



When colleagues from other writing centers visit and new staff members join the Center for Writing (C4W), they are often amazed by our robust academic technologies that enable students to schedule writing consultations, check how long the waiting list is at Student Writing Support–Appleby, or engage in an SWS.online chat with a writing consultant as they both work on a shared document. In this year’s newsletter, we welcome you to join us in looking back at generations of students who have served as our student technology specialists, or “techies,” as they are fondly called. Their technological prowess, creativity, collaboration skills, and hard work have left a legacy that has made the C4W more accessible and effective for thousands of students, instructors, and C4W staff members since 2005.

Just as each generation of techies shares their knowledge and experience with the next, so too does wisdom get passed down in each C4W program. This past year, we experienced exciting transitions in both the Minnesota Writing Project and the Writing Across the Curriculum program, which we hope you’ll enjoy reading about below.

C4W Techies: The Legacy Continues

Although academic technologies have long been part of the C4W’s history, in 2004, the Center took a giant leap forward when new techie Huy Hoang convinced director Kirsten Jamsen to abandon the Center’s FileMaker Pro database and give him free rein to build a custom database framework with web application interface despite the fact that, as Huy remembers, “we were both well aware that I’d have to learn how to do it along the way.” That willingness to take risks and learn together has been the foundation of all of the Center’s technology development ever since Huy, Kirsten, and writing consultant Jim Oliver (then a graduate student in Scientific and Technical Communication) put their heads together to imagine what a customized writing center scheduling app could be.

With much hard work, deep learning, and “wandering around campus when [his] brain was ‘cooking on a solution,’” Huy not only built that original customized system, but he also trained and supported successive generations of techies, including Mitch Sans Souci, Daniel Balm, Buyu Chen, Alec Von Arx, and Jordan Anderson. They are responsible for creating the mySWS portal for students to make and manage their own consultation appointments, the hybrid SWS.online consulting interface that combines document response with synchronous chat, the electronic sign-in for walk-in consultations in SWS–Appleby, and a private blog where consultants engage in rich professional development conversations (now sometimes enhanced by memes!).

While other writing centers often must rely on software programs that end up defining the way their centers are run, our techies have been able to tailor our technology to meet the C4W’s unique needs. Current techies Sean Hurley and Ethan Brenny are designing an automated tool that builds consultant work schedules as well as a sub request system; together, these all-new tools will make it easier to accommodate the busy schedules of 45 staff members working across four SWS locations.



Huy Hoang “cooking” a technology solution in 2011; laptop art courtesy of his daughter Helen

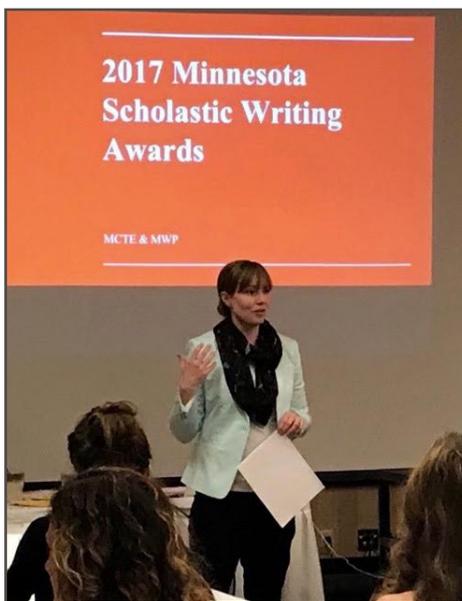
Buyu echoes what many have told us about their best memories of working in our Center: “I am most proud of being able to have a positive impact for students and to teach staff directly (you don’t get those often once you step into industry).” Daniel concurs: “I also felt in the job that I was developing something that really mattered. SWS makes a huge impact on students’ writing and lives, and I was fortunate to work on web applications that help make the day-to-day operations run smoothly.”

Even though our student techies have gone on to successful jobs in industry, they recognize the uniqueness of our collaboration model. As Daniel sums up, “C4W provides student tech specialists with interesting and real-life development experiences in all areas of the Software Development Life Cycle. It’s exciting as a student to develop new features that you can see real people using... The trust between Center staff for the student workers creates an environment where they are motivated and enabled to really step up and shine.”

Minnesota Writing Project: Honoring our Past and Responding to the Current Political Moment

Since its founding in 1990 by Lillian Bridwell-Bowles and Muriel Thompson, the Minnesota Writing Project (MWP) has kept teachers' voices at the center of the National Writing Project (NWP) mission to improve the teaching of writing and improve learning in the nation's schools. With Muriel's transition to Director Emerita in December 2016, Stephanie Rollag Yoon has stepped into the Director role. With ten years of teaching language arts and elementary Spanish in 7th and 8th grade classrooms in both rural and urban districts, Steph participated in the MWP Invitational Summer Institute (2009) and also served as a MWP graduate assistant (2014–16). Steph is currently finishing her PhD in Critical Literacy English Education.

MWP's emphasis on supporting and empowering teachers is especially important



MWP Director Stephanie Rollag Yoon presenting the 2017 MN Scholastic Writing Awards

during a time of declining federal funding for public education. As Steph notes, "There aren't a lot of spaces right now that honor the knowledge that teachers bring to the classroom. The tension around the lack of funding for NWP is the same tension that teachers feel in the classroom, from unrealistic expectations about curriculum to curricular decisions that don't meet the needs of their students. Part of the work of MWP is to provide a space for teachers to navigate the tensions around education right now." The MWP 2017 Fall Workshop on "Teaching Love in an Era of Hate" reflected this need, bringing together teachers to share practices that engage students in using writing as a tool to think critically about their local and global contexts, to build community, and to participate in a digital, interconnected world. As Steph affirms, "Writing has the potential to create a true democracy."

Writing Across the Curriculum Wishes Molly Bendzick a Fond Farewell and Welcomes Heidi Solomonson



In September 2017, the C4W welcomed its newest staff member, Heidi Solomonson, in the role of Administrative Coordinator for the Writing Across the Curriculum program, replacing Molly Bendzick, who has taken a new position in the U of M Software Engineering Center. Heidi previously worked as a program manager and alumni relations coordinator in the nonprofit sector. Heidi's role involves coordinating the events and activities associated with the [Teaching With Writing series](#) and the [Writing Enriched Curriculum](#) (WEC) program, including the upcoming WEC Symposium, WEC Institute, and NSF-funded Improving Undergraduate Science Education Institute in 2018.

Heidi Solomonson, new Administrative Coordinator for WAC

As this year's newsletter well illustrates, the C4W has a rich and talented alumni community. With another year of graduations, retirements, and departures to new jobs, that community now includes Molly Bendzick, Alysha Bohanon, Elizabeth Braatz, Mariya Gyendina, Andreas Hochrein, Grant Johnson, Andrew Juneau, Jennifer Kang, Leah Moreno, Lyss Mullings, Isaac Muscanto, Mario Obando, Lucas Paulson, Shannon Puechner, Nikita Salovich, Jo Shoemaker, Julie Sinn, Annie Thompson, and Muriel Thompson. We wish you all well on your next endeavors and hope you'll keep in touch!

You, too, can stay in touch by joining and posting on our "University of Minnesota Writing Center Employees, Alumni, and Friends" Facebook page and by answering (or updating your entry in) our [11 Questions for Alumni survey](#). You can read responses from others at writing.umn.edu/alums.

You can also support the Center and our work to support students and educators who practice, teach with, and research writing through gifts to our U of MN Foundation accounts at writing.umn.edu/home/giving.html. We hope you will consider us in your year-end giving this year!

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