

COM GRAD NEWS



Newsletter for the Graduate Program in Communication
at Illinois State University

Coordinator's Corner

By Dr. Aimee Miller-Ott

A couple weekends ago, the GSA organized an end-of-year BBQ. I want to share my experiences from the BBQ that reminded me of the amazing program we have.

When I arrived, I found "Congratulations Graduates" written on the white board, with very impressive freehand drawings of Reggie the Redbird (nice work, Isa and Grace!), Zach prepping the new griddle he bought when we decided to move the event indoors due to rain, paper decorations hanging from the ceiling, and music playing in the background. As the event unfolded, I heard comments of "this is fun!" and "it's so nice to have everyone hanging out in person!" Everyone seemed genuinely happy to be in person celebrating our upcoming graduates and each other's success this year (and eating a lot of really good food!).

Toward the end of the event, Isa asked the students who are graduating this year to share their memories of the program. Here is just a glimpse into what they shared (remember, their first year in the program was spent all online): Being able to attend classes and teach classes in person; Getting to know each other more in person; Attending a conference in person; Getting to know and work with faculty in person.

Clearly we will remember this school year as "the one when we were finally back in person." We all did the best we could online these past years, but we shine as an in-person program. These graduating students will remember back on their last year of the program and be so thankful for the face-to-face opportunities they had. I know that I am thankful for these opportunities too! The BBQ seemed to be a celebration not only of past success but also of happiness in current times and hope looking forward.

The cohort that began in Fall 2020 was the first that I brought in myself in my role as coordinator. I am so proud of these students and their success in the program in spite of all they had to unexpectedly overcome when starting grad school. I'm excited to see where you go from this point on. Best wishes and happy summer to everyone!

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Professional Development Workshops

On February 28, we held another **professional development workshop** for our grad students titled, *Finding and Landing Jobs after Graduating our Program*. Five of our amazing recent alumni -- Lisa DeWeert, Sara Engstrom, Sarah Monsma, Stephanie Robertson, and Maddie Witt -- shared their experiences in the workforce and how their master's degrees help them navigate their jobs and also stand out from their peers with their backgrounds in data collection and analysis, problem-solving, and quality writing. Their experiences really highlighted the value of a master's degree in Communication from ISU.

Research Presentations

At the **Central States Communication Association conference** at the end of March, several faculty presented their work: Drs. Lindsey Thomas, Ashley Hall, Nathan Carpenter, Kevin Meyer, Steve Hunt, John Baldwin, Aimee Miller-Ott, Lance Lippert, Byron Craig, Joe Zompetti, John Hooker, Phil Chidester, and Megan Hopper. Student presenters included: Kathleen Craven, Jennifer Zheng, Kaitlyn Sullivan, Zach Thornhill, Alex Berry, Tyler Martin, Madeline Dalponte, Isabela Scaturro, and Evan Lobdell.

At this year's **ISU University Research Symposium**, Benjamin Sam-Paintsil (pictured bottom left), Madison Wilson and Taylor Newswander (pictured bottom right), Ertemisa Godinez, and Hunter Thomas presented research projects from Dr. John Baldwin's class.



We also held two **research colloquia** this spring semester. Each session included one graduate faculty member and one graduate student sharing their research and then responding to questions and comments from those in attendance.

On March 14, second year grad student, **Samantha Schultz** (pictured top left), shared her work on a project titled *Communication Between Adult Daughters and Their Mothers Regarding Child Care and Unsolicited Advice*. **Evan Lobdell** (pictured top right), second year grad student and **Dr. Aimee Miller-Ott**, talked about their recent project, *Caregiving and Communication in the Family System about Alzheimer's Disease*.



On April 7, first year grad student, **Mary Katreeb** (pictured bottom left), discussed, *The Circle: Strategic Identity Construction in Mediated Reality TV*, and **Dr. Mary Beth Deline** (pictured bottom right) presented, "Information Avoidance in Environmental and Health Contexts and Implications for Communication Campaigns."

GSA Recap of the Year

The GSA Executive Board was busy this year with different social activities. They started the year with a pizza party. They also hosted a movie night and a holiday party and finished out the year with the Second Year Send-off BBQ in April (pictured right).

Thank you to President Jennifer Zheng, Treasurer Tyler Martin, Co-Event Chair and Secretary Isa Scaturro, Co-Event Chair Zach Thornhill, and First Year/At Large Representative Emily Deppermann for all of their work this year as we transitioned back to on-campus learning and in-person social activities!

The results for the new board are in! The 2022-23 GSA Executive Board members are: President: Benjamin Brew Sam-Paintsil; Treasurer: Kaylin Lane; Event Planning Chairs: Grace Telfer & Henrique Villela; and At-Large Member: Curren O'Connell.



Faculty, Student, and Alumni Achievements

Alumni Awards

The graduate faculty selected two of our outstanding alumni to receive awards.

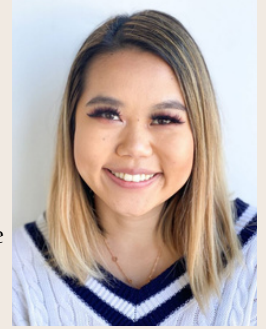
Dr. Jason Teven has received the 2021 Outstanding Graduate Alumni Achievement Award. This award is presented to alumni whose achievements in their field or vocation have received favorable statewide, national, or international recognition; who have received honors from associations or employers; or whose work has proven beneficial to a pronounced segment of society.

Dr. Teven graduated from our program in 1995, obtained a doctorate in Communication Education from West Virginia University, and now serves as a professor in the Department of Human Communication Studies at California State University, Fullerton, where he has worked since 2006. He is co-author of a leading interpersonal communication textbook, *Real Communication* (Bedford-St. Martin's Press), in its fifth edition and adopted by over 50 colleges and universities, and is a prominent scholar in the fields of instructional communication and persuasion. He is especially devoted to developing undergraduate and graduate students who have a desire to become college instructors or successful corporate trainers.

Dr. James Ndone has received the 2021 Outstanding New Graduate Alumni Award. This award recognizes significant accomplishment and leadership early in one's chosen professional or academic career. Originally from Kenya, Dr. Ndone graduated from our program in May 2017 and then obtained a doctoral degree from the Missouri School of Journalism in May 2021. He is a crisis communication teacher and researcher with an emphasis on experimental research designs. His research focuses on the role of emotions in a crisis. He has taught classes exploring the intersection of journalism and PR. Dr. Blaney referred to Dr. Ndone as "a young teacher-scholar destined for greatness."

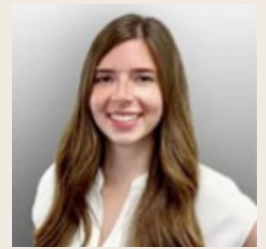
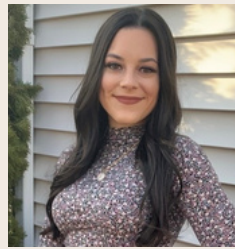
Graduate Student Recognition

Jennifer Zheng, second year graduate student, represented our program at the University 3 Minute Thesis competition this spring. She was required to present her thesis to a layperson audience in 3 minutes. Her thesis, directed by Dr. Joe Zompetti, is titled, "I'm Not a Virus: Asian Hate in Donald Trump's Rhetoric." Of the competition, she said, "It was a great opportunity to not just learn but also discuss the importance of my thesis about Asian Hate to those who may have been unfamiliar with the topic."



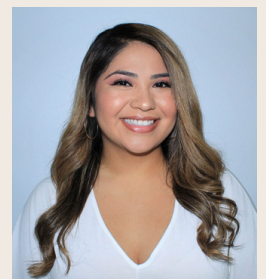
Jennifer was also selected by the COM graduate faculty for the Outstanding Graduate Student Award. This award goes to the student who faculty believe demonstrates excellence in teaching, research, and service. Jennifer is starting a doctoral program at the University of Washington in the fall.

Congratulations to first year graduate students Kaylin Lane (pictured below, left) and Hunter Thomas (pictured below, middle) on their publication in the journal *Communication Teacher*. Their article is titled, "Targeting an Audience - A Discussion of Relevant Variables and a Test of Priming" and is based on a teaching activity they created for their fall 2021 Persuasion seminar with Dr. Hunt.



Erianne Thedorf (pictured above, right), a second year COM master's student and GTA for the School of Communication, was awarded the Outstanding Graduate Student Teacher, Masters Level I (having sole responsibility for course instruction) Award at ISU. She was selected from a pool of nominated GTAs representing numerous departments across campus. Awardees are selected for their outstanding contributions to teaching.

Second year graduate student Jatzari Abonce (pictured right) was recently selected as the Outstanding Student Social Media Manager at the annual RedbirdProud Social Media Awards and Workshop for her role in managing the ISU Office of Admissions' social media channels as part of her graduate assistantship. One nominator wrote that Jatzari has "creativity, passion, and [a] collaborative spirit," and is the "type of student who you can hand over the reins to your accounts after very little onboarding."



Recent program graduate Maura Freeman (M.S., 2021) (pictured left) received the College of Arts and Sciences James L. Fisher Outstanding Thesis Award for her thesis titled, "Exceptional Paternal American Heroes Triumph Over Big Bad Terrorists (Again): The Storied Episodes Of Three Presidential Addresses Announcing The Elimination Of Another Middle Eastern Terrorist Threat." Dr. Joe Zompetti advised her thesis project. Maura is the current Plant Communications Coordinator at Rivian.

Did You Know?...

That Dr. Craig has a new podcast available on Apple and Spotify?



The podcast, titled *Tapis Talk*, is a project Dr. Craig has developed for the Office of the Assistant to the President for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at ISU under Dr. Doris Houston. As Dr. Craig explained about the title of the podcast, “tapis has several different meanings . . . Basically, it refers to a tapestry or richly decorated cloth, used as a hanging or a covering. For my purposes, however, it can also mean 'under consideration' or 'for discussion' and I wanted to play around with all three of these to suggest we are bringing together a rich tapestry that has the possibility of creating something new and beautiful that could bring about change.” The purpose of the podcast is to bring a number of different voices together from various areas

including the Assistant to the President for EDI, but also members of the community who are invested in doing this work on our campus, for instance Dr. Shannon Epplett, faculty advisor for TRIBE; Dr. Diane Zosky, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; Dr. Christa Platt, Director of the Multicultural Center; and Dr. Gavin Weiser who, along with Dr. Craig, is the co-President of the Queer Coalition. Dr. Craig hopes that these conversations “will enlighten our community about the potential EDI work can have, what is already being done on this campus, and how this effectively makes change for students, staff, and faculty on our campus.” Ultimately, Dr. Craig hopes that “we hear from a plethora of voices on this campus so that all of us are given an opportunity to voice our accomplishments, concerns, and hopes moving forward.”

That we have an informal group of students we refer to as GPAs?

For the past couple of years I have called upon a group of our current students that Dr. Chidester and I informally refer to as “Graduate Program Ambassadors” (GPAs). These students have met (in person and virtually) with prospective students to talk about the program. These GPAs don’t get compensated or often acknowledged other than through my “thank you” after a student leaves from their visit. They make a huge difference in our recruiting efforts. Among these students are **Jennifer Zheng, Benjamin Brew, Zach Thornhill, Grace Telfer, Evan Lobdell, Shelby Limbach, Tyler Martin, Samantha Schultz, Ja Tavia Stoot, Henrique Villela**, and many others.

When asked about these meetings with prospective students, Evan said, “Meeting with perspective students was a huge privilege! I was in their shoes just 2 years ago, so to be able to serve as a resource of information and encouragement was great.” Ben recalled, “Before I came to the US, I had met with other prospective students through Zoom, and it was such a wonderful experience. I felt welcomed and connected before I even made my journey to ISU. This experience is what I would like for our prospective students.” I often hear from prospective students that meeting with our current students is one of the highlights of their campus visits and Zoom chats. Thanks GPAs for all of your help in welcoming these students to ISU!

That we have an award winning, nationally recognized forensics team that our GTAs help coach?

Among some of the team's accomplishments this year were: their debaters placed at nearly every tournament throughout the season and qualified the entire team to the National Forensics Association National Tournament; they received invites to the inaugural Rising Stars Round Robin at WKU where the best debaters entering their second year from across the country competed; and they won the novice division of the Gorlok Gala hosted by Webster University.

This year, two of our second year students, Isa Scaturro (pictured right, above) and Zach Thornhill, (pictured right, below) have helped coach our amazing forensics program. Through his coaching experience at ISU, Zach said that he “learned a lot about being an empathetic person” and “became much more organized out of necessity.” Isa said that through coaching, she “learned how to love the activity again.” Both students also coached while completing their theses projects, about which Zach explained, “it all worked out in the end because our program is known as one of the best in the country and I am graduating on time.” Zach will be attending the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to pursue his PhD and coach with their debate team. Isa will be moving back to the greater St. Louis area and plans to find an adjunct teaching position in that area.



Some Changes to the Graduate Program

Welcome (Back) to the Grad Program, Elizabeth Chupp



This semester, we made some big changes to our registration and advising process. Alumni, remember the days of standing outside of Patty's door early in the morning with your paper override form? Those days are now behind us! Students have begun registering online for their classes without needing to get overrides first.

Now overseeing registration and academic advisement is Elizabeth Chupp, an alumna of both our undergrad (B.S., 2005) and graduate (M.S., 2009) programs, who is also currently the Director of Advisement for the School of Communication. Her work as Director includes undergraduate student advisement, enrollment management, curriculum development, course scheduling, and recruitment and retention efforts.

Starting this spring, she added Graduate Program Academic Advisor to her list of responsibilities in the School. She has been and will continue to work closely with COM grad students to assist them with academic planning and course registration. Her role is to help students track and understand their requirements for graduation, explore options to achieve their academic goals, and provide assistance during the course registration process each semester. Elizabeth said about the program, "I like the fact that it is flexible and allows students to customize their experience to meet their professional and personal goals."

How does Elizabeth feel about stepping into this new role? "I'm looking forward to getting to know the students, working collaboratively with faculty, and giving back to program! As an alum of the COM Master's Program, I have a great affinity for our program and the student experience. My experience in Graduate School was transformational and I owe much of my professional success to the mentors and experiences I had in the School of Communication. I'm excited to be a small part of the journey with these students!"

Invaluable Support for Our Program from Jason Taylor

Jason Taylor, Office Support Specialist in the main School office, has worked in the School for the past 20 years. He has a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from ISU. A lot of his work in the School relates to budgets and accounting. For example, he currently manages the books for Forensics and WZND radio. He also facilitates textbook orders, reports service and maintenance problems to Facilities Management, and undertakes the huge tasks every semester of preparing and distributing course evaluations and compiling results for instructors.



With Patty's retirement earlier this year, Jason began taking on more work with our graduate program. Jason has assisted with MANY questions that Patty would have normally answered and tasks that Patty would have overseen in addition to his other responsibilities. He just finished the important task of reviewing and processing grad students' travel vouchers from the CSCA conference.

Jason says that the collegial spirit, the teamwork, and the great leadership are some of what he likes most about working in the School of Communication. On a personal note, when he's not working hard for the School, he loves listening to country music (he has seen Reba McEntire 5 times in concert!), doing crossword and Sudoku puzzles, watching old Hitchcock and film noir movies, and reading mystery novels, biographies, and inspirational works.



Stepping into the Fall with Dr. Becky Hayes

We are grateful to Dr. Becky Hayes who has agreed to step into the role of Interim Graduate Program Coordinator for the fall 2022 semester while Dr. Miller-Ott is on sabbatical to focus on her research. Prior to joining academia, Dr. Hayes' worked in public relations and public affairs, providing an industry-perspective that she brings into the classroom, particularly in classes focused on campaigns and crisis communication. At the graduate level, she teaches these topics, along with social media uses and effects, which is the core of her research. She said that she is "looking forward to keeping the ship afloat while Dr. Miller-Ott is on sabbatical, and the chance to get to know more of the graduate students than I usually do."

If you are interested in making a gift to the graduate program or donating your time or resources, check out our website (<https://communication.illinoisstate.edu>) or reach out via email (Aimee Miller-Ott, Graduate Program Coordinator, aeott@ilstu.edu)