

I begin my last semester at Grand Valley simultaneously eager for it to begin and end! While I have enjoyed my time here, I crave the intensity and specificity that graduate study offers. I am coming away from my undergraduate experience with new perspectives and beliefs, but, most excitingly, the ability to formulate better questions and the wherewithal to access the resources to explore them, and, perhaps, although less importantly, answer them. So it is here that I find myself applying to graduate programs, eager to investigate this intensified curiosity about myself and the world through my writing.

The University of Alabama has long been my ideal graduate school because it offers so many features which would benefit me specifically. I consider my weaknesses to be that I'm not well enough read, and that I don't take enough risks. In that the program offers many courses in contemporary literature and experimental forms, I know that I would be challenged and inspired to break out of my comfort zone, and to consider new sources of inspiration. My biggest strengths are my background in the visual arts, and my wonderment. I work in a variety of forms, including short poetry, the nonfiction essay, and soon, a collage project with poetry, prose, and photography. This year has seen my work diversify both in form and content and the University of Alabama offers many courses which inspire me to continue broadening as an artist. I look forward to a graduate study filled with positive learning experiences in areas I have previously been unable to explore in an academic setting.

My short-term professional goals include continuing to learn new methods and approaches to writing, while sharpening and experimenting with my own style. Because both my poetry and prose are strictly nonfiction, I feel an obligation, and fascination, to further consider what responsibilities, if any, I have to readers. Too, it's important to me that I better understand my influences, particularly how non-literary forms like music and the visual arts have contributed, and continue to contribute to the development of my aesthetic. While I actively submit and publish my work at Grand Valley, I now feel ready to begin submitting to more competitive literary journals and magazines, and aim to do so on a regular basis. Most significantly however, I seek to do two things: to refine my understanding of what makes a powerful collection of work and to strive towards creating chapbook length projects (possible projects include explorations into short poetry, collage forms, mixed media, portraiture, and the list), and to gain teaching experience through an assistantship/volunteering in schools, in order to develop more fully as a future professor. My short-term goals are, as is evident, numerous!

My long-term professional goals include running a small press, publishing regularly, working with children, whether through volunteering in schools or programs like Dave Eggers's 826 Valencia, and, after I have accrued sufficient life/career experience, becoming a professor. My devotion to both the visual arts and writing suggest that my sanity may depend on my involvement in publishing! A career in publishing promises to fulfill me in various ways: the ability to practice art and writing, to be in control of my own work, to share art I believe in (both my own and others'), to give other artists the opportunity to be involved in the complete creation of their work, and by keeping me connected with the artistic community. However, while a career in publishing may guarantee my sanity, on its own it would not be satisfying. Through working as an Assistant Teacher with the Child Care program at Munson Medical Center for three years, being a writing consultant for two years, and volunteering in an Outreach program, I have found that I am most fulfilled when in positions which allow me to work with elementary-aged children, which is, regardless of the task, creative, or to function in a teacher-like role. It is not enough for me to write, despite how much I enjoy it. I have always had the need to share my passion and experiences with others, which explains why I write nonfiction, and why I am so

active in the writing department. I have learned the most about myself and my work through working with children; their curiosity, honesty, and lack of inhibitions, as well as their art (see Kenneth Koch's *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?*) give form to my aesthetic. In this way, Dave Eggers' career is somewhat of a blueprint for what I hope to achieve, as are the careers of Joshua Beckman, Michael Martone, and my professor, Ander Monson, editor and designer of both New Michigan Press and *Diagram*, who publishes like a maniac and still completely invests himself in teaching.

The University of Alabama offers many features which would prove instrumental in helping me to achieve my goals. Those elements which were most important to me in my search for a graduate school were location, the availability of publishing courses and assistantships, the encouragement of cross-genre exploration, and unique course offerings. Strictly a nonfiction writer, my poetry and prose depend on my ability to experience and enjoy the world around me. The South was my desired region of study primarily because of how different it is from where I grew up, though Tuscaloosa has no shortage of water (a must for this Northern Michigan girl)! Equally stimulating for my writing is the ability to be active in both poetry and nonfiction courses; something which the University of Alabama requires. While I am unquestionably a poet, I have grown the most as a writer through this dual study. Additionally, the University offers a balance between a comprehensive education in both the professional and creative spheres through courses in Book Arts, Writers at Work, Writing for Kids, and FC2. The courses offered by the University of Alabama are without a doubt the most creative and specific of any program I've found. The website for the Creative Writing MFA only helps to enact this individuality with pages like "Staff & Faculty: Overview," which is at once playful and crafty, just like the course titles and descriptions. Equally unique to the university are Michael Martone and Joel Brouwer. As I hope to explore short poetry and collage forms, there are few people I would be more excited to work with. Martone's work has forced me to reconsider my ideas about reader/writer responsibilities and genre lines, in addition to contributing a much appreciated sense of mischief and fun to the literary world and reading experience. Brouwer's book *Centuries*, with its use of short form and language, excites and challenges me, and it would be an invaluable to have him as a resource in my explorations of both. I am equally excited that the University of Alabama offers assistantships, as being awarded one would help acquaint me with various aspects of both the writing and professorial life, in addition to alleviating some of the financial stresses associated with graduate study. Lastly, I am thrilled by the University of Alabama's opportunities for student involvement. A very active member of GVSU's writing department, I have been published numerous times per year in various campus publications, served as poetry editor, co-editor, and reader for the campus literary magazine *Fishladder*, coordinated the Student Reading Series, and given three readings, in addition to working at the writing center and volunteering in an Outreach program. The experiences I have gained through my involvement are immeasurable both to myself personally, as I have made many friends, and as a writer, as I have been exposed to many elements of the writing life which my courses did not address. Were I to be accepted, I'd hope to continue this level of involvement, both at the university and in the community.