Halloween was particularly memorable this year for five Center for Writing Excellence Writing Assistants. The five—Bailey Hoffmann, Hannah Zidon, Anthony Letourneau, Alexandria Herrera, and Hannah Brandel—traveled to Disney World in Orlando, Florida, to present at the prestigious International Writing Centers Association/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing joint conferences.

This appearance marks the third time CWE Writing Assistants have presented at IWCA and/or NCPTW. The conferences, which are the preeminent scholarly conferences in writing center studies, are held jointly every other year.

The WAs, in collaboration with CWE Director Alan Benson and Assistant Director Christa Tiernan, presented two panels showcasing research projects begun as part of ENGL 397 and continued in the CWE. Hoffmann, Zidon, and Herrera built upon their interest in spoken language in “Part of Your World: Collaborative Conversation in the Writing Center.” The other panel, “Imagining a ‘Hoop That Never Ends’: Building Connections Between College and High School Writing Centers,” showcased the work that Letourneau, Brandel, and Benson did in preparing for a possible writing center collaboration with Memorial High School.

Both presentations were well-attended and left audience members impressed by the work these Blugolds are doing. One attendee said the panel on collaborative conversation was “the most interesting thing [he’d] seen” at the conference. After their presentation, two college directors said UWEC’s work inspired them to consider their own high school collaboration. We look forward to impressing more non-Blugolds at future conferences!
In academia, we are constantly challenged to think in a way most people wouldn’t. We are dared to present epiphanies in our papers and contribute unique wisdom to discussions. But what do you do with an idea—an unsettling idea—that nobody has ever had? Not something that generally fits inside the realm of academia or everyday conversation, conspiracy theories can easily fester in the minds of their owners. This year, however, the Center for Writing Excellence dares you to tell all about them in its annual writing contest.

This year’s theme, “Conspiracy Theories,” aims to prod the boundaries by welcoming both fiction and non-fiction prose. There is no theory “too real” or “too uncomfortable” for this contest. Submissions must adhere to the theme, be a maximum of 1000 words, double-spaced, and submitted as a PDF. The March 15th deadline will be only the beginning of your piece’s recognition, as there will also be an open read on April 9th for any participants who would like to share their talent with other students, CWE staff, and guests.

A first-, second-, and third-place winner—as well as ten randomly-selected winners—will receive a range of awesome prizes at the open read. Previous winners have received fabulous prizes such as signed books and Nooks—so make sure you don’t miss out!

At the Center for Writing Excellence, we celebrate writing like it’s our job. And what better time is there to rejoice in the intricacies of writing than with the National Day on Writing? Officially established by the U.S. Senate in 2009, the National Day on Writing, held on October 20th, is an annual celebration dedicated to demonstrating and encouraging the beneficial and entertaining aspects of writing.

This year, the Center for Writing Excellence held several on-campus events for UW-Eau Claire students to participate in to promote writing at the University.

In the Davies Center, students were asked to write haikus on any topics they could come up with; many of these had a sweet-treat focus, as after writing a haiku, students received a baked good, made and provided by several of the CWE’s own Writing Assistants. On the first floor of the library, students were also challenged to write a horror story—using only two sentences! If successful, the students received a piece of candy.

The final event held on the actual National Day on Writing consisted of a story wall; students were asked to help write a story on the walls of the Center for Writing Excellence’s McIntyre site, by each student adding one sentence to a continuing string of sentences previously written on the wall. However, the writing didn’t end when National Day on Writing was over. Later in the week, a class that was held in McIntyre library decided to continue writing on the story wall, filling an additional glass pane with their additions to the story!

In collaboration with NOTA, the Center for Writing Excellence also celebrated the National Day on Writing with an Open Read in The Cabin at the Davies Center. Students brought in short pieces of writing, either their favorites by other authors or selections they had written themselves, to present to other attendees of the event. Turnout was amazing—it was standing room only for most of the night.

Each of these events had a great impact on the students who participated, and we are excited to start preparations for next year’s events! Happy writing, everyone!
Earlier this semester, Dr. Erica Benson took charge of the English Department when Dr. Carmen Manning moved her desk to become the Dean of Education and Human Sciences. Benson is currently the Interim Department Chair, but starting in the spring of 2015, the “interim” will be scratched off the title.

Benson has been with the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire for 11 years now, teaching linguistics courses.

Originally, as an undergraduate, she was a Chemical Engineering major, but realized after a few years that she wanted to take a break from science. She stated, “I was doing fine, but I just wasn’t feeling fulfilled. So I took a couple semesters off and then took a lot of humanities courses… and one day I looked at my transcript and realized ‘I can graduate this semester if I major in German.’ So I did.”

After a couple years of working, Benson came up with the idea of going back to school to study linguistics. She received her Masters degree at the University of South Carolina “and in the process of that, [she] got a Graduate Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.” After teaching in Poland and Germany she went to Michigan State to study and work on her PhD and came to UWEC right after. She said it was a long path leading to linguistics, but “somewhere along the road, it just clicked. To me it’s the marriage between the scientific approach and the humanistic approach.”

When discussing her new roles in the department she said, “There’s so much to this job… and it’s a little weird being the boss.” But it’s “a great thing, that our department is very committee oriented, we’re very democratic.” To hear that is wonderful because English is the biggest department on campus with more than 50 members.

Recently, all the members of the department were able to vote for candidates applying for a permanent position as chair of the department. The conclusion was to have her remain in the office, which comes with the bonus of a beautiful view.

When asked for advice she’d give to any UWEC students, she says to get involved. “Get involved in the department, student groups…. Take advantage of what this university has to offer.”
Jamie Vue Bids Farewell to the CWE
by Andrew Suralski

The Center for Writing Excellence will lose a valued staff member after the Fall 2014 semester. Jamie Vue, second year Graduate Assistant Director with the CWE, will be graduating with a Master's Degree in Creative Writing this December.

Jamie first came to UW-Eau Claire in 2004 to begin her undergraduate studies as a Business major. She quickly realized that business was not for her. As a result, Jamie took some time away from school in order to find out what field she wanted to pursue. During that time, she expressed an interest in creative writing. “I’ve always had a passion for English and writing,” she says. “I realized that I wanted to be in English and I wanted to be a writer.” Jamie returned to UWEC in 2009, majoring in Creative Writing. After graduating in the spring of 2012, she decided to continue studying creative writing at UWEC as a graduate student.

Looking back on her previous studies, Jamie sees that UWEC’s English faculty has helped her develop considerably as a writer and as a researcher. One professor in particular, B. J. Hollars, has had a significant impact on her writing style. “B. J. has been a great influence on me, at both the personal and professional level in helping me grow as a writer. He saw the kind of writer I wanted to be and he helped to encourage that.” With the help of B. J. and other English faculty, Jamie recently finished part of a memoir for her thesis project—the first of its kind at UWEC. The work is based on her early years growing up in Detroit, Michigan. When asked about the writing process, Jamie says, “Writing my thesis has been a very rewarding experience. I got to learn a lot about myself as a writer, as a researcher, as a student, and especially as a Hmong American woman who’s always wanted to understand her identity from a historical perspective.”

After graduation, Jamie plans on taking some time off in order to finish and publish her memoir. Beyond that, she will look into various MFA and PhD programs in Asian American studies or Asian American literature in hopes of becoming a professor some day.

For now, the thought of moving on from both UWEC and the CWE is both exciting and bittersweet for Jamie. “I’ve lived in Eau Claire for ten years now,” she says. “I consider it home. And the CWE staff has really left an imprint on me as a person as well as a student because they’ve always been very welcoming and supportive.”

While everyone at the CWE will miss Jamie when she graduates this December, we’re also very proud of her and wish her the best of luck!