

JACOBSON CENTER TELEGRAM



Issued in early fall and winter, the Jacobson Center Telegram informs Smith staff, faculty, and students about newsworthy developments in the work of the Jacobson Center and the teaching of writing. Complementarily, it hosts a forum on writing specifically for faculty and a guest perspective on writing or the work of the center in every issue. The Telegram is posted on the [Jacobson Center](#) website and distributed to the community.

NEWS & DEVELOPMENTS

Spring semester didn't start with a snowstorm but it did start with another storm of sorts—ChatGPT—about which we will hear much more. In January, it was sobering to follow the ChatGPT news while also supporting seniors writing theses. No ChatGPT there. For three hours a day for two weeks, thesis writers gathered in Seelye to write-on-site with a Jacobson Center staff member. Overall, our thesis writing mentoring program (of which the write-on-site is but one component) gathered even more strength this year. The Jacobson Center staff mentors are currently working with 12 students in 9 disciplines.

We look forward to continuing the faculty retreat conversation about ChatGPT with Annette Vee (U. Pittsburgh) on April 24. Ever prescient, the Writing and Public Discourse Committee organized this talk last fall before the media blitz. Professor Vee is a renowned expert on literacy, composition, and technology. Her talk is titled "Text Generation Technology and the Future of Writing." The 5:00 PM talk will be followed by a reception to celebrate the end of our writing and public discourse grant period. Please join us!

The Journalism Concentration, now with an inaugural class of 8 concentrators mostly in their sophomore year, continues to thrive. After the success of last semester's talk by nonfiction

author and former *Washington Post* media columnist Margaret Sullivan (thank you Tim Recuber for a brilliant Q&A), the concentration will be sponsoring or co-sponsoring two final talks in the Inside Journalism: Free Press and Democracy series. The first speaker is Brooke Williams, an associate professor of journalism at Boston University. Professor Williams specializes in computational journalism and her talk is titled "Seeking Equity and Justice through Data Journalism." The second is Mike Chinoy, now Senior Fellow at the U.S.-China Institute at the University of Southern California and formerly CNN's senior Asia correspondent. His talk is titled "Assignment China: An Oral History of American Journalists in the People's Republic." Finally, if you haven't already, we encourage you to check out Naila Moreira's piece on journalism, democratic practice, and the liberal arts, as well as Olivia Petty's piece on free speech in the latest issue of the *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*. Olivia is a first-year student.

We are excited about the continued interest in writing among the first-year students. At the end of last semester, we had 26 submissions for this year's *Smith Writes*, the Jacobson Center's online magazine of best writing from WI courses, with more submissions likely to come from the spring WI courses. Thank you, all WI instructors, for your thoughtful assignments and for encouraging your students to submit their work for publication.

FACULTY CORNER

by Miranda McCarvel

Near the end of last semester, a student submitted a first draft essay that was not what I expected from a first year, multilingual student. I have been teaching writing to non-native writers of English since 2008 and am familiar with the syntactic and rhetorical devices common to the first drafts generated by my students. Multilingual students have a number of linguistic repertoires to draw from and craft papers that exhibit greater linguistic variation than those of their monolingual peers. The prose I encountered was grammatically perfect Standard American Academic English, the structure was the typical five paragraph essay, and the incorporation of evidence was there but shallow. This student failed for other reasons, but this paper stuck with me.

When [ChatGPT](#) appeared in an NPR story in December, followed quickly by a story on [GPTZero](#), which works to detect AI generated content by checking for unpredictability and randomness ("burstiness"), I returned to that essay. I quickly plugged in the prompt into ChatGPT, and it generated content that closely aligned with the paper. I then submitted the student's paper to GPTZero, which confirmed my suspicions: the content most likely had been generated by AI.

Despite my experience, I am not that worried about ChatGPT in my classroom. My students bring vibrant, unpredictable "bursty" writing. Like many have discovered, ChatGPT often produces shallow, error-ridden pieces. Simply ask it to write a Wikipedia entry on you to see just how inaccurate ChatGPT can be. However, I do hope it leads us to more robust discussions on the nature of assessment (and writing) in academia. If you are interested in discussing ChatGPT, you are invited to attend the Sherrerd Center's teaching circle I am hosting, "Teaching in the Time of ChatGPT."

SPOTLIGHT

CAP has approved a new subject code: **WRT Writing and Public Discourse**. The new code will be the primary code for all courses taught by Jacobson Center staff and affiliated NTT faculty. These courses were formerly offered through the English department, with whom some will continue to be dual listed.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Teaching Arts Luncheon

Digital Pedagogy Fellowship Showcase

Miranda McCarvel & Jonathan Ruseski

February 10 12:20pm

Neilson Browsing Room

Inside Journalism series:

Seeking Equity and Justice through Data Journalism

Brooke Williams, Boston University

February 20 4:30pm

McConnell 103

Inside Journalism series:

Assignment China: An Oral History of American Journalists in the People's Republic

Mike Chinoy, U.S.-China Institute at the University of Southern California,

March 20 5pm

Stoddard Auditorium G2

Writing and Public Discourse Lecture

Text Generation Technology and the Future of Writing

Annette Vee, University of Pittsburgh

April 24 5:00pm

Neilson Browsing Room

PERSPECTIVES

from Eléna Zytnecki '25

I became a French Peer Content Tutor at the Jacobson Center in Fall 2022. For me, the French language has always been an important part of my life – speaking at home with my parents or with family and friends abroad, French language and culture have helped grow my curiosity for the world and beyond. Becoming a tutor meant that I could not only share this curiosity with others, but also help facilitate a positive relationship in the long process of language learning.

Each time I meet with a tutee, it's like working out a puzzle – and discovering that some pieces don't quite make sense. It is such a joyful and rewarding experience seeing someone learn something new and gain newfound confidence in a developing skill. Having that moment of realization – that epiphany – is truly special.