



# VilasVoice

Winter 2024-25 | For Alumni and Friends of the Department of Communication Arts

## Remembering David Bordwell

How the film community is carrying on his legacy.  
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# VilasVoice

is the alumni newsletter of the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, 821 University Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin 53706.

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Front page banner photos: iStock Photo

Front page featured Ph.D. candidates: Top row - Minh Bui (left) and David Martinez (right). Bottom row - Anya Williams (left) and Nimish Sarin (right).

## Chair's Voice

### Hitting Our Stride



Endurance athletes impress us with their ability to dig in and make steady progress toward daunting goals. In Communication Arts, I am proud to work with an amazing community of students, faculty, and staff who have been equally relentless in pursuing a shared vision. The aims we've set for ourselves are significant, but in the past year we have hit our stride and found a momentum that I am certain will carry us to the finish line.

To modernize our curriculum and better prepare students for future success, we have welcomed new instructors to Communication Arts who are focused on areas including AI as well as media production. We also plan to add new tenure-track faculty to our program starting in Fall 2025 to help better train and mentor the communication leaders of tomorrow.

We are also on pace to strengthen the bonds of community within Communication Arts. Thanks to resources from the College of Letters & Science and SuccessWorks, we're building a team to improve communication and engagement among the department, its students, and our amazing alumni. Our new Distinguished Alumni Awards have helped us identify strong role models for our students, and we plan to expand that program this year by recognizing the achievements of

early-career alumni who are using their Communication Arts degrees to make a difference in the world.

No marathoner succeeds without course support, of course. In addition to the energizing engagement of our alumni and friends on Day of the Badger, new endowments like the Hirsch Family Lecture Series in Television and Film empower us to build new conversations between our students and media industry professionals. Our next priority is to increase the number of scholarships we can offer to better ensure that all students have access to the community and modernized, world-class communication education we provide.

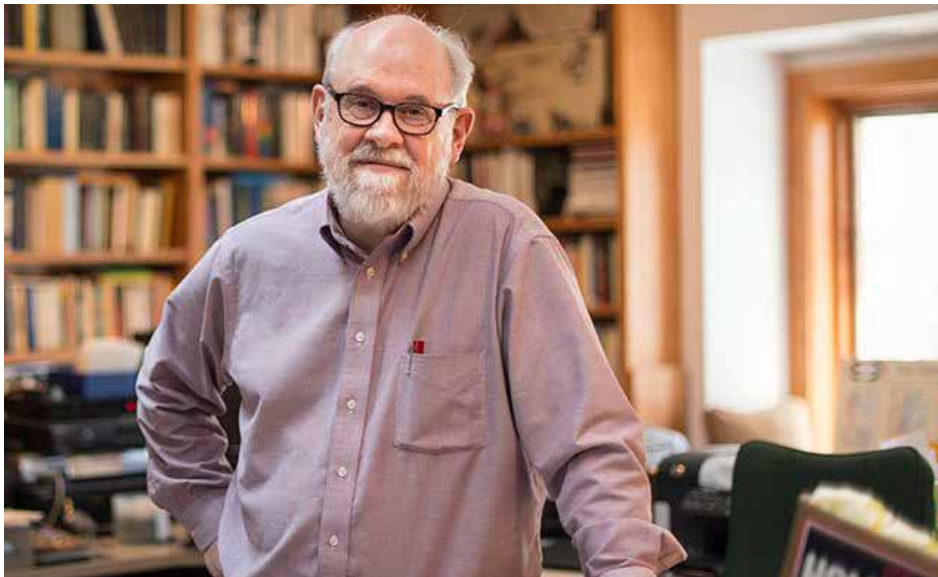
All these things are possible because we have your support. Thank you for not just cheering from the sidelines, but also jumping onto the course to take these strides along with us.

Sincerely,

Derek Johnson  
Department Chair  
Communication Arts Partners Professor

## Saving a Seat in the Front Row for David Bordwell

TINA PATLA-BERARD



David Bordwell, the Jacques Ledoux Professor Emeritus of Film Studies at UW-Madison

Earlier in 2024, the film community lost one of its most influential figures. David Bordwell, the Jacques Ledoux Professor Emeritus of Film Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, passed away on February 29, 2024, at the age of 76 after a lengthy illness. In the months since, Communication Arts faculty and alumni have shared their fondest memories of Bordwell and reflected on the momentous number of lessons they still carry with them today.

Bordwell published more than 20 influential books throughout his career, many of which were co-authored with Kristin Thompson, his partner and Honorary Associate Fellow in Communication Arts. “*Film Art: An Introduction* and *Film History: An Introduction*, continue to be revised and updated decades after their initial publications. For more advanced students, his extensive writings are models of how research and publication should be done,” Thompson said.

Bordwell’s research was extraordinarily vast and encompassed topics such as Hong Kong cinema, precise analyses of individual films, the craft practices and stylistic norms of classical Hollywood cinema, and the work of individual directors, including Ozu, Feuilade, Mizoguchi, among many others.

Vance Kepley, Professor Emeritus of Film Studies, who was a student of Bordwell and later became chair of the Communication Arts department, pointed to both the sophistication and accessibility of Bordwell’s writings. “His elegant prose style broadened his audience and made his ideas accessible. He wrote with clarity, precision, and generous doses of humor. Specialists and nonspecialists, academics and film buffs, could all enjoy reading his work,” Kepley said.

These works have likely done more to shape film studies than contributions from any other scholar. The techniques he presented for understanding film history and aesthetics have defined film studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and will continue to be central to programs across the globe.

Bordwell was critical to the growth of the film studies program in Communication Arts during his early professional years, arriving at a time in the 1970s when scholarly attention to cinema was relatively new and infrequent. Many of his students have become major figures in film studies, and some have dedicated decades to the discipline as faculty in Communication Arts, passing down lessons they learned over the years of working with him.

Jeff Smith, Professor of Film in Communication Arts and former Bordwell student, still has binders overflowing with 35mm film strips that Bordwell captured to present as slideshows in his lectures. “David was a big believer in the value of showing real images to illustrate the concepts that he was talking about,” Smith said.

Kelley Conway, another Professor of Film in Communication Arts, watched how Bordwell mentored graduate students over the years and continually aims to embody his successful approach. She said, “he had very high expectations for students, and yet, he was generous and wanted to help them become the best scholars they could be.”

After retiring in 2004, David Bordwell returned frequently to the Communication Arts curriculum. Zachary Zahos, a 2024 Ph.D. graduate who took Bordwell’s last seminar on poetics in 2020, still refers to his notes from the seminar and treasures the knowledge gained from the late scholar. Zahos joined the program largely because of David Bordwell’s legacy. “The name recognition alone opens doors to initiate conversations with people in the field. To say that you worked under him is an incredible honor,” he said.

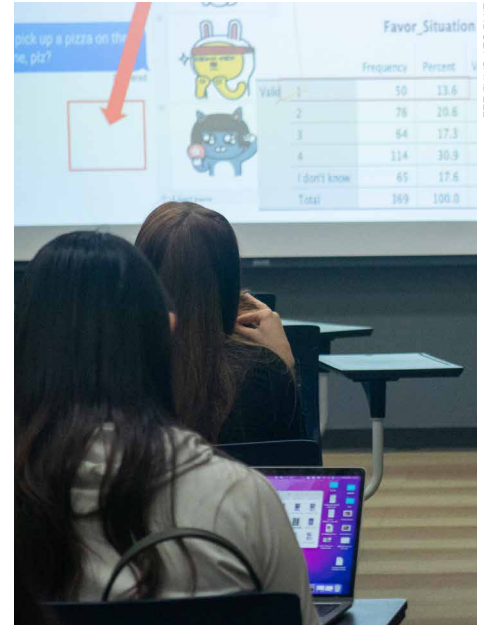
One of the many things that made Bordwell so special was his ability to inspire people to explore their own research paths. “Through his teaching and writing, he didn’t simply inspire film scholars to mimic him by writing, say, a second book on Ozu or on classical Hollywood style and narrative. Students took inspiration from him and his approach to writing film history to pose their own research questions and cultivate fresh areas of inquiry,” said Conway.

The generations of students who took a course with Bordwell have gone on to impact both higher education and the media industry. His legacy is carried with each Communication Arts alumnus who continues to use the tools he provided to transform film studies. Bordwell will shape the way we experience film for generations to come.

## Communication in the Age of AI



Juhyung Sun teaching new course, “Communication in the Age of AI”



LINDSEY CARDELL

Students engaging in Sun’s course materials

In the age of artificial intelligence (AI), students, educators, and researchers are eager to learn, assist, and understand the societal implications of quickly developing technologies. Communication Arts has been taking an interdisciplinary approach to AI to include perspectives from both the social sciences and humanities. In recent semesters, some faculty have started involving AI in classroom assignments and discussions, and researchers have begun studying the various effects of AI in lab experiments.

In Fall 2024, Communication Arts introduced a new “Communication in the Age of AI” course for undergraduate students that explores the rapidly evolving scope of AI and its role in different communication contexts. Students are discovering how AI is currently used in industries like education and healthcare while also critiquing the ethical concerns that have emerged as these platforms gain popularity.

Students engage in discussion each week to understand the impacts of AI technologies in multifaceted ways. Visiting Assistant Professor Juhyung Sun asks students to consider questions like “could this AI replace

a teacher” or “who is responsible when AI makes some kind of mistake?”

Students also partake in a “Conversations with AI” group project. “I ask them to compare two different AI tools, one based on voice AI, like Siri, and one text-based tool, like ChatGPT or Replika,” Sun said.

Having students more consciously interact with AI tools allows them to think more critically about the ways these technologies work and how they can both help and hinder different populations and industries.

In addition to this new course, the Communication Science area of the department is completing multiple studies revolving around AI. Professor Catalina Toma and her colleagues are working to understand how people feel toward chatbots depending on the input of positive or negative messaging or the effects of algorithmic feedback on online dater’s self-perceptions.

Jeremy Morris, a Professor of Media and Cultural Studies in Communication Arts, is also exploring ways to involve AI in the classroom. In his course, “Critical Internet

Studies,” Morris’s goal is to introduce students to the technology they will interact with in their daily lives.

“The semester after ChatGPT became popular, I figured out a way to include it in my big project for the internet class. Students use ChatGPT to create a song about one of the course topics, and then they critique what the output is,” Morris said.

As part of an AI research workgroup on campus, Morris also highlighted the approach that humanities scholarship is taking when it comes to understanding AI. “The Humanities perspective is trying to focus us back on issues of power, issues of appropriation, issues of how these new technologies impact marginalized communities.”

Educators and researchers are watching how society will continue to change in response to new AI tools. While AI is not a new technology, its prevalence in society is on the rise, and the Communication Arts department is continuing to find ways to best prepare students for the future.



# The Ticket to Graduate Research Success

Traveling to collect research is often an essential part of graduate students' dissertations. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, Communication Arts awards many students with funding that makes research travel more accessible and allows them to choose a topic that would otherwise be limited by the archival resources in Madison alone. The Vance and Betty Kepley Dissertation Award is the department's most prestigious award, and the three most recent recipients have utilized the funds to visit facilities and archives that were essential to the progression of their work.

Alicen Rushevics is a fifth-year Rhetoric, Politics, and Culture Ph.D. candidate who is researching the rhetoric of reparation legislation between Indigenous communities in the Pacific and the U.S. government. Thanks to the Kepley Dissertation Award, Rushevics has gone on three research trips to further her work.

Rushevics's first dissertation case looks at the internment of Unanga̅ residents of the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands off the coast of Alaska by the U.S. government during WWII. Rushevics traveled to the National Archives in Maryland to listen to Unanga̅ witness testimonies for the congressional committee hearings in the 1980s. She also traveled to the Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, CA to view his reactions and oppositions to reparations for the Unanga̅ while he was president.

Rushevics's next case looks at the Hawaiian Apology Resolution in 1993, for which she traveled to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Congressional Archives in Honolulu, HI. Here, she reviewed documents related to the U.S. congressional apology to native Hawaiians.

The third chapter Rushevics is working on will focus on the Compacts of Free Association agreements which establish the governing relationship between the U.S. and three of the Pacific Island sovereign states. Rushevics plans to return to Honolulu by the end of 2024 to parse through these agreements and complete her dissertation research.

John Bennett, a Film Ph.D. candidate, was inspired by *The Battle of Algiers* for his dissertation research and is now focusing on the Algerian film industry's global dimensions. After receiving funding from the Kepley Dissertation Award, Bennett traveled to the Algerian Cultural Centre and the Defense Ministries in Paris, France, as well as the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Turin, Italy.

While at the Defense Ministries, Bennett looked through French military intelligence concerned with Algerian documentaries that were circulating internationally while the country was at war. These materials were recently declassified in 2020, and Bennett was excited to look through and include these pieces in his research.

Traveling internationally was imperative and opened doors for Bennett to search through documents that cannot be found in the U.S. After a first research trip to France, he received a second grant from the French government and was invited to present at a research laboratory there.

Allyson Gross, a Rhetoric, Politics and Culture Ph.D. candidate and Dana-Allen Dissertation Fellow, is focusing her dissertation on time capsules, cryonics, nuclear waste, and how certain ideas and ideologies might influence audiences of the future.

After receiving a Kepley award, Gross traveled to the Detre Library & Archives at the Heinz History Center in Pittsburg, PA. While there, she searched through correspondence for the Westinghouse World's Fair time capsules to understand the debates about which artifacts would and would not be included.

On the way to Pittsburg, Gross also stopped in Clinton Township, MI to visit the Cryonics Institute, which was founded shortly after the process was theorized in the 1960s. Gross toured the facility where they keep numerous patients and talked with workers at the facility to further understand the process.

Awards like the Kepley give students the opportunity to visit facilities and archives around the world. This helps them craft stronger arguments and gives them the best chance of completing dissertations that will make a major impact in the field.



Alicen Rushevics



John Bennett



Allyson Gross

# Lab Modernizations Expand Opportunities for Faculty and Student Researchers



Catalina Toma (left) next to two undergraduate research assistants during a lab meeting



LINSEY CARDELL



New cameras (top) and microphones (bottom)

Few things are more essential to communication scientists in Communication Arts than a physical lab space to conduct live experiments, collect data, and advance their research.

To meet that essential need, Vilas's fourth-floor lab spaces used by faculty and students in Communication Arts have recently undergone significant upgrades thanks to funds from an Instructional Laboratory Modernization (ILM) grant that the department received in early 2024.

Catalina Toma, Professor of Communication Science, notes the importance of having updated and versatile technology in these spaces. "Our faculty are working on very different creative study methodologies and those all have different needs. It's very important to have flexible spaces that we can be creative in and have access to the necessary technology," Toma said.

Some notable additions to the space include new ceiling-mounted cameras that are much smaller and discrete, allowing study participants to focus on the experiment rather than feeling observed.

New microphones have been added to the space as well. A beamforming microphone

array system is now mounted to the ceiling of each room, virtually blending in with the white ceiling tiles. These new microphones provide directional recording and capture dialogue and noise no matter where a participant might be stationed or how loud they speak.

The installation of large flatscreen televisions in each study space also now allow researchers to introduce new and varying stimuli within studies or conference in experiment collaborators for research team meetings.

Updated technology directly assists undergraduate and graduate research assistants as well. Professor Lyn van Swol highlighted how students are being impacted by these updated facilities.

"Undergraduates are often trained to help run experiments in the fourth-floor labs, getting an understanding of how involved experimental research can be. Graduate students have access to state-of-the-art lab facilities that allow a variety of experimental designs, so that they can design very sophisticated experimental studies in which multiple recordings of groups are possible," said van Swol.

The Communication Science teams are eager to get back into their physical lab spaces in the Spring 2025 semester. The new lab additions will allow in-person studies to resume following the many obstacles the Communication Arts department has faced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and building restorations from a flood in Vilas Hall that occurred in 2019.

As projects like these lab modernizations wrap up, the Communication Arts department continually looks to what can be improved next. Creating a better community space in Vilas Hall for students, staff, and faculty to interact and strengthen connections is something the department hopes to achieve with donor support.

The department will also continue pursuing ILM grants to complete future projects like upgrading the Mirisch Seminar Room technology and purchasing items like advanced production LED lighting equipment, intro and intermediate camera gear, and a digital projection system. Finally, renovations to the building that will improve accessibility in Vilas—from lab spaces to classroom spaces—are an essential measure Communication Arts aims to complete in the coming years.

### Fall 2024 Dean's Message

JEFF MILLER



As we embark on another academic year, I look at all the work being done in the College of Letters & Science with remarkable pride. In our College, I see research opportunities that are fueling discovery, a curriculum that challenges students to think critically and alumni working across the state and world to make a difference in their communities.

The fundamental strength of our educational experience is that it is broad and inherently interdisciplinary. That diversity of thought, skills, backgrounds, and lived experiences is what makes L&S such an extraordinary learning environment. And our unwavering commitment to the value of sifting and winnowing is what makes our education stand out. We're not just teaching students the knowledge of the world but helping them develop an understanding of how that knowledge is built. Every day we prepare our students with the tools they need to succeed and make their impact on an increasingly complex and nuanced society.

L&S remains at the heart of this vibrant university. Our faculty, students, alumni, and staff continue to be recognized year after year for their teaching, research, and service. We're also strengthening our investment in the sciences and the humanities with esteemed faculty hires, new research initiatives and plans for state-of-the-art facilities on campus.

I'm proud of what we're accomplishing in the College of Letters & Science, and I hope you are, too. Thank you for your continued support of L&S.

On Wisconsin!

Eric Wilcots, Dean  
Mary C. Jacoby Professor of Astronomy  
UW–Madison College of Letters & Science

### Darshana Mini Uses New Book to Examine Mediation of Desire



Darshana Sreedhar Mini, an Assistant Professor of Film in Communication Arts, examines Malayalam soft-porn cinema and the national and international influences involved in the industry in her new book, *Rated A: Soft-Porn Cinema and Mediations of Desire in India*. Mini looks at how the film genre circulates among blue-collar workers in the Middle East, taking many different forms including vernacular pulp fiction, illustrated erotic tales, and American exploitation cinema.

*Rated A* also discusses how the soft-porn industry uses gendered labor and trust-based arrangements, revealing how actresses navigate their personal lives after getting involved with the industry. Mini provides a model for understanding the soft-porn industry through the negotiations between sexuality, import policy, and censorship in India.

*Rated A* is the winner of the Edward Cameron Dimock, Jr. Prize in the Indian Humanities awarded by the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) in 2024.

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### Jeremy Morris Explores Podcasting in Latest Book



Jeremy Morris, a Professor of Media and Cultural Studies in Communication Arts, discusses the history of one of digital media's most vibrant formats in his new book, *Podcasting*. "It covers the last twenty years of the industry and how it has developed from a niche practice online to what is now a fully-fledged media industry that has all the good and bad things that come from a media industry being more formalized," Morris said.

The boom of platforms like Spotify, Google, and Apple Music has contributed to the formalization of podcasting as an industry. These platforms have pushed podcasting from a format that was once open and highly participatory to one that is now much more proprietary, exclusive, and dependent on the needs and whims of the platforms.

As the book covers the twenty-year history of podcasting, it reflects on changes in technologies for creation and distribution, in industry economics, and in aesthetics and stylization. *Podcasting* is a great introduction for someone just beginning to learn about the medium or for any lovers of the form.





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In late November, Communication Arts celebrated over 100 years of producing cutting-edge Ph.D. dissertations during an event at the National Communication Association Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana.



KAI PRINS