



College of Letters & Science
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



VilasVoice

Winter 2023-24 | For Alumni and Friends of the Department of Communication Arts

Globetrotting undergraduates

Three students using travel
to make lasting impacts.

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VilasVoice

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Chair's Voice

Building the Future of Communication Arts



To say it has been a busy year for Communication Arts would be an understatement. At the same time as we began a routine 10-year retrospective review of our undergraduate and graduate program, we launched into the creation of a new strategic plan to set a course for our future. Our faculty, staff, and students have been thinking hard about our strengths and our opportunities for growth, leading to many fascinating conversations about the value of a Communication Arts degree and the community of support that comes with it.

This process has depended significantly on the input of our alumni and friends network, too. Many Vilas Voice readers may recall hearing from our Communication Arts Partners board of visitors over the past year asking for feedback about your experiences in the program and your ideas for how we might build on our past successes. I'd like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who shared their time and their ideas with us—it was essential to

help us understand the Communication Arts community as it exists now and as we want it to become going forward. We envision a future in which we can draw on our department's communication expertise to build even stronger connections between us all.

Most immediately, we look forward to sharing a new, finalized strategic plan with you in the weeks ahead, and hope that you will see in that vision some new opportunities to contribute to the Communication Arts mission. Our students continue to look to those who came before them for guidance and support, meaning that our exciting future will depend on that link between the Communication Arts of the present and of the past. Thank you for helping us to build an even stronger department and community.

Sincerely,
Derek Johnson
Professor and Department Chair

Investing in Tomorrow's Communication Research Leaders



Thanks to the generosity of our alumni and donor network, the Department of Communication Arts is delighted to introduce new funding opportunities for graduate students. These efforts will ensure that we continue to recruit the best communication students while supporting their research needs, helping them making an impact in the field, and recognizing their contributions in our classrooms.

Each year, we offer a \$5,000 grant – the Vance and Betty Kepley Dissertation Award – to one or two distinguished dissertators who propose to use the funds in a transformative manner to conduct research on their project. According to Professor Jeremy Morris, director of graduate studies, this is the department's "most prestigious and valuable research award." The Kepleys have been lifelong supporters of our graduate students--Vance as part of the faculty (now emeritus) and Betty as an equally ardent advocate for the program. By creating this award, they extended that record of support to future generations of students. Additionally, students can apply for up to \$3,000 per year to cover research expenses through the Marilyn R. Baxter Research Awards. All students who pass their dissertation proposal defense within a year of their preliminary exams are eligible for the Elliott Dissertation Scholarship, to cover \$2,000 in early dissertation costs. These awards all provide finan-



Above: Introducing 22 new graduate students to Communication Arts—a promising addition to our academic family. Top right: Vance and Betty Kepley

cial support for innovative research projects.

This fall, all students received \$1,000 "start-up" awards to help cover initial expenses like segregated fees and first-month rent, ensuring a solid start to the semester. A new gift from the Marilyn R. Baxter Trust made this possible.

Thanks to the reorganization and expansion of our McCarty Award program, all graduate students can now access up to \$1,000 per year to attend conferences, present their research, and network with professionals in their field. This support is essential for our students, but still does not often cover the entire costs of conference attendance. The Department looks forward to providing more support in this area in the future.

We recognize the excellent graduate student teaching that takes place in

Communication Arts through a series of departmental awards. Each year, we award one of the highest-value teaching awards on campus through the Vance and Betty Kepley Teaching Award (\$2,000), and we recognize achievements in teaching media production through the Robert J. Wickhem Award (\$1,000). We also make multiple awards (valued between \$250 and \$1,000) that are distributed to over two dozen students each year for excellence in teaching and departmental contributions.

These initiatives are just the start of a multi-year transformation of graduate funding to better recruit, retain, and celebrate talented graduates who follow in the footsteps of our generous alumni. As our students forge their own unique paths forward, we are always looking for new partners who can help us support them on their journey.

Student Achievements



Kamika Patel



Alex Page



Elizabeth Kallies

Undergraduates Taking Communication Arts Around the Globe

Meet Kamika Patel, Alex Page and Elizabeth Kallies. What do these three undergraduate Communication Arts students have in common? Their studies have all taken them around the world to put their communication skills to the test!

Kamika Patel, a Communication Arts (and International Studies) major, has pursued her passion for communication worldwide. She has held various communications roles with local organizations including Nehemiah, Wisconsin Humanities, and Open Doors for Refugees, where she has worked on projects to promote cross-cultural dialogue. Kamika's interest in global exploration led her to an internship with Go Tico!, a Costa Rican-based travel organization, which started her passion for international communication. In 2022, she studied in Buenos Aires, Argentina with Global Gateway, followed by a semester at Lund University in Lund, Sweden in 2023. She also spent a summer in Oslo, Norway through the Brittingham Viking Scholarship program. In each

of these locations, she sought to work with INGOS or grassroots organizations, taking on communications roles to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and foster a deeper understanding of global issues. Kamika's experiences have nurtured her interest in becoming a global citizen and developing a multicultural perspective.

Alex Page is a senior Communication Arts major who combines his interests of filmmaking, travel and entrepreneurship. Page, within the top 3% of frequent drone pilots worldwide, lives by the motto "get out there and start creating." This belief has taken him across the United States and world, going as far as Bolivia to collaborate on projects, spanning multiple industries and disciplines as well. Page's approach to creativity reflects his adventurous spirit: "Don't wait for someone to tell you to start creating. Start the project yourself and invite people along. I've met so many amazing, talented people that way, in fields I never imagined working with before."

Elizabeth Kallies is a senior Com-

munication Arts major who is passionate about film, entertainment and travel. Kallies's passion for storytelling has roots in her early years when she assisted her father with photography, making her the family historian. Her academic career has taken her from Madison to London and then to Barcelona, where Kallies immersed herself in a new culture and language, while taking classes at four different universities. During this time she served as a project director for a sitcom assignment in the class "Punchline to Laughtrack," where she honed critical and creative thinking skills within a team. Her mission is clear: "If you're passionate about using creativity to make a positive impact on society, the Communication Arts Department is the ideal place to do just that."

These three students are only a few of the many Communication Arts students making a global impact. As others follow in their footsteps, the perspective and skills learned in Communication Arts will continue to change the world.



Marie-Louise Mares



Anthony Chen

LGBTQ Youth Empowerment: Harnessing Entertainment Media for Parental Support

Parental support is vital for the well-being of LGBTQ teens. However, it often takes time for parents to fully grasp this reality. Recent research in Communication Arts reveals the potential impact of entertainment media to bridge this gap.

Communication Arts professor Marie-Louise Mares and her collaborators are researching how entertainment media can cultivate more supportive attitudes among parents of LGBTQ youth. Working with Professor Brad Bond (University of San Diego) and Dr. Anthony Chen '23 (University of California, Irvine), her latest study provides new insight into the power of entertainment communication, thanks to a grant from the Institute for Diversity Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“A teen who is wondering whether to come out to their parents and sees them change the channel or pull a face if a gay character is on-screen gets the point about their parent’s views,”

Mares says. “On the other hand, teens and parents both report that shared media moments – like watching TV shows, TikToks, or even browsing websites can open up conversations where they can ask questions and get answers. Those moments matter.”

Chen, a recent Communication Arts PhD, used similar tactics with media to build a connection with his parents.

“In China growing up, there were few LGBTQ media representations. During my own journey of understanding my identity, I made an effort to introduce my mother to positive portrayals of the LGBTQ community in the United States with shows such as *Modern Family* and *The Ellen Show*. These programs helped her understand a more inclusive perspective and improved her understanding of both the LGBTQ community and myself,” Chen said.

The design of an online survey is currently underway, made possible by

grant funding. Mares, Chen, and Bond aim to survey a diverse group of parents. With increasing challenges faced by LGBTQ kids, particularly transgender and nonbinary youth, across the United States and the globe, understanding and promoting parental and community support are more critical than ever.

“It is my hope and belief that our research will uncover insights that can lead to more inclusive, empathetic, and supportive environments for these young individuals and their loved ones,” Chen said. “I am excited to embark on this journey with my collaborators and discover the stories that have true, meaningful potentials.”

Mares hopes these research findings help the media industries grasp the need for diverse narratives and how parents might react to them. She also hopes this research can be used by other organizations to advise parents how to initiate conversations with their children through media.



Left: Sara McKinnon; Right: The UNICEF shop provides migrants free water purification tablets and water containers to stay safe.

Making Migration Safer with Real-Time Insights

10,000 migrants crossed the Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama in 2020. By 2022, the number soared to 250,000, with 2023 estimates surpassing 400,000, presenting heightened risks for migrants.

Led by Dr. Sara McKinnon, a Communication Arts professor, the Migration in the Americas Project is addressing these challenges, providing real-time insights from field research for informed migration decisions.

“Rather than waiting for research articles to be published, we offer real-time policy analysis, field reports, webinars and stories,” McKinnon said.

The project provides direct support to migrants through webinars for humanitarian groups, legal clinics

working with migrants and on-site legal consultations offered by UW Law students in the Immigrant Justice Clinic. It also conducts policy analysis and shares migration stories.

The project follows a community-based framework, establishing connections with Colombian universities and NGOs such as Heartland Alliance International and HIAS. The team has already conducted three two-week research trips in 2023 and is planning future field trips.

The team puts good communication skills into practice by “listening to humanitarian groups and legal service providers, creating programs addressing their needs,” McKinnon notes. “Research assesses the reach and utility of the legal information

support we provide and looks for ways to replicate the model elsewhere.”

Immigration is organized as a national system yet is inherently a transnational experience. The project’s primary challenge is to grasp the transnational dimension of immigration and strengthen the infrastructure for legal information and support to help people.

As the project expands, McKinnon hopes to collaborate with researchers and immigration law practitioners in countries like Canada and Spain, to expand the transnational infrastructure of information available to understand immigration pathways around the world. For real-time updates, follow them on Instagram @migrationamericans and LinkedIn.

Fall 2023 Dean's Message

ERIC SUIT



This year, UW–Madison celebrates 175 years as one of the world's premier public universities. Since its founding in 1848, UW's traditions of teaching excellence, academic discovery and public service have set the standard for institutes of higher education throughout the world. And since its own founding in 1889, the College of Letters & Science has advanced the university's commitment that innovations developed here will impact the world.

How will L&S lead for the next 175 years? By focusing on the core values that define our liberal arts mission: honing our creative talents, developing the intellectual courage to ask tough questions about the world around us, and building the connections between disciplines, people and ideas that drive tomorrow's innovations.

Our breadth is our greatest strength, from the disciplines we teach to the students who learn and thrive in our classrooms. That diversity – of thought, skills, backgrounds and lived experiences – is what makes L&S such an extraordinary place. It is why our faculty, students, staff and alumni continue to be recognized on campus and around the globe for their teaching, research and service. And it is why Letters & Science will continue to remain an academic leader and the heart of this great university.

Join me this year in celebrating this incredible milestone, and thank you for supporting us as we help lay the foundation of excellence for UW–Madison's next 175.

On, Wisconsin!

Eric Wilcots, Dean

Mary C. Jacoby Professor of Astronomy
UW–Madison College of Letters & Science

Jason Kido Lopez “Redefines Sports Media” in Latest Book



Jason Kido Lopez, an assistant professor in Communication Arts, offers a fresh perspective on sports media in his new book *Redefining Sports Media* (Routledge, 2023).

Lopez's book dives into the deep landscape of sports media, encompassing game broadcasts, commercials, websites, social media, fantasy sports, documentaries, and more. What makes this work particularly intriguing is Lopez's approach – he surveys existing sports media literature and reorganizes it in a new theoretical framework.

“Thinking of sports as an entertainment genre with particular associations and expectations gives common ground and larger context for understanding sports media,” Lopez said.

Sports were a large part of Lopez's family growing up. When he started teaching a course on ethics and entertainment media, he found the most interesting topics to be focused on sports.

“As I taught and researched more,” Lopez said, “I thought there might be something interesting to say about the distinctiveness of sports in media industries, media texts, and fan engagement.”

Lopez regularly teaches a class on sports media, and his favorite part is getting students to think critically about sports media. As many of the students are Communication Arts majors or earning the sports communication certificate, most are excited to explore this topic.

This was Lopez's first book on sports and media. He is currently working on another book that delves into the domain of sports media and gambling, with a focus on sports betting.

Recent Faculty Books



Lori Kido Lopez
Race and Digital Media



Jenell Johnson
Every Living Thing: The Politics of Life in Common



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The Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research recently received its largest ever federal grant to digitize, preserve and share video archives of artist Wendy Clarke, pictured here during her visit to campus.

