellectual property law and Latin American Studies—as well as a deep appreciation for the ways digital culture interacts with historically rooted social structures. Her recent book, *Digital Fusion* (2015, Peter Lang Publishing) targets the ways that certain communities continue to be left out, or left behind, in the tech revolution.

*Welcome to the Writing Dept. Professor Pierce. Though you've been close to us for a number of years (in the Comm Dept.), we're all very excited to have you join us on LNCO's 3rd floor.*

Thank you for the warm welcome! It was a pleasure meeting you in December and I look forward to getting to know you and other faculty, staff and students better over time.

*I was hoping you might tell us a bit about yourself—about what brought you to communications and writing—and about how you fell in love with research.*

Well, I am a military brat, so moving to where I may advance or reinvent myself (i.e., from Comm to Rhetoric Studies) feels natural. I started tutoring classmates in English when I was in the third grade. At the time, I was reasonably fluent in Tagalog so working with classmates who were recent arrivals from the Philippines was fun and enriching. My love of journalism came a few years later when I saw the movie, *Superman*. I marveled at Lois Lane's indepen-

dence, intelligence and adventure. You could say I got my first taste of Girl Power.

By middle school we'd moved from Illinois to South Carolina, and I knew I loved learning, language and teaching. As a journalism major and Spanish minor, I was fortunate to get an internship as an editorial assistant at the *Charlotte Observer* one year. It happened to be the year the investigative reporters I worked for broke two huge stories: Jim and Tammy Faye Baker, and a scandal involving the University of South Carolina President. My job as editorial assistant was to do the research for the stories they were writing. It took me to bankruptcy court, archives in the basement of the state building, and university offices, where I delivered FOI requests and retrieved heavily redacted documents. From that experience, I was hooked on research.

*I understand at one point you were also involved in the design-end of publishing—formatting and layout. When did that happen—and how did you go from that into an interest in law?*

I left journalism for more steady work as Publications Manager in an art museum. I was always a computer geek, and that obsession began to pay off as I began to create calendars, newsletters and other print material using desktop publishing. It's a little ironic, since I was considered by those in the office as a computer person. Somehow, despite all that, I decided I wanted to attend law school and study intellectual property law. I moved to Los Angeles and worked as a legal assistant for a major immigration law firm. (I didn't know then that that information would

inform the work I do now.) About two weeks before I was to begin law school, I had the opportunity to meet the person whose position I had taken at the firm. She was in town on break from law school and we happened to be the first to arrive for the office lunch. When I asked how she liked law school she said, "I made a \$50,000 mistake; I'm quitting and going to art school."

I am so grateful for that serendipitous meeting, because it made me think long and hard about whether I wanted to practice law or just



Associate Professor, Joy Pierce joins the DWRS this fall.

be an attorney. It was then that I remembered tutoring classmates and working as a volunteer in an adult literacy program after graduating college. I also remembered my time as a journalist. In the end, I decided I wanted to teach future writers and editors.

*That decision certainly turned out great for us in Writing! I've been spending some time with your recent book, Digital Fusion, and learning a great deal more about the "digital divide." I wonder if you can tell us when*



*and why you decided to research this issue?*

In 1997, while working on a paper about Charlotta Bass (the first African American woman to own and operate a newspaper in the US), I came upon a city library branch in South Central Los Angeles. When I couldn't find the computers to search for a book, I asked a librarian for help. She pointed me to a card catalog – the wooden case with drawers, which held index-type cards. I was shocked. I had not seen one in nearly a decade. I lived in upper-middle class areas most of my life and always had access to the latest ... *everything* really.

I was so shaken by the experience that I knew from that moment forward I would focus on societal disparities. My interest in the Digital Divide grew from that epiphanic moment.

*That story reminds me of the moment in your book when you recount working with the Urban League and your students begin using class to investigate the regional prison. At first you're taken aback, but then real-*

*ize many of the students have family members there that they rarely get to see—and they're using the technology to patch that gap. It reminded me of the times I've been momentarily blind to the value of a lesson or technology for different communities. It's a profound learning moment in the book!*

As someone who has lived a relatively privileged life, I have always been mindful that there are those less fortunate. I have heard second-hand stories of slavery (considering teachers barely covered slavery during my secondary education in South Carolina, it sometimes felt like a distant past). Yet, my grandparents tell stories about picking cotton; I have one of the quilts from that time. It is filled with cotton and the seeds are still attached. My now 97-year old grandpa and his brothers used to tell stories about their parents and their parent's parents.

It makes that history not seem so long ago.

I bring this up only to point out how far members of my family have come in just a short

while. The work I do reminds me that there remain people who are still in the struggle to find a way out of the historical oppression and discrimination that may continue for generations. I see my contribution to the struggle through providing digital access and information. I am a firm believer in the idea that theory is not useful without praxis. That is not to say I don't appreciate those who work purely in the theoretical, ...[but] I appreciate that work because of course it informs my work in the classroom, in the field and through publishing.



This fall ('16) Prof. Pierce will teach Writing as Social Practice (WRTG 3870) as a hybrid and Writing & the Public Sphere (WRTG 4060) online. Please see Writing's website at [writing.utah.edu](http://writing.utah.edu) for more information about these and other exciting classes being offered in the DWRS.

## Talking Rhetoric—from Star Wars to Jazz

New Professor, Jonathan Stone brings a fresh perspective to the Department of Writing & Rhetoric Studies

Writing Professor, Jonathan Stone loves music: from singing and playing guitar, to listening to classic vinyl. He played in a high school band, and during performances he would pass out lyric sheets to engage with his audience. As he describes it, even at that young age he was most interested in “the way art is the undercurrent for why people form values and behaviors.”

His success in connecting with students now



Asst. Professor, Jon Stone connects his teaching to his students' interests.

often draws on his ability to tie his love for art to the rhetoric that surrounds it. In essence, he's fascinated by the way these subjects influence people—and his passion for the material is contagious.

Stone loved rhetoric before he had any knowledge of what the word meant: he took speech communication in high school and built on those concepts as his education continued. But he didn't see himself teaching the subject early in his college career. Rather, he stumbled into professorship. He “bopped around” as an undergrad, studying Communication, English Literature, and English Education for his degree. Stone says at one point he thought, “I am good at going to school—maybe I'll just *keep* going.”

He went on to get a Masters and a Ph.D. in Writing Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Now he uses his background in digital rhetoric and sound studies to add depth to the department. He believes “the old traditional stuff is (often) understood better with contemporary tools.”

Stone takes time in his classes to discover his student's interests. He describes this concept as “the idea of *care*”—and insists that “not caring can undermine the [teaching] process” as quickly as any other issue. That's why he takes time to find out what his students love, and then adapts the material to incorporate those interests.

His current Introduction to Rhetoric students agree: “[His] classes go by really fast because they are all about discussion and what we're thinking about the subject matter. Some days we talk about *Star Wars* and Harry Potter because it's a good way for us to understand the concepts.” In this class and others, Stone facilitates an environment where his students have an opportunity to create a personal connection to the material.

Whether jazz, classic rhetorical theory, or *Star Wars*, Stone makes sure his students learn by caring about the material. This fall (2016), Stone will teach Digital Rhetoric (WRTG 4040/6040-001) and Intro to Rhetoric (WRTG 3860)—and he'll keep developing classes that encourage students to pursue writing through their own interests.

- Tiffany Parkin

## Writing that Gets You Hired

Class on how to write for the professional world popular with students

In a few months, thousands of Utah students will graduate and start looking for jobs. Most job applications require a strong cover letter, resume, and list of references in order to be competitive in the work force. These documents can make or break a job opportunity, so learning to create them is key. Assistant Professor/Lecturer David Hawkins says “a poorly written resume or cover letter—one that doesn’t reach out to the employer—can sabotage a job search before it ever gets started.” WRTG 3015, Professional Writing, is designed to teach students to compose professional documents, from resumes to memos to cover letters and proposals.

Students in the class learn to create resumes and cover letters tailored to real world jobs. They also study the strategies necessary to write interoffice memos, proposals, and even grant documents. These skills are invaluable in finding work after graduation, and Hawkins reports that “a number of students have even found work using documents they created in class—even *before* they graduated!”

Every instructor who teaches the class offers students detailed feedback to ensure the documents they create are as polished as possible. This feedback helps students to present their own professional experience and education in the most attractive manner.



A number of sections in Professional Writing are offered every semester, making it easy for any student to join. Classes are offered in person at many different days and times, or online where students interact with each other and the instructor virtually. Also, because the class covers a number of common writing skills, it appeals to a variety of majors. Professional Writing is not just a class for writing majors—the skills students learn are universal.

For more information on Professional Writing or other classes offered in the Department of Writing & Rhetoric Studies, please visit [writing.utah.edu](http://writing.utah.edu) or email the department academic advisor, Lisa Shaw at [l.shaw@utah.edu](mailto:l.shaw@utah.edu).

- Bailey Shelden



## A New Capstone for Writing

WRTG 5990 encourages students to put their learning to practice

In the spring of 2017, the Writing Department will introduce its first Senior Seminar, WRTG 5990. Taught by Assistant Professor Christie Toth, the class will give Writing & Rhetoric students the opportunity to explore both writing theory and their experiences in the Writing major in ways that reflect their individual interests. Students will participate in class discussions and readings, and have a chance to articulate and apply their rhetorical knowledge by creating a semester-long project and a final portfolio.

“A big part of the class is developing and completing a significant final project. This class is an opportunity for students to do the project they

want to do,” Professor Toth explains. “I really am interested in students learning how to take their experience out into the rest of the world in a way that is meaningful to them.”

Toth will work with each student individually to design and implement a rhetorical project of their choosing. “This is a chance to do something real, ...not [just] something that I want you to do,” Toth tells potential students. Those who enroll in the class will be able to create a final project that is not necessarily aimed at an academic audience: while scholarly projects are one possibility, students can also direct their projects toward audiences in their future career fields,

their current workplace, or other communities .

Toth points to studies that support the importance of capstone classes as one reason for the course’s creation. “There is a lot of research about education that shows how beneficial a capstone experience can be,” she says. “It’s very helpful for students to have an opportunity to pull everything together and articulate what they have learned.” To help with this, students will participate in discussions and readings that cover key concepts and ideas in the field of writing and rhetoric studies. “The opportunity to articulate what you have learned helps students retain the information much longer, and more deeply. That’s part of why capstone courses are increasingly popular,” Toth says.

WRTG 5990 is a 3 credit hour course for senior Writing & Rhetoric students. Intro to Rhetoric and Writing as a Social Practice are required prerequisites. To learn more about the class, or about other courses in Writing & Rhetoric Studies, visit <http://writing.utah.edu> or contact the Writing & Rhetoric Studies academic advisor, Lisa Shaw, at [l.shaw@utah.edu](mailto:l.shaw@utah.edu).

- Alexander Lewandowski



## A New Leader for a Young Department

**New Department Chair, Jay Jordan maps out Writing's future at the U**

Professor Jay Jordan, the newly minted department chair for Writing & Rhetoric Studies, envisions a bright future for writing at the University. He acknowledges that he has big shoes to fill, but plans to further the previous department chair, Maureen Mathison's legacy by creating connections with other departments on campus as a way to show the community how valuable writing is.

He is most interested in "teaching writing as a mode of thinking, a key technology in human societies, and a tool people use to make sense of their lives, work, and education."

Recently returned from a year in Korea where he led the department's program at Songdo, Jordan is also intensely interested in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students and communities. In order to engage international students, Jordan wants to focus



Department Chair, Jay Jordan with his pens and signature bow tie.

on making the support for them as cohesive as it can be, placing emphasis on writing across

the curriculum as a way to encourage their involvement. "These are some of the fundamental values of writing," says Jordan.

He also has aspirations to hire the best, up-and-coming, tenure-line faculty members in hopes of bringing together an incredible team of professors and colleagues. "This will allow us to build on existing scholarly strengths in areas like discourse analysis, multimodal rhetoric, literacy studies, and multi-lingual writing," he says.

Hiring top-of-the-line faculty members is also essential because it will encourage students to see the Writing & Rhetoric Studies department as an extremely relevant and collegial environment where people are highly engaged in teaching and research.

"I know how valuable writing is," he says, "and I want our campus and community to be able to appreciate that value, too."

- Dalton Oium

