UNT Department of Communication Studies

Department Newsletter

Spring 2020

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From the Chair

From the Chair …

Uncertain. Stressful. Sad. Frustrating. Challenging. Unprecedented. Pick the adjective and we likely experienced it during the Spring 2020 semester in the Department of Communication Studies. Just as the world, the nation, and the state took on the challenge of responding to the COVID-19 virus threat, so too did the COMM department at UNT. In late January, UNT department chairs received an email making us aware of travel restrictions to China and that the university was closely monitoring the spread of the novel coronavirus. It all seemed so very far away and certainly not a threat to our way of doing business. For several weeks on campus, we heard nothing new or revelatory about the virus. However, in early March, news about COVID-19 began to take on a new, serious tone. With each passing week, the virus crept closer to the U.S. and information from university leaders revealed increasing concern. We closed for Spring Break and by the time that week had concluded, it had become clear that the semester would be irrevocably changed.

The university extended Spring Break by one week, but I assure you the faculty and staff were doing anything but "breaking." We put the full-court press on and converted all of our classes for online delivery. This was a significant undertaking; many of us, myself included, had never taught in a fully online format. Some of our classes require public speeches, performances, and presentations— experiences not exactly conducive to virtual contexts. Faculty were forced to adjust their assignments, their mode of delivery, and their communication to students within a very short time frame.

Everyone stepped up, learning new technologies and new ways of teaching and evaluating assignments. And, I received zero complaints! We were assisted by the university's Center for Learning Experimentation, Application, and Research (CLEAR), where a number of department alumni work. We also relied on each other, with those less experienced with this new format asking our veteran online teachers for assistance. I could not be prouder of our group of faculty, staff, and teaching assistants who pulled together to deliver outstanding curriculum, department advisors who took on the challenge of virtually guiding students, and our students who remained flexible and persisted in this new learning environment. This is a great place for me to add a big "thank you" to our part-time, or adjunct, faculty. They are already underpaid and over-worked and I can't thank them enough for going above and beyond to maintain their teaching excellence.

Not only did we survive the challenges of the Spring 2020 semester, we emerged stronger. More than ever, we are equipped to teach in new, innovative ways. We've updated some of our office processes, allowing us to be increasingly "green," and have new methods for meeting and collaborating. Don't get me wrong, we're certainly ready for things to get back to normal, whatever that means in our changed world. We look forward to seeing our students in class and resuming in-class learning, as well as the less obvious but significant learning that comes from conversations before and after class, in hallways, and on walks across campus. We look forward to re-establishing the "community" feel of our department. That sense of community is helping us persevere through this crisis and it will sustain us as we slowly but surely open our classroom doors.

As I type this, the university is making plans for a modified Fall 2020 semester, one which prioritizes safety while striving to provide students the education and extra-curricular opportunities they signed up for when they decided to attend UNT. It's a bit early to know all the details about what the campus will look like in late August, but know that the COMM faculty and staff will be planning and preparing to deliver a first-rate education in the safest way possible.

I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the outstanding leadership of Jennifer Cowley, UNT Provost, Tamara Brown, Executive Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS), and the wonderful associate deans and staff of CLASS for their guidance. They provided outstanding leadership during this stressful time.

The Spring 2020 semester was my last long semester as department chair; I'll finish my term August 31, 2020, and turn over the chair responsibility to the very capable Dr. Suzanne Enck. This was not how I had planned for my final semester to turn out. But if I had to respond to an international crisis that touched every level of society, including higher education, in my last few months as chair, there is no group I would rather have done that with than the faculty and staff of the Communication Studies department at the University of North Texas.

Hope you have a safe and wonderful summer,

Brian Richardson

Alumni Spotlight

Bethany Germany Excels at University of Pennsylvania

Bethany Germany (B.A. 2008, M.A., 2011) is the Associate Director of Regulatory Education at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. Bethany lives in Philadelphia with her husband and 2 elderly dogs and enjoys running through the city but only to her favorite donut spots.

Cotton Hensley Will Have His Stock Trading with a Side of Stand-Up Comedy

Cotton Hensley (B.A. 2015, M.A. 2017) is currently working at TDAmeritrade as a Trader Solutions Specialist. His job is teaching investors how to use technical trading platforms for stocks and commodities. I'm still performing comedy in Dallas at Four Day Weekend and Stomping Ground Comedy Theater, a nonprofit theater that uses improvisational comedy as a social tool for individuals suffering from anxiety and depression. Finally, I'm proud to say I recently leash-trained both of my cats (Rayon, age 5; Lace, age 8 months) to keep me company on hikes.

Deepa Pillai Assists Folks in Professional Development in Singapore

Deepa Pillai (MA, 2002) is a Professional Development Coach and Corporate Trainer based in Singapore. She has designed and delivered numerous corporate training workshops in the area of Business Communications and Presentation Skills in Singapore, Malaysia, India and Bhutan. She is also an Instructor at the National University of Singapore and an Associate Lecturer at University at Buffalo (Singapore campus). Deepa enjoys travel, tennis, and is currently finishing up her very first book.

Alumni Spotlight

Laura Oliver Conducts Important Cultural Work at LSU

Laura Oliver (B.A. 2012, M.A. 2014), premiered the original recording of her show, *Nappy Hairstories* at LSU in May! Laura is currently a PhD student at Louisiana State University, where she crafted this performance. Next school year Laura will transition to a more concentrated role as the graduate student representative for the New Diversity Council in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at LSU. The committee, directed by Dr. Lori Martin, will oversee anything diversity/justice/culture related at the university.

Laura Maninger Sees Great Success in Practicing Law

Laura Maninger (B.A., 2013) is an associate attorney with Carter Arnett PLLC in Dallas, Texas. Laura has experience in civil litigation in both state and federal court. Laura has represented plaintiffs and defendants in disputes involving securities litigation, breach of contract, breach of fiduciary duty, negligence, and more. Outside of work, she is a weekend artist and spends a lot of time at Lake Tawakoni catching monster catfish.

Rowdy Farmer to Begin PhD Studies at ASU Tempe

Rowdy Farmer (M.S., 2020) will be pursuing his PhD at the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University in Tempe. There, he will continue his studies in interpersonal communication. He will also be a teaching associate. He is proud to announce that he received full funding along with the teaching position.

Langley Chatman Oversees Portfolios for Large Mortgage Company

Langley Chatman (B.A., 2010) is a Portfolio Oversight Specialist with Nationstar Mortgage doing business as Mr. Cooper Group. She lives in Little Elm, Texas with her husband and daughter (age 3). Langley plans to enroll at UNT in the fall to pursue her M.B.A.

Alumni Spotlight

Seth Knievel to begin Master's Studies at Syracuse

Seth Knievel (B.A. 2019) who has worked for the department as the Black Box Manager and Administrative Specialist for the last year will begin his studies at Syracuse University in the Fall. There, he will pursue an M.A. in Communication and Rhetorical Studies. His interests include performance, rhetorical, and queer studies. He will also be a teaching assistant for the department which has offered him funding.

Kelly Wood Providing Important Volunteer Service in Texas

Kelly Wood (B.A. 2013) is running a COVID-19 hunger Relief Effort, feeding around 160 children in his local community where some students can no longer get food from their schools. Kelly has also become active in the Friends of Bethany community, where he and other amputees support the limb loss community.

Zane Dayton Pursues PhD at University of Kentucky

Zane, having recently completed his M.A. at UNT, was accepted into the PhD program at the University of Kentucky in the College of Communication and Information. There he will continue to study health communication as he did with the faculty members on his committee. He's excited to enjoy full funding and a teaching position.

Hailey Drescher Excels in Consulting on Legal Cases

Hailey Drescher (B.S., 2013) is a Litigation Consultant with Trask Consulting. She consults on a variety of civil and criminal cases in State and Federal courts across the country. She lives outside Lawrence, Kansas with husband Blake, son Bryce and dog Barkley.

Krystle Brom pursues PhD at UNT

Krystle Brom (MEd, 2013) is in the Curriculum and Instruction PhD program at UNT. Prior to pursuing her doctorate, she taught English in public Education for 6 years. Currently, she lives in Wichita Falls with her husband, Justin Brom.

A Note to All COMM Studies Alumni

We recently started a COMM Studies Alumni Network on LinkedIn. Consider joining the group for job postings, updates from the department, and other networking with your fellow Alumni. You are also always welcome to share updates with us by emailing us at COMMStudies@unt.edu

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Enck and Dr. Morrissey Speak on Women and Gender Studies' Panel

On February 26, Dr. Morrissey and Dr. Enck spoke at the inaugural Women's & Gender Studies Program panel, featuring how different disciplines approach the study of gender. Specifically, they talked about how their backgrounds in critical/culture rhetorical studies allows them to study how scholars develop intersectional understandings of belonging and resistance. Dr. Morrissey focused on a current article she's working on analyzing how Rachel Dolezal's claims to blackness circulate problematic expectations about race and gender. Dr. Enck discussed her current book project, analyzing the narratives of incarcerated women, to consider how collective narratives of trauma help to explicate how cycles of abuse intersect with cultural expectations regarding gender, race, and sexuality.

Dr. Mark Hlavacik Secures Tenure

In the spring semester of 2020, after almost six years with our department, Dr. Mark Hlavacik secured tenure as an associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies at UNT. This milestone reflects years of hard work and dedication to the craft. Not only has Dr. Hlavacik published in many reputable journals, such as *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* and *Communication Education*, but he has also published his own book, *Assigning Blame: The Rhetoric of Education Reform*. Please join us in congratulating Dr. Hlavacik for this important achievement!

Dr. Enck's Work Accepted at Rhetoric Society of America Conference and Looks Forward to Upcoming Book Publication

Dr. Enck would have been presenting "Narrating Vulnerability: Balancing Precarity and Hope in Carceral Spaces" at the conference in May in Portland. Unfortunately the conference was cancelled due to COVID-19. Dr. Enck's is continuing to work on completing her book project, *Storying Carceral Survival: Exploring Women's Pathways to Incarceration,* based on a series of life history interviews she conducted with incarcerated women in Dallas. She is also working on a project examining cultural understandings of sexual violence as illustrated in the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation hearings.

Faculty Spotlight

Erin O'Connor Joins the COMM Faculty Family

The Department of Communication Studies is elated to have Erin O'Connor joining us in the Fall semester as our newest faculty member. Erin will be teaching COMM 3010 and serving as the Director of Undergraduate Advising. When asked what excites her about the job, Erin said "I cannot wait to introduce students to the research I love, and I get a first-row seat to seeing what they get excited about, which is super inspiring." Even with so much up in the air right now regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, Erin is confident we can get through this together! Her office is going to be Jurassic Park and Golden Girls themed, so please stop by and welcome her in the Fall!

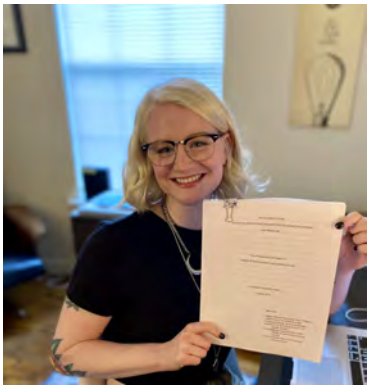
Brittany Hale Earns Adjunct Award for Teaching Excellence

Brittany Hale was recently awarded the university-wide "Adjunct Award for Teaching Excellence." Not only does Hale work extremely hard, but she pours so much love into each class she teaches. "Brittany is an invaluable member of our team who invests immense energy in our students' success. This award is only a small acknowledgment of the labor and love she devotes to our department and we are so proud to see her recognized in this way," said Dr. Megan Morrissey

Dr. Morrissey Presents Research at LMAS Plàticas Event

Dr. Morrissey partnered with the Latina/o and Mexican American Studies program to present some of her research. In LMAS Plàticas, Morrissey explored different art installations placed along the US/ Mexico border and the public discourse that followed. This is an introduction to a new materialist scholarship she refers to as *border studies*. Morrissey discusses two art installations in depth, specifically JR's pieces "Kikito" and "Giant Picnic". Both installations occur on or across the border wall, and receive international acclaim. Notably, Instagram is an important mode through which this art is mediated. This allows for Morrissey to study the comment sections as well, allowing an interesting lens into the public response and discourse.

Student Success



Leah Brooks-Hall's Work Accepted at RSA

In May, Leah Brooks-Hall would have been presenting her paper at RSA: Sexual Citizenship, 'Global Gay' Rhetoric, and the Lived Experience of Queer Muslim Women." Unfortunately, the conference was cancelled due to COVID-19

Kinny Torre Is Awarded Prestigious Fellowship

One of our incoming grad students for next year, Kinny Torre, has been awarded the prestigious CLASS Voertman-Ardoin Graduate Fellowship. This prestigious fellowship is awarded by the college to exceptional graduate students.

Kendal Lyssy Presents Research at Honor's Day at UNT

Kendal Lyssy (Senior, Communication Studies) would have be presenting her research project she complied for her Undergraduate Research Fellowship at UNT Honors Day. She would have presented her paper entitled "Peer to peer graduate student mentoring: Exploring the communicative behaviors of graduate students in peer mentoring groups."

Student Success

Michael Mairs Generates Thousands in Donations to St. Jude Children's

Michael Mairs (Junior, Communication Studies) recently hit a milestone in his fundraiser for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, generating $25,000 in donations. By tapping into his wide audience of video game enthusiasts, Michael has made a real impact in our community!

Kate Ellis Presents Research at UNT Honor's Day

Kate Ellis (Senior, Integrative Studies) defended her undergraduate Honor's Thesis entitled "Nonverbal presentation in a mediation session" which examined how individuals Personal Cultural Orientations to evaluate nonverbal behaviors in a mediation session. A poster of her project is available at the Scholars Day Online Gallery

Current students are encouraged to join us on Facebook for more updates and to share with us their success so that we can share them too!

Master's Recognition

Congratulations to our Spring 2020 graduating Master's Students

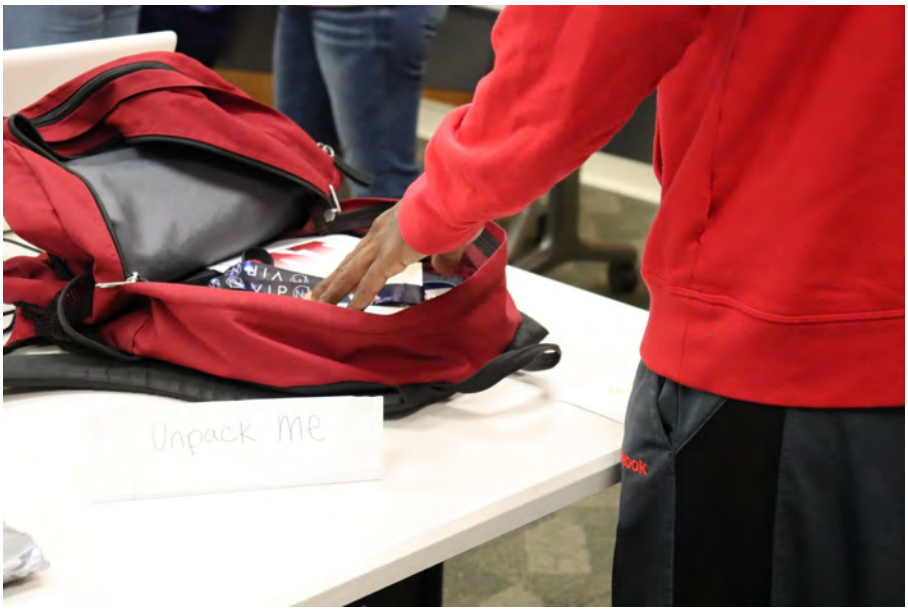
Events

Dr. West Joins Dr. Enck's Graduate Studies Course as Guest Speaker

Dr. Enck hosted Vanderbilts University's Dr. Isaac West in her graduate course on social movements where his book, *Transforming Citizenships: Transgender Articulations of the Law* was assigned to students. He discussed his book, his general outlook on coalition-building and activism, and discussed the challenges of conducting academic research in pandemic times. And since they were all in Zoom anyway, it felt like he was really in the room!

Dr. Anderson-Lain's Students Facilitate Cultural Identity Forum

Students in Dr. Anderson-Lain's Intercultural Communication course(COMM 3620), completed projects to showcase parts of their cultural identity. Students were encouraged to share important parts of their cultural identity such as race, religion, gender, ethnicity, and much more. Other students from the class and college as a whole were welcomed to come through the installation and engage with their peers about cultural differences.

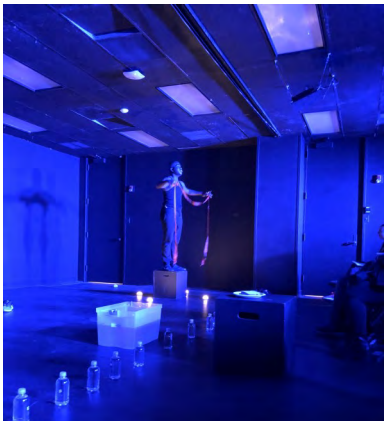


Sadly many of the other events we had planned for this semester had to be cancelled due to the university closures surrounding COVID-19.

Black Box

The Black Box witnessed an interesting semester. The two shows that went up before the coronavirus-related closures were both directed by undergraduate students. The third show that was slated for this season, a reiteration of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race*, was sadly cancelled. Additionally, the Black Box hosted its first *Pop* Up, a series of short runs which aren't as involved as regular shows. This included a night of Stand Up Comedy. We look forward to whatever the next season brings for the Black Box.

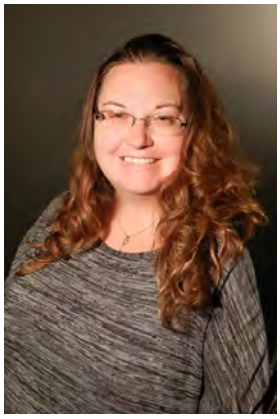
Mean Green, written and directed by Jaylee Calabrese, is about the criminalization of cannabis in the United States from the 1910s to present. This show highlights certain laws that were created regarding cannabis and how these laws affected people of color. Mean Green also explores the current stance on marijuana regarding stoner culture, current issues with legalization, and precaution on using marijuana.



And the Walls Came Tumbling Down, a compilation of Phillip Burton's poems and short stories, discusses topics surrounding the concept of hurting. Burton depicts the pain that ensues when an African American male is taught to push their emotions deep down and not show them. The texts in the show reveal a deep and long standing pain within the artist.

The Black Box hosted it's first *Pop Up* production. Juliana Cohen and Claire Methvin both performed original stand up comedy routines, selling out each night. Attended by faculty and students alike, everyone had a great laugh listening to the two students discuss and critique issues of class, race, religion, and gender in a responsible and engaging manner. We look forward to doing similar productions in the future!

Faculty Updates



Dr. Karen Anderson-Lain is finishing her 15th year at UNT. She continues to teach undergraduate courses in Interpersonal Communication and graduate Pedagogy. She is the current co-chair of the Committee on the Status of Women and was elected to the Faculty Senate beginning in fall 2020. She has continued her research on Pedagogy & Communication with two publications in 2020. She continues to work on research with her students and has current projects in process with alumnus Rowdy Farmer exploring civic engagement and pedagogy in the basic communication course and with alumnus Kendal Lyssy on a project examining peer mentoring of graduate teaching assistants.

Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed is now in his 8th year at UNT. He regularly teaches graduate Group Processes and Communication Theory and undergraduate Group Communication and Organizational Communication. Dr. Ahmed investigates task group effectiveness, evolution of organizations, inter-organizational collaboration, and human behavior and communication in virtual worlds. He has recently completed a 5-year long project on organizational collaboration funded by the NSF. Now he is writing a book based on the research findings. His other project "The Global Initiative to Enhance @scale and Distributed Computing and Analysis Technologies (GECAT)" is at the final stage. His latest publication "Stability of Membership and Persistence in Teams: Impacts on Performance" was published in *Group Dynamics*, an APA journal.

Dr. Justin Trudeau is now in his second decade of service at UNT. His primary pedagogical responsibilities include teaching graduate courses in Performative Writing, Performance Methods, and Adaptation and Staging. He regularly contributes to the undergraduate curriculum by means of his classes in Performance Theory, Performance Composition, Adaptation and Staging, and Performance Art. Dr. Trudeau continues to publish in the areas of performative writing and performance praxis in a variety of venues and he has regularly contributed to the Black Box Theatre by means of his creative research based productions. He has recently been named as the At-Large Associate Senator to the Faculty Senate.

Dr. Jay Allison is looking forward to his retirement at the end of this calendar year. In his last semester on faculty, he will be teaching his two favorite courses—Intertextuality and Performance and Performing Southern Culture. Looking to the past, he is grateful to all the students he has had the privilege of teaching and learning from over his 30+ year career at UNT. They are the source of many fond memories. In retirement, he looks forward to new adventures, in particular traveling with husband, Carl, (once that possibility becomes available again).

Faculty Updates

Having completed her first decade at UNT, Dr. Suzanne Enck continues to teach a range of courses emphasizing the importance of civic engagement, encouraging students to explore how we come to understand issues of gender, race, sexuality, and class. In the fall of 2020, Dr. Enck will transition out of the role of Director of Graduate Studies and begin serving as the department chair for Communication Studies — excited (and a bit trepidatious) to help steer the department through the murky waters of higher education amidst a global pandemic. Dr. Enck will also teach the graduate-level Feminist Criticism class in the fall and continue to serve on the Executive Committee for UNT's Women's & Gender Studies Program and the elected leadership team for the National Communication Association's (NCA) Feminist & Gender Studies Division.

Dr. Joe McGlynn enjoys the challenge of balancing mutual goals of outstanding research, teaching, and service for the Department of Communication Studies. This past year he taught classes in Interpersonal Communication, Health Communication, and Theories of Persuasion, a course that seeks to blend traditional academic theory with practical modern wisdom. In addition, Dr. McGlynn received recognition for his research efforts with recent publications in journals such as *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* and *Communication Research Reports*. His latest line of research focuses on the health risks associated with concussions and head injuries in youth sports. Dr. McGlynn also serves as the Faculty Sponsor for Lambda Pi Eta, the Communication Studies Honors Society, a student-led organization that makes efforts to promote academic and philanthropic excellence in our local community. As for hobbies, Dr. McGlynn enjoys watching and playing sports, yoga, meditation, and learning more about botany and the science of plants.

Dr. Brian Richardson is wrapping us his term as department chair and will return to a full-time faculty role in the Fall. He looks forward to continuing the COMM Alumni Mentoring Program (CAMP) as soon as everyone can meet in person. Dr. Richardson is currently developing a *Theories of Crisis Communication* course, which will be offered for the first time this Fall. With regard to research, Dr. Richardson authored a book chapter set to appear this year in the book, *Whistleblowing, Communication and Consequences: Lessons from The Norwegian National Lottery* (Publisher: Routledge). He also just published a research article about parent's decision making about youth tackle football in the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* with co-authors Dr. Joe McGlynn and former graduate student Rebecca Boneau.