

COM GRAD NEWS



Newsletter for the Graduate Program in Communication
at Illinois State University

Coordinator's Corner

By Dr. Aimee Miller-Ott

What can I write about the 2020 Fall semester in the School of Communication graduate program? It was a challenging one, to say the least, one that required us to be flexible and creative, and sadly get used to not seeing each other around the halls of Fell. We got really comfortable using Zoom! We held so many Zoom meetings! But I'm happy to report that the grad faculty, students, and staff, as always, showed our resilience and found ways to continue to be awesome. We presented at virtual conferences, coached virtual forensics tournaments, taught virtual courses, held a Zoom 3-Minute Thesis Competition, defended thesis proposals and developed plans for 39-hour projects virtually, and held virtual recruitment and professional development events (can you see the virtual theme?!). The graduate faculty worked hard to make sure that our new students felt welcomed in spite of the lack of physical presence in Fell, and that our continuing students kept making progress toward program completion. I am in awe of the hard work that everyone put forth in making the most of this semester and keeping our graduate program connections! I also want to give a big thanks to the alumni who have remained committed to connecting with and inspiring our students this semester.

I want to give a special thanks to my graduate assistant this semester, Sarah Monsma, who has been working tirelessly to develop, implement, and lead important virtual events in our program, which you will read about in this issue. Her creativity, professionalism, attention to detail, and motivation has been inspiring this semester. So thank you, Sarah!

Remember to follow our Facebook page (Illinois State University Communication Graduate Program) to stay updated. Also check out the new section of our graduate program website called Program Spotlight. There you will find recent publications, graduate student projects, and our biannual newsletters.

I wish everyone Happy and Healthy Holidays and a Happy New Year!

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What We've Been Up To This Fall

Networking and Presenting Our Research



From November 19-22, the National Communication Association (NCA) held its annual conference in a virtual format. Participants either submitted videos of their presentations to be posted and shared or engaged in live sessions on Zoom. We were well-represented this year! Numerous grad faculty and the following students and recent alumni presented their work: Ana Belmonte, Amy Crumbaugh, Lisa DeWeert, Sara Engstrom, Alyssa Green, Alyssa Hernandez, Luis Jauregui, Jillian Joyce, Mallorie Latora, Vanessa Le, MJ Mason, Allie Metz, Anjali Patel, Tyler Pham, Gabby Thompson, Jacob Valov, & Jared Worwood.

Giving Back Beyond Our Community

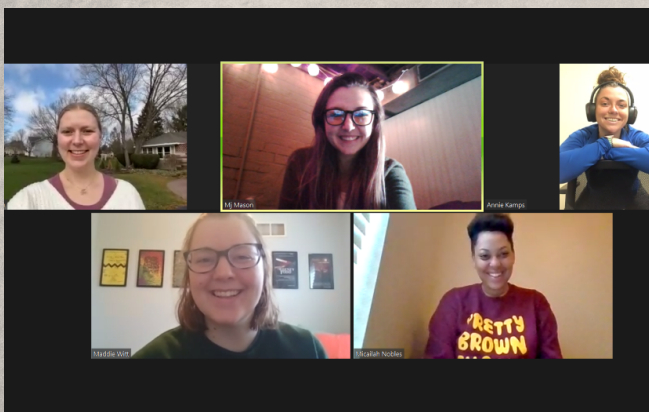
Grad students Amy Crumbaugh and Alyssa Green, under the guidance of Patty Franz, helped make our annual Operation Santa collection a success! Operation Santa collects donations from local businesses and community members (see photo to the right for just a fraction of what they collected!), and then sends the donations in stockings to troops overseas. As Amy explained, "The stockings are full of little items that hopefully remind them of home and give them a little sense of comfort." Amy and Alyssa set up donation boxes around town and sought donations from local businesses. Alyssa explained that, "At the end, we ended up collecting so much more than we could have ever imagined. I even had to go back to some collection sites after I picked up from them because people kept bringing more items past the deadline."



Collaborating to Study COVID-19

Dr. Mary Beth Deline and second-year graduate student MJ Mason have begun a project on information avoidance, COVID-19 and inequitable risk burdens for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities. In their study, they are gathering semi-structured qualitative interview and survey data from young adults in two states experiencing disproportionate risk burdens in these populations: Illinois and Arizona. When asked about the benefits of research collaborations with graduate students, Dr. Deline said, "I love mentoring students on research because I think one of the best things we can do is teach students how to ask questions and then go out and answer them. That's a powerful skill, whether it's applied at the civic level, or on the job during a career, or in the academy. Also, I always feel that I learn more from my students than they learn from me." We are looking forward to seeing the results of this study published in the future.

Keeping Students Connected Through the GSA



The Graduate Student Association found creative ways to stay engaged this fall. Regular virtual coffee dates and game nights allowed for students to connect and have fun. "Hosting weekly coffee dates is undeniably a weekly highlight for our GSA team," President MJ Mason said. "Our coffee dates always involve laughter and fun conversations." GSA hosted other events, including a BINGO night and card writing event, and coordinated pen pals pairing graduate students with one another. "We wanted to make sure that special events were prioritized, as they would be during any other non-COVID impacted semester," MJ said. These events allowed students to connect with one another outside of the virtual classroom and develop friendships.

"The Board wanted to regularly encourage students to stay engaged, seek out friends, and participate in conversations and interactions that aren't solely class-centric," MJ said. "We are looking forward to keeping up the good work and facilitating the implementation of some of these fantastic new ideas." GSA is planning on facilitating similar events in the spring semester.

GSA Board Members: President MJ Mason (top middle), Treasurer Micailah Nobles (bottom right), Events Coordinators Sara Engstrom (top left) & Maddie Witt (bottom left), First-Year Representative Annie Kamps (top right)

Student Achievements and Activities

GradBird Scholar



Second-year grad student Rocky Roque was selected as the GradBird Scholar in September 2020, a recognition by the Graduate School for his outstanding research. Rocky shares his thoughts about receiving this award.

What it felt like to be selected: I am incredibly honored and humbled to have been chosen to be the GradBird Scholar for September. Being chosen means that I am able to showcase research to the university. Additionally, my paper advocates for the Me Too movement. Incorporating advocacy with my research to support a movement that I care about is really important to me, and I want to make sure that my support can get to as many people as possible.

Being selected as a GradBird Scholar means that I am able to use a platform to advocate for underrepresented groups. I see a lot of research that addresses injustices that marginalized communities experience and I want to contribute to that too.

Your favorite part of the graduate program: I love my cohort and the professors. The School of Communication is a supportive community that will guide you and play with your strengths. I always feel safe around everyone, and everyone that I have met has contributed to my development as a future academic scholar.

To learn more about Rocky's research, you can reach him at rroquel@ilstu.edu.

Ensuring Success Workshops

This semester, we offered the Ensuring Success professional development virtual workshop series that connected current students with alumni and faculty to discuss transitioning into careers and advanced education.

In the first two sessions, panelists discussed careers in communication after earning a master's degree at ISU. Students learned about career development, interviewing skills, and networking.

Alumni speakers included:

- City of Bloomington Community Relations Manager **Nikita Richards** (pictured below left)
- Heartland Community College Director of Marketing **Tim Bill** (pictured below middle)
- Rush University Medical Center Manager, Faculty Recruitment **Rose Sprinkle**
- State Farm Communications Manager **Jennifer McDade** (pictured below right)



Dr. Joe Blaney and Dr. Becky Hayes also shared their experiences in their respective industries prior to entering academia.

In the third session, recent alumni and current doctoral students Divine Narkotey Aboagye and Ben Lynn shared their experiences in academia and provided advice for students intending to pursue doctoral degrees. Dr. Miller-Ott provided some insights from her own educational experiences.

Sara Engstrom, a second-year graduate student who attended these sessions explained, "As someone who is entering the job market, I am always looking for advice for starting networking conversations, interviewing, building and maintaining professional relationships, and how to best sell myself. These Ensuring Success events provided new connections that I could build upon individually if I would like."

Luis Jauregui, also a second-year graduate student attendee, said, "These workshops have made me think about the variety of options I can do with my degree outside of academia. Additionally, I have made some pretty great connections as a result of these workshops that I hope I can continue to maintain!"

We appreciate our alumni and the time they spend giving back to our current students. If you were a student in our program and want to chat about ways you can share your experiences and advice with our current students, please contact Aimee Miller-Ott at aeott@ilstu.edu.

Introducing the New(ish) Grad Faculty

Last year, we welcomed four new faculty members, Dr. Byron Craig, Dr. Ashley Hall, Dr. Roth Smith, and Dr. Andrew Ventimiglia, into the School of Communication. We are happy that they have recently started or will soon start to teach some of our graduate seminars and work with our outstanding students. Learn more about them below!

Dr. Byron Craig

Dr. Craig earned his Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Public Culture from Indiana University in 2013. His area of research is in race, trauma, rhetoric and media. He is specifically interested in the rhetoric of trauma and sites (such as The National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, and Africa Town in Mobile, Alabama) and how those sites reflect and navigate racial trauma in a contemporary public culture.

At the undergrad level, he teaches small group communication and race and visual rhetoric. He will teach Seminar in Rhetorical Theory in Fall 2021.

Something interesting about Dr. Craig: "I partially paid for graduate school performing in drag. Now I continue to study drag, specifically the history of drag in the African American community."



Dr. Ashley Hall

Dr. Hall earned her Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh in 2016. As a rhetorical scholar, her research focuses on Black women's communication and agentive power as it revolves around their bodily autonomy, gender expression, reproductive health and mothering. Her current research is developing an Afrafuturist feminist rhetorical approach to explore the potential and possibility of Black women's lives and futures beyond antiblackness.

Her undergraduate courses include African American Rhetoric, Rhetorical Criticism, Black Feminist Approaches to Communication, and Communication and Culture. She will teach Seminar in Rhetorical Theory in 2022.

An interesting piece of information about Dr. Hall: "I was recruited to play field hockey in college."



Dr. Roth Smith

Dr. Smith graduated from the University of Texas, Austin in 2019 with a Ph.D. in communication with an emphasis in organizational communication. His research investigates how communication facilitates or constrains organizing processes among loosely structured collectives that often lack the traditional trappings of formal organizing.

At the undergraduate level, he teaches Organizational Communication, Research Methods, and Leadership Communication courses. At the graduate level, he will be teaching Seminar in Organizational Communication in Fall 2021.

Something interesting about Dr. Smith: "I enjoy BMX bicycle dirt jumps as both a hobby and site of study."



Dr. Andrew Ventimiglia

Dr. Ventimiglia earned his Ph.D. in Cultural Studies from the University of California, Davis in 2015. He is a media studies scholar with a focus on issues around media distribution. His main area of research is on the history and cultural effects of intellectual property law and its role in shaping the circulation of media.

At the undergraduate level, he teaches Mass Media Law, Policy, and Ethics and Ethical Problems in Mass Media. This fall, he is teaching the graduate seminar, Foundations of Mediated Communication.

Something interesting about Dr. Ventimiglia: "I lived for three years in Brisbane, Australia as a researcher at a law school. I hope to someday build a study abroad program with University of Queensland to connect students here in Illinois with the wonderful scholars in media and communication in Australia."



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)