

**Sweetland Minor in Writing
Commencement Timeline
Winter 2025**

Thursday, May 1, 2025 - 1-2:30pm
Great Lakes Room - Palmer Commons

[SLIDE SHOW OF GRADUATES WILL PLAY AS GUESTS ARRIVE]

1:05-1:10 pm - Welcome address - Simone Sessolo, Sweetland Director [Introduces Mishal Charania]

1:10-1:15 pm - Mishal Charania Student Address (4-5 minutes)

1:15-1:20 pm - Remarks from Julie Babcock, Minor in Writing Faculty

1:20-2:10 pm - Presentation of 2025 Graduates - Shelley Manis, Minor in Writing Director
[Shelley & Student Speakers].

Shelley announces graduate names

T or Julie - present certificate

T or Julie - present stoles

2:10 pm - Farewell/send off - T Hetzel

Welcome Address, Simone Sessolo, Sweetland Director

Hello Everyone,

Faculty, Staff, proud parents and relatives, and most importantly the incredible graduates of the Minor in Writing Class of 2025. I'm Dr. Simone Sessolo, Director of the Sweetland Center for Writing, and it is my honor to welcome you to today's celebrations. Today, we gather to recognize not only the culmination of years of hard work and dedication, but also the extraordinary journey of self-discovery and creativity that has led each of you graduates to this significant milestone. Look at the flowers on your tables: so rooted in soil, or water, and yet tending toward the sky. They remind me of you. I can only imagine what your sky will be—a chance to unleash your petals upon the world and to make your mark of beauty and kindness on it. I invite you to embrace the power of your pen (or, as you learned in the Minor, any medium, really!) and experience the irrepressible lightness and joy of being writers. Congratulations on your remarkable achievements.

CLAP

And now, let me invite Mishal Charania to the podium for some remarks.

Also, please feel free to get up and get more food and drinks during the ceremony.

Mishal, take it from here!

Mishal Charania Student Address

You never know what can happen when you approach writing with care and bravery. You never know what can happen when you approach the obstacles that life may throw toward us with bravery and care. Effective writers are more important now than ever. The ability to effectively disseminate information to others is a powerful tool in our society. The care and respect for our readers is what we need to continue to take away as we continue our writing journeys. I recognize that we might not all become writers in the traditional sense of publishing research or penning novels, but we all will continue to write in the future. Whether it's writing code and creating new tools for others to use to journaling our lives, writing will stay with us and be key in our future endeavors.

Good afternoon everyone, my name is Mishal Charania and I have been in the writing minor since my sophomore year. It is in these classes that I have found individuals who consistently showcase their care through feedback sessions and wield their emotions in their writing. A question I am often asked by other students is, what do you do in the writing minor? It's a fair question. Everyone writes, most people can write decently well, why not learn something "new." Directing care towards how we read the work of our peers and the work we do ourselves is an exemplified message in the minor. Writing can be taught but writing with care is learned and earned.

The writing minor has given many of us a community within our classes. All of us most recently took the capstone course where we sat with the words of our peers, given the unique opportunity to critique and support the work of others. I have had the experience in many of my other non-minor in writing classes where feedback from peers consists of an "it was all good" comment and nothing else. In the writing minor, we don't do that. We are not afraid to be honest about how we feel about a piece, always working with kindness and understanding because we genuinely want each other to succeed. What I have loved about this program is that we all truly care about one another and we show that by spending time, energy and care about each other's work.

Our care extends to each other always, especially with the ongoing changes within the federal government and campus community. Our classes have never shied away from talking about the changes that are affecting us and others because good writers need to take care of themselves before they can take care of an audience.

I want to thank all of the writing minor professors, all of whom have dedicated their time and energy into our development. You all care so much about who we are as individuals, and we see that through the love you put into each of our projects. I know that there are current and future published authors in the room just as there are many who will continue to write for themselves. Those write to provide themselves with joy, to jot down memories or find some mental peace and clarity. This kind of writing is so important on an individual level, and I feel better equipped to be kind to myself and my writing because of the minor.

If there is one thing I have learned from this experience is how important it is to take your writing seriously. If you don't, who will and why should they? Don't be afraid to center yourself in the story, reach out to that person who you think would never respond for an interview, write about difficult topics. Because again, if we don't, who will. I am so grateful to be standing here, surrounded by other minor in writing graduates who have inspired me to take my own writing seriously.

Congrats to the Writing Minor class of 2025.

Remarks from Julie Babock, Minor in Writing Faculty

Julie Babcock, Capstone '25 Graduation Remarks

Hello!

It's a joy to be here celebrating with all of you—family, friends, colleagues, and of course all our amazing Minor in Writing graduates. This Minor is unique in that it not only accepts students from disciplines across the university—from biology to history—from art and English to physics and psychology—it asks them to actively engage with each other across these disciplines to create projects that go beyond what they have been asked to do in their majors.

Students who are aces at doing archival research but have never designed their own, try it out. Students who have always kept the boundaries of their personal identities separate from their academic ones, see what happens the two are invited into the same room. Students who have never thought about sharing their writing beyond a classroom are now asked to make websites, to think about audiences they would most like to reach, to think through their own point of views and how to express them. This Minor asks students to take what they know and are passionate

about and to engage with others in the spirit of deep curiosity. *If you could make anything right now*, we asked these students at the beginning of the semester, just a short fifteen weeks ago, *if you could share it with anyone, what would you make?*

The question is both exciting and uncomfortable. It blends vision and ambition with a lot of unknowns. It provokes other big questions, crucial questions that we all ask ourselves at pivotal points in our lives even though they can never be definitely answered: What are the possibilities of my potential? What are the limits? Who am I as a writer and a person in the world when I am freed beyond the confines of one particular discipline or someone else's assignment?

I'm not quite done finishing my work for the semester, but I just picked up the poet and essayist Maggie Smith's new book *Dear Writer* this week. I'm sure some of you have read her poem "Good Bones," those famous lines where she imagines herself as a real estate agent trying to sell this world to her children, a world that is "at least half terrible." Though a real estate agent would never say that, and neither would a good parent. "Good bones," Maggie Smith writes instead, "this place could be beautiful,/ right?" You could make this place beautiful."

Smith's new book of essays is subtitled "Pep Talks & Practical Advice for the Creative Life," and in it, she doubles down on her bright, change-making vision for writing. She argues that the process "Is about letting yourself be changed. If you aren't growing, what's the point? I don't write—or read—for comfort. I don't engage with language because I want to be soothed. I don't turn to literature to have my choices or ideas confirmed. I go to be changed."

These graduates have all gone through rigorous change-making processes over the past few years. In addition to three other courses our minors select from a wide range of possibilities, they have all taken the same two required courses: Gateway and Capstone. In Gateway, they embarked on a set of "experiments" that asked them to take something they'd written in the past and read, research and play with different genres and multimodal compositions. These experiments radically change their writing and its purpose. Through the process, these writers directly engage with a crucial fact: that they have, and always will have, more choices available to them than it first seems.

These experiments set the foundation for their Capstone course, where we asked them to create a multimodal project of their own, any genre for any purpose, as long as it incorporated significant research and was written for a public audience.

These graduates got to make their own rules, and along the way, they've created projects that have changed them and their future readers. You can get a sneak peek of these projects on the screen behind us. You can read the names of the projects in our commencement program. And, thanks to our design specialist, Aaron Valdez, you'll soon be able to access them on the Minor in Writing project gallery site.

On the gallery site you'll be able to see what happens when someone creates a cookbook that is half recipes, half lyric memoir. Or when someone interviews 15 up-and-coming Asian American writers from the Midwest. You can see someone go through the process of starting a speaker series for an organization. Learn how K-12 educators can get arts-based funding grants. See ad campaigns for new companies and apps. Share space with protestors creating community when it's not given to them. You can read stories that make our strange familiar and our familiar strange. Read articles and essays about sitcoms, about NASA, about wildlife in Ann Arbor. You can listen to podcasts and see photo essays, and more. Much more.

Creating change needs lots of support and spaces to play, and over the past few years, the Minor has built new opportunities to do this. Our new student ambassadors, one of whom, Rebecca Fite, is currently part of this graduating class, have hosted game nights and info sessions and created an ongoing newsletter. They have also collaborated with our amazing student-run journal *Writer to Writer*. We have brought alumni into our classrooms, and have collaborated and learned from project consultants, who are thanked in our commencement program. This year, for the first time, we have embroidered stoles for our graduates which they will receive at this ceremony shortly.

There are so many people who have contributed to this celebration today. Thank you to my fellow Capstone colleagues T Hetzel and Shelley Manis- all three of us have been working on this minor virtually since its inception in 2010, and even after all this time, I still learn from you. Thanks to Beth Baker and Jennifer Catey who guide our students through all the program specifics from beginning to end and make sure we have what we need. And thanks to all the Minor in Writing faculty and staff, past, present, and to come.

I want to thank our family members present in this room, watching the live stream, and those we carry in our hearts, who have supported these writers and change-makers. As a parent of a college freshman myself, I am starting to feel the awe of seeing someone who depended on you make their own decisions. To watch them navigate this world with what you've given and also with what you haven't. To watch them find and create beyond you.

And thank you especially to all the graduates in this room. You have spent many generous hours providing wise feedback on each other's work. You have supported each other through the doubting times as well as the inspired ones. You have believed in each other enough to believe in yourselves.

You are awesome. You didn't get this minor by doing what you already knew how to do. You got this minor by following curiosities, trusting your potential, and committing to a community that would change and be changed by each other. Carry this process through your life. It will provide boundless support as you continue making choices and creating in beyond what someone else asks you to do.

Presentation of 2025 Graduates - Shelley Manis

Abigail Bartley

Abigail Kelleher

Allison Wei

Amanth Binyousuf Khandaker

August Mashburn

Ava Meister

Chloe Landers

Christa Fornusek

Claire Janssen

Deena Aboul-Hassan

Elizabeth Ann Cushnir

Ella Russell

Enrique Baranda

Hailey Love

Irena Li

Isabella Carucci

Isabella Detwiler

Ita Newman-Getzler

Janna Jacobson

Jiayou Shen

Joseph Pistonetti

Julie Zhou

Katherine Grace Bennert

Katie Weis

Kelsey Walworth

Logan Brown

Lys Goldman

Mai Tran

Martha Schaller

Mary Elizabeth Redmond

Merin McCallum

Mia Cohen

Micah J. Hopkins

Mishal Charania

Nada Alduays

Nina Groll

Noor Alchalabi

Palak Srivastava

Rebecca Rae Fite

Reese Leif

Shane Taylor

Shelby Brown

Shereen Shahid

Shreya Barlinge

Zoe Fox Bernardi

The following students have not RSVP'd so we think they will not be attending.

Andrea Nicole Heslip

Evan Kiel

Grace E. Yaldoo

Ritvik Pasham