

THE ANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE UCONN DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

the

# Communicator

Volume 7, June 2019



## ONWARD AND UPWARD

As COMM Grows, so too do Students' Opportunities

*The Arjona Building: Home to the Department of Communication since 2013*

**INSIDE:** Focus on COMM Careers - Events Recap - Alumni Profiles - Research Spotlight - News & Notes

# On Changes and New Opportunities

By **Stephen Stifano**, (Ph.D., 2011)

*Assistant Professor in Residence & Advisor: Communication Society*

Welcome to the 2019 edition of *The Communicator* - it is a pleasure to have you reading. This is my first year as the Advisor to the Communication Society, our wonderful undergraduate student organization who has helped to bring you this newsletter for seven straight years. In the pages to come, you'll see a glimpse into a department that is growing, changing, and advancing in numerous ways. The field of communication requires constant adaptability: society changes, relationships change, media changes, technology changes, and people change. With it, our scholars, teachers, and students are constantly adapting to reflect the modern world. Some may see that as scary, but we see it as an opportunity. Our field has never been more exciting, and our department has never been better.



As we adapt and grow as a department, we have expanded in new directions. Today's department is far more engaged in applied communication, with our new sequence of courses in Multimedia Production, our expanded internship offerings, and the hard work of our exceptional advising staff. Meanwhile, we continue to produce immense amounts of research and garner awards, thanks to our wonderful faculty and graduate students and their tireless work to push this department toward the forefront of the field. Today's Department of Communication is a place bustling with ideas and enthusiasm, consistently pushing boundaries to generate new knowledge, new opportunities, and new experiences for our students. We work hard, we challenge one another, and we have a lot of fun doing so. For those of you who made your way through our program many years ago, we owe you a great deal of gratitude for paving the way for our work. As you continue on in your careers and your communities, you help to carry the flag for our department in the public sphere; for that, we are eternally grateful.

Before I let you read on, I must take a moment and stop to salute my colleague Dr. **Rory McGloin** (Ph.D., 2011). Rory worked as our Director of Undergraduate Studies for seven years, ending his term on June 30th, 2019. As I succeed him in this role, I know I have large shoes to fill, but I am more so thrilled at the amazing progress our undergraduate program has made in this time. As we go forward, we build on the shoulders of this exceptional work. Cheers, Rory, on a great run - we vow to do you proud with our next steps.

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## THE COMMUNICATOR

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*The Communicator is produced by the UConn Department of Communication in conjunction with its undergraduate student organization, the Communication Society, as well as student article submissions created in COMM 4820: Public Relations Writing.*

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# Welcome From the Department Head

Dear friends,

The Department of Communication continues to grow and play a significant role at UConn. We are now the third largest undergraduate major at the university with well over 900 students, and we plan to offer the major in its entirety at our Stamford campus in the near future. Our internship program has grown to over 100 students annually, and our integration of science and hands-on experience is paying off; data from the Center for Career Development indicates that 90% of our undergraduate alumni are successfully employed one year after graduation. Our alumni continue to be active members of our community too, as many have returned to campus to talk to engage with our majors through career nights, graduation events, and our public speaking competition.

We have had a remarkably successful year for faculty recognition. Dr. Shardé Davis has been awarded a second national-level research fellowship,

this time from the Ford Foundation. Dr. Anne Oeldorf-Hirsch received the 2018 News Audience Research Paper Award from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Dr. Stephen Stifano won the 2019 University Teaching Innovation Award for redesigning COMM 1000 and building our Multimedia Production course sequence. Dr. Saras Bellur and Dr. Rory McGloin were successfully promoted to Associate Professor with tenure, and we thank Dr. McGloin for his seven years of service as Director of Undergraduate Studies.

Our graduate students continue to play an important role in the life of our department, and go on impact our field outside of Storrs. We hooded 10 PhD grads at this year's commencement ceremony. They are going on to faculty positions both inside and outside the state, at universities such as Southern Connecticut, Fairfield, Johnson & Wales, West Chester, John Carroll, Northwest Missouri, Cal Poly,



University of the Pacific, and Houston.

We are very proud of all we do here in Communication, and we hope you are too. Go Huskies.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Lachlan".

Ken Lachlan

## Greetings from the President of the Communication Society

Dear readers,

Hello! I am proud to present the 2018-19 edition of The Communicator to the UConn Communication community. The newsletter is composed of outstanding work created by students in our public relations courses from Fall 2018 and Spring 2019. On behalf of Comm Society, we hope you enjoy this glimpse inside our department. This year was a time of transition for Comm Society, as we said goodbye to Dr. Rory McGloin as our faculty adviser and welcomed Dr. Steve Stifano as our new adviser. I know that Comm Society is in good hands with Dr. Stifano and will continue to build upon



the foundation that Rory created for our organization.

We would like to thank the Department of Communication for its continuing support of Comm Society members and projects. I would also like to thank Steve Stifano for his guidance

and support of Comm Society this year. He is committed to ensuring the ongoing success of Comm Society and has served as a steady presence for the group during a year of transition.

Comm Society will transition to a new leadership team next year, led by president Annie Coleman. I want to thank all of our departing officers for their hard work this past year to make the Public Speaking Competition and the newsletter come together again to represent our department so well.

Best wishes,  
Jori Houck '19

# COMM Department News & Notes

## PROMOTIONS

Dr. **Saras Bellur** has been promoted to Associate Professor, with academic tenure, effective August, 2019.

Dr. **Rory McGloin** has been promoted to Associate Professor, with academic tenure, effective August, 2019.

## AWARDS

Dr. **Shardé Davis** has been awarded a Ford Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellowship for 2019-2020, in recognition of her outstanding teaching and research.

Dr. **Stephen Stifano** won the 2019 University Teaching Innovation Award for his work in redesigning COMM 1000 and the creation of the Multimedia Production course sequence.

Dr. **Anne Oeldorf-Hirsch** and doctoral student **Preeti Srinivasan** received the 2018 News Audience Research Paper Award from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Doctoral candidate **Kimberly Embacher Martin** received the 2018-2019 Christine Witzel Research Award through InCHIP in support of her research examining is-



Dr. Stephen Stifano (right) receiving the 2019-2020 University Teaching Innovation Award, with Director of Undergraduate Studies Dr. Rory McGloin

sues related to women's health.

Doctoral candidate **Adam Rainear** received a 2018 CLAS Graduate Research Fellowship, and doctoral student **Preeti Srinivasan** received a 2019 Summer Research Fellowship from the Institute of Brain and Cognitive Sciences.

Dr. **Saras Bellur** received funding from the Office of the Vice Provost for Research for her work advancing scholarship through the Department's Speaker Series.

Numerous faculty and graduate students received one or more Top Paper Awards at regional and national conferences, including: **David Atkin, Amanda Denes, Kirstie Farrar, Mark Hamilton, Ken Lachlan, Leslie Snyder, Maria DelGreco, Adam Rainear, Michelle Rego, Dana Rogers, Alyce Viens** and **Xiaowen Xu**.

## PUBLICATIONS

The department continues to thrive in research, with faculty and graduate students publishing across a range of academic journals. Many faculty and graduate students authored publications this academic year:

Faculty: **David Atkin, Saras Bellur, Ross Buck, John Christensen, Shardé Davis, Amanda Denes, Ken Lachlan, Rory McGloin, Anne Oeldorf-Hirsch, Leslie Snyder,** and **Arthur VanLear**.

Graduate Students: **Margaret Bennett, Christina DeVoss, Christine Gilbert, Emily Hutter, Suji Park, Adam Rainear, Brenda Rourke,** and **Xiaowen Xu**.

## MILESTONES

Dr. **Kirstie Farrar** celebrated 15 years of service with UConn.

Dr. **Dave D'Alessio** and Dr. **Diana Rios** both celebrated 20 years of service with UConn.

Dr. **Mark Hamilton** celebrated 30 years of service with UConn.



Director of Graduate Studies Dr. Kirstie Farrar (Right) poses with doctoral student Alyce Viens after receiving their 2019 ECA Top Paper Award

## PLACEMENTS

Several doctoral candidates and recent graduates have obtained faculty jobs at other institutions, including:

- **Margaret Bennett:** University of the Pacific
- **Christina DeVoss:** John Carroll University
- **Adam Rainear:** West Chester University
- **Michelle Rego:** Johnson & Wales University
- **Dana Rogers:** Southern Connecticut State University
- **Brenda Rourke:** Northwest Missouri State University
- **Kara Winkler:** University of Houston Downtown

## WELCOME

Dr. **Sara Stifano** joined the faculty as an Assistant Professor in-Residence in January, 2019. She was previously a Postdoctoral Teaching Associate at Northeastern University.

## LITTLE ONES

Dr. **Thomas Meade** welcomed daughter Autumn to the world in November, 2018.

# Newest Faculty Member Merges Interpersonal Communication and Creative Media

The Department of Communication has added a new faculty member whose teaching focus spans the curriculum. Sara Stifano (Ph.D. 2016) joins the department as an Assistant Professor in-Residence teaching interpersonal communication and multimedia production. Stifano began teaching in the department for the Spring, 2019 semester.

A native of Kentucky, Stifano began her academic career at the University of Louisville, gaining her bachelors and masters degrees while teaching Public Speaking and Gender in Communication. Stifano moved to Storrs to complete her doctoral work at UConn in 2011, where she taught a host of courses over five years, including research methods, interpersonal communication, and small group communication. After completing her Ph.D., Stifano worked as a postdoctoral teaching associate at Northeastern University, where she taught several courses and aided in the development of online summer classes in the Communication Studies Department.

Stifano provides a unique approach to interpersonal communication and multimedia production as she joins the program. A former copy editor of the Louisville Cardinal independent student newspaper, Stifano has frequently found ways to merge the creation of media with her course assignments, including challenging research methods students to create effective public service announcements and distribute them online, and having students in her gender and communication course reimagine entire advertising campaigns that reinforce difficult gender stereotypes. “These kinds of projects are a practical application of the skills and theories being taught in the class,” Stifano says. “Today’s students are constantly connected, so these projects are a great way to use that to our advantage



Dr. Sara Stifano, who started as an Assistant Professor in Residence in Spring, 2019

in the classroom.”

As part of her dissertation research, Stifano created film scenes to test the effects of varying different elements of safe sex narratives on audience reception. Eight variations on the scenes were created, with each subtly tweaking the story being told. The resulting experiment showed how viewers react to being “told what to do” in a narrative, compared to an expression of the feelings associated with a decision. Other tweaks adjusted the credibility of the protagonist when discussing normative behaviors for college students – comparing what viewers think when the narrator sounds like a knowledgeable social person, vs. when the narrator sounds like an outsider. This work was recognized as a 2017 Top Paper in Health Communication by the National Communication Association. Stifano thinks these kinds of research are important, because they help content creators know how to most effec-

tively reach audiences with important messages. “Public Service Announcements often tell people what to do with little explanation why, and that can create a huge boomerang effect, especially if the people delivering the message aren’t relatable,” she says. “We need to learn how to do a better job creating these messages.”

As she joins the department, Stifano brings her diverse experiences merging research and multimedia to the program, looking for even deeper connections between the expansive research profile of the department of communication and our forward-thinking approaches to creative media. “There’s a lot we can do to connect our research to media production,” Stifano says, “and we’ve already tossed around a few ideas that could really help to bring out the best in both. I’m excited to help.”

# Focus on CAREERS

## New Resources for COMM Students

By Lauren De Acutis and Yuhang Zhang

As students of Communication, one of the most consistent challenges we face is in matching our degrees to a specific job market. Communication is one of the most diverse and inclusive fields of study in academia; companies ranging from research firms to automotive companies to fashion designers need public relationships teams, brand managers, social media builders and human resources representatives. While the opportunity to cater our careers to our personal interests is a great advantage, finding the right match between our training and our career path can often be overwhelming. Fortunately, UConn is adding resources and support to help students make these critical decisions.

Recently, UConn's CLAS Center for Career Development hired two new Career Counselors to help students find their professional niche. In a recent interview, new counselor **Kristen Soprano** explained, "The competencies that CLAS majors possess— things like critical thinking, communication skills, and teamwork— are the core of what every individual needs to be successful in the workplace. Our job is to help CLAS majors build that confidence and recognize that they are just as valuable as that business major sitting next to them."

There has been major growth in industries that require communication skills, which has resulted in an increase of students pursuing a degree in communication at UConn. To best serve these students, the Department of Communication has worked closely with the Center for Career Development to improve resources and opportunities for communication majors. Together, the two units have promoted career planning workshops, alumni events, and special seminars to give further education and guidance to soon-to-be communication graduates entering the workforce. The Communication Advising Office, led by **Kathryn D'Antonio** and **Joel Nebres**, organized several of these beneficial events during the spring 2019 semester:



COMM Advisors Joel Nebres and Katie D'Antonio

- *Communicating via Social Media* was a workshop connected to UConn's Social Media Course (COMM 4640) that discussed what it's like to work as a social media specialist. Two of the speakers were recent COMM graduates. **Jade Axman** graduated in 2016 and works as a social media and PR Coordinator at Inspire Marketing group in Norwalk. **Carlos Rosario Gonzalez** graduated in 2018 and now works for Foxwoods Resort Casino as a Social Media Assistant. Both spoke extensively about their careers and experiences since graduating from UConn.
- *Digital Marketing within the COMM Major* featured **Paul Michael Mullally**, a Communication Alum who shared his experience working as a National Digital Campaign Manager at NBCUniversal. Communication Major Lauren De Acutis attended the event and found it highly beneficial. "I found it to be extremely helpful," she said. "Mullally's experience gave me guidance on what direction I want to take my future career once I graduate."
- Another event during the spring semester featured a specific niche of communication. *Communicating Health: Advertising in the Healthcare Industry* featured **Patrick Dugan**, who is a creative director and chief copywriter at the Adams and Knight marketing and advertising agency. Dugan educated students on how a communication degree can be applied in the health and insurance industries, connecting the material learned in the classroom to real-world work in the field.

In addition to these events, the Center for Career De-

*Continued on Next Page*

## Careers, cont'd:

velopment also hires students to help one another prepare for the job market. Through “Career Intern” positions, UConn students work to help other undergraduates grasp important job market skills, prepare for the workplace, and manage their social media accounts in anticipation of their careers. **Amanda D’Arbanville** has worked as a Career Intern since her sophomore year, and has helped many students prepare for employment. “As part of my role as a career intern, I have worked as a member of the Practice Interview Team,” D’Arbanville said. “In this role, I guide one-on-one practice interviews with students and help them brand themselves to employers and recruiters. Learning and perfecting my response to questions like ‘Tell Me About Yourself’ and my ‘Elevator Pitch’ has allowed me to professionally articulate my abilities and skills.” D’Arbanville has also learned a great deal about professionalism through her work. “It was essential for me to learn how to communicate professionally,” she explains. “I have learned to adapt my communication style at work and around campus to ensure I represent my personal and professional brand appropriately at all times.” The multi-layered approach of training students and developing student trainers has helped the CCD push UConn students into successful careers in the workforce as they leave the University.

Dr. **Thomas Meade** also contributes substantially to students’ professional development, both by teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in Professional Communication and by leading the department’s internship

program. Meade sees the current technological landscape as a boost to students as they begin their careers. “I think you have a really cool opportunity because you have social media jobs at entry-level positions,” Meade said. “Students know more about social media than I will ever know about it, and the next generation will know more about it than today’s students ever will. There’s a lot more available to this group of students through social media than there was for even my generation, and I graduated college ten years ago.” As the department’s internship program continues to expand, students are finding practical experience in variety of important fields, and learning more about where to turn their career focus as they near the end of their undergraduate studies.

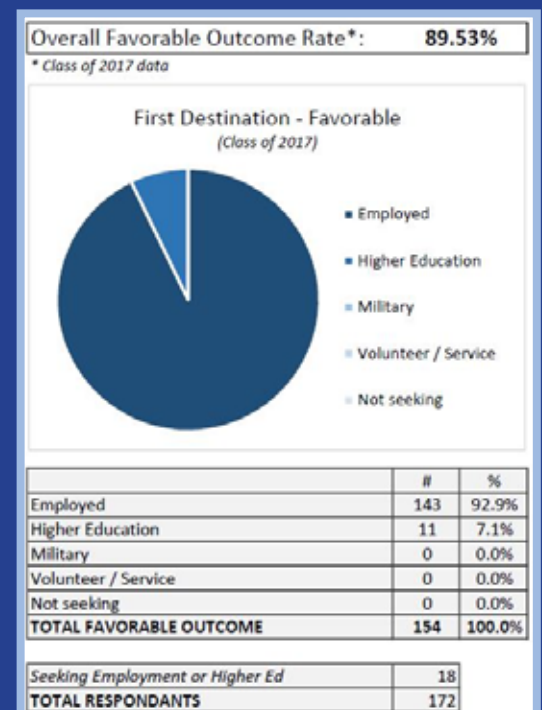
Between on-campus services, events, and internships, today’s students of Communication are more prepared than ever before to enter the workforce. Perhaps even more exciting is the growing number of COMM alumni working throughout Connecticut, New England, and beyond. As our reach expands, so too does our influence in the public sphere. With more and more Husky alumni helping one another - both inside Storrs and out in industry - the future for COMM graduates is indeed very bright.

*Information from pieces by Danielle Balzano, Jenna Demicco, Emily Lauzon, and Yunxuan Liao contributed to this article.*

## UConn COMM Graduates Landing on their Feet

Communication Alumni past and present have plenty to smile about when it comes to their careers. Take for instance these two pieces of data:

1. Among the humanities, the Communication major has grown rapidly in the past decade, and now represents the field awarding the most degrees, representing about **25%** of all humanities degrees by 2015. What we do is in demand.
2. The UConn Center for Career Development found that **89.5 percent** of all Communication graduates from the Class of 2017 had favorable outcomes within one year of graduation. Favorable outcomes were defined as employment or the pursuit of an advanced degree. Communication majors find work with their degrees.



# From the Halls of Arjona to Binghamton, NY: Catching up with Grace Gagnon, Class of 2018



*2018 alum and former Communication Society President Grace Gagnon has been busy working as a reporter for WBNG 12 News in Binghamton, New York. We caught up with her:*

**What are some of the best things the UConn Department of Communication offers?**

GG: I think the research program in our COMM department is something everyone should take advantage of. Whether it's participating in studies for extra credit or working as a lab assistant, it's truly a unique experience for COMM students. I also think the COMM department has expanded its course offerings over the past few years. I feel like I took a wide range of classes and it made me a more well-rounded student.

**How did being the president and previously a member of the Communication Society help to further your experience in your field?**

GG: Pursuing a leadership role allowed me to take control of situations and learn how to make decisions. Being a

reporter, I have to make quick decisions every single day. I am held accountable for my actions every single day. Being a leader of an organization like the Communication Society taught me the importance of good decision making and leadership.

**What role did UCTV play in helping to land your first job?**

GG: UCTV taught me how to report, how to take care of expensive camera equipment, how to swallow my fears and approach random people, and how to ask for interviews. I learned how to edit on complicated software. I learned how to dress for TV and read off of a teleprompter. UCTV is an underrated student organization. The students who work with UCTV are the most motivated people I have ever worked with. Every time I walked into the studio, I felt like I was entering a positive environment. Being surrounded by such positivity made me want to be there and work harder.

**What's next for your career goals?**

GG: I love reporting. I absolutely love

doing longer, special reports. Sitting down and connecting with someone is the best part of my day. Eventually I would love to work for *60 Minutes* on CBS, but until then I am focusing on investigative journalism.

**Any advice for UConn Communication seniors?**

GG: Don't be afraid to graduate. Less than 7 months ago, the thought of leaving UConn made me sick to my stomach. But once I walked across the graduation stage, I knew everything was fine. To be honest, I haven't looked back once. College is an amazing time but reality can be just as great, as long as you stay motivated in following your dreams.

*Grace is also joined by former UConn huskies Chloe Vincente '17 and Julia Gorman '18 who both graduated with degrees in Communication and Journalism, making WBNG 12 News a packed husky house.*

*Interview by Lindsey Kane, Dan Menicio, and Matt McGovern*



# COMM Student Films hit the Red Carpet

One night each spring, students, faculty, families, and friends descend upon Hartford CT to celebrate the work of communication students through a time-honored tradition: By going to the movies.

The annual *Commotion Pictures* Screening and Red Carpet Event represents a culmination of a year's worth of student work in multimedia production courses. Each year, films created in COMM 2940 (fundamentals of digital production), 4940 (narrative digital video production), 4941 (nonfiction digital video production), and 4999 (independent study in multimedia production) are eligible for selection, with the best films chosen to screen in front of a large audience at the Spotlight Theatre in Hartford.

"This is a chance for our students to screen their work in an actual movie theatre with a true audience," said Dr. **Stephen Stifano**, who supervises the multimedia production sequence and teaches multiple courses in it. "The films that get to the Hartford Screening are clever, insightful, and entertaining - but they're also created by tireless students who invest a ton of energy to get them right."

The event is made possible through a unique partnership with UConn Hartford, who arranges use of the Spotlight Theatre in the Front Street District, just steps from the Hartford campus. From there Stifano, advisors **Joel Nebres** and **Katie D'Antonio**, and a team of other faculty and grad students work together to bring the event to life, including a red carpet with a step and repeat for students to pose for pictures, free popcorn for attendees, and a special "cold open" film produced by production faculty to open the show.

After the screening, the audience (which has totaled over 200 in consecutive years) votes for their selection for best picture, a prize recognized by the department and the production sequence. This year, the best picture was accompanied by a \$500 scholarship for the winning team, the result of a generous anonymous donation by a friend of the program. In 2019, **Jimmy Brockett**, **Tajek Mikel**, **Gilbert Owens**, **Aaron Lorenzo**, and **Mike Sampson's** *Lil Doc*, a documentary from COMM 4941 about Soundcloud rappers and the social issues facing Connecticut rap musicians, was awarded the top prize. Narrative *Dirty Laundry*, a dramedy from COMM 4940 about a young man coping with the loss of his mother created by **Ken Asada**, **Kyle Barry**, **Dan Whalen**, **Neel Razdan**, and **Kwaku Gyasi**, finished second.

Founded in 2016, the Multimedia Production course sequence has been wildly popular in COMM, where students continue to seek media creation skills in advance of their careers. *Commotion Pictures* represents the brand identity for films produced through the department. "We work hard, everyone learns a great deal, and we have a lot of fun," Stifano said.

Check out more about the production sequence, including student films, at [www.commproduction.com](http://www.commproduction.com)



Top: **Dana Kringel** & **Sahara Shrestha**, '18, pose on the red carpet.  
 Second: Over 200 filled the Spotlight Theatre to view a full slate of films.  
 Third: Prof. Stifano poses with the *Lil Doc* team, winners of Best Picture.  
 Bottom: *Dirty Laundry*, 2019 runner up, screens before a packed house

# Sixth Annual Public Speaking Competition Tackles Science Communication in a “Fake News” World



By Sowon Chung

Is climate change real? Are vaccines safe? Are we sure the earth is round? These days, it seems like a variety of voices have called into question what many of us took as easy scientific facts. And with it, the jobs of science communicators became much more difficult. How, then, can today's experts reach people with valuable science, health, and environmental information?

This was the theme for the sixth annual UConn Public Speaking Competition, which took place on April 10th, 2019. The event was sponsored by the Department of Communication, the Communication Society, and the Communication Graduate Students Association. Student contestants came from a variety of backgrounds, including journalism, ecology and evolutionary biology, business, and animal science. All shared one thing in common: a passion for improving the communication between scientists and the general public.

The event was hosted in McHugh Hall Room 102 - the largest lecture hall on the Storrs Campus - and featured a crowd of over 400 in attendance. Communication Professor **Stephen Stifano** and doctoral student **Christine Gilbert** - co-hosts of the department's *Compendium* podcast - served as hosts. Judges included competition founder and former host Professor **Rory McGloin**, social media expert Professor **Anne Oeldorf-Hirsch**, and recent Communication alum and Fox61 anchor **Ben Goldman**.

The competition used a three-round format to identify the best speaker among the five chosen to compete. The first round consisted of contestants presenting prepared speeches about science communication. The second round was a question and answer period, where each contestant had to answer a question related to their speech from one of the three judges. The final round featured an impromptu speech where contestants were given just ten minutes to prepare an answer to the question “Do you see social networks as a positive or negative influence on public understanding of science and health information?”

This year's winner was **Jennifer Magnoli**, a freshman management major. Magnoli talked about the difficulties of spreading good science through social media and overcoming the noise and misinformation that spreads rampantly. After the competition, she said that it was an honor to win while discussing a topic that is so important to her.

**Marlese Lessing**, a senior animal science and journalism double major, came in second place and elicited several laughs from the crowd with her deadpanned characterizations of poor social media content. Lessing spoke about science writing, noting that it's something close to her heart. **Amanda Pastore**, a junior ecology and evolutionary biology major, won third place.

With a compelling and important topic and the diverse collection of talented contestants, this year's competition was another success, ensuring that this growing university tradition will carry on as a key annual event.

# Communication Society Brings Students, Department Together

By Jori Houck, Katherine Ratcliffe,  
and Sonika Komal

Students are the beating heart of any university academic department, and UConn's Department of Communication is no exception. Students can work closely with the department through undergraduate research, media production, and the department's student group, the Communication Society. As the link between the department and its students, the Communication Society strives to create a strong community of support and professional development for students both inside and outside of the Communication major.

The primary goal of the organization is to serve the needs of its members. During the fall semester each year, the group is largely guided by feedback from members. The organization holds an annual internship night to discuss obtaining internships and networking which has become quite popular, as well as an evening dedicated to helping students select courses. A small group bonding experience is held early in the semester. Near the end of the semester, the group travels to New York, Boston, or Hartford to network with public relations, television, and media professionals, many of whom have close ties to UConn.

"We really try to offer something helpful for the undergraduate experience. I find that the Communication Society is a place where we can all gather to discuss what's on our minds," said senior **Jori Houck**, president of the Communication Society. "We receive a lot of great advice from our peers and it has been very beneficial for me and many others to be a member of the group."

The importance of networking is also stressed to Com-



COMM Society's 2018 Field Trip to New England Cable News



munication Society members, who are encouraged to attend department and university-wide networking events as often as possible. As the mantra goes, "It's not what you know, it's who you know." For students of communication to be fully prepared to enter the increasingly competitive workforce, proficiency in networking skills is a must. These skills can eventually lead to a wide variety of career options. Alumni of the Communication Society are currently working in public relations, television broadcasting, and marketing, among other fields.

Members can also gain experience in event planning, hosting, and news-writing. During the spring, the Communication Society co-sponsors the University's annual public speaking competition. The competition is open to all UConn students and regularly draws many talented contestants. Local public figures and professors in the Department are brought in to serve as judges for the event, which grows in attendance each year. Additionally, this very newsletter, *The Communicator*, is also produced and distributed by the Communication Society every spring. "One of the greatest things we've developed in our department is the community surrounding our scholarship, and nowhere is this more evident than in the work done by the Communication Society," said advisor Dr. **Stephen Stifano**. "Students in the Communication Society work together to make the most of their academic experience in communication, both through networking and professional development. The activities that Communication Society students engage in, and the events they help to organize, help the department immensely. Seeing some of our most invested students work hard to maximize their college experience is both exciting and inspiring."

The Communication Society is working continuously to help put the "COMM" in "COMMunity." They can be reached via email at [uconnmsociety@gmail.com](mailto:uconnmsociety@gmail.com).

# HuskyTHON in the Age of Social Media



Photo Credit: Huskython.org

**By Lily Roeller and Katherine O'Donnell**

In 2000, the students of the University of Connecticut hosted their first annual Midnight Marathon, an event that would later become known as HuskyTHON. That year, they raised \$13,878. Since then, participants have increased their year-long fundraising efforts to achieve one goal: One million for the kids. In 2018, HuskyTHON surpassed this goal, raising \$1,021,485. This past February, on the 20th anniversary of the very first Midnight Marathon, they set a new record: \$1,328,402.19.

HuskyTHON is no easy task, but as every participant would say, it's well worth the time. Madison Nadolny, a junior in the Engineering department, participated as a dancer representative for her team in 2018, raising over \$350. "It was a lot of work," she said. "But seeing the difference we've helped make for the kids is so worth it."

As technology grows, so do the fundraising opportunities available to students. In addition to the tried and true methods such as canning, participants have moved to the internet to ask for donations from people near and far.

Back in 2016, HuskyTHON caught the attention of pop star, Taylor Swift. Through following a UConn student's Tumblr fan page "Imtheblankspace", Swift found out about the student's involvement in HuskyTHON. She reached out to the student, setting up a surprise facetime call where she told him she planned to donate to his team. Sure enough, by the end of the night she had donated \$1,989, a nod to her album "1989".

Taylor Swift fans across campus were amazed that UConn had caught the attention of a celebrity, and thrilled to see HuskyTHON get acknowledged by someone with such a huge platform and following. Maria Blois, a Swift fan who had participated as a dancer that year said, "I think it's going to be huge for HuskyTHON in the years to come – especially now that she knows about it." The buzz Swift's donation created for HuskyTHON helped lengthen the reach of the event, bringing in more participants and donations and catching the attention of yet another celebrity in 2018.

Last year, HuskyTHON raised a record breaking

\$1,021,485.37, gaining local news coverage and praise from rapper Drake. After seeing a video posted to HuskyTHON's instagram page, Drake congratulated UConn for raising over a million dollars, commenting "amazing what you guys did." All of campus was floored that HuskyTHON had been commended by Drake, even those who hadn't participated in the event caught notice. The reposts and mentions on social media only helped to create more buzz for HuskyTHON 2019.

This year, HuskyTHON used its growing social media buzz to promote their new slogan "Raise Them Up". Nicole Schwartz, HuskyTHON's VP of Communications, explains that organizers wanted to shift the ultimate goal of the event away from money and toward what really matters: raising the spirits of the people at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center. "We are striving to 'raise up' the hospital staff, children, and families," Schwartz said. Social media allowed organizers to capture the preparation for the event and the excitement of the event itself, encouraging students to share their own HuskyTHON posts on their personal profiles and accounts.

Facebook posts can be found scattered over newsfeeds for the months before HuskyTHON. Opportunities to support the cause, or to raise money for your own donor drive are constantly popping up, from asking family members for donations to offering sober rides for a few dollars to other students. HuskyTHON promotes all forms of fundraising, especially on social media. One of the most popular methods is the use of Venmo punch cards. Participants post a photo with four different donation amounts, and ask their friends to send them a donation matching it. Each donor then receives a shoutout on the participant's social media. Once filled, these punch cards raise anywhere from \$75 to \$100 in around 24 hours.

The benefits of social media platforms for fundraising are endless. From reaching just your closest friends and family to expanding beyond your social network to celebrities, it creates opportunities for donations while simply spreading awareness of a cause that holds a personal meaning to so many UConn students.



# RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

2019-20 Ford Fellowship Recipient Dr. Shardé Davis

## Race, Gender, and Interpersonal Communication: How Black Women Support One Another

By Chieyon Williams and Nico Osorio

Faculty across the department of Communication seek to understand human relationships through any number of lenses. For Assistant Professor Shardé Davis, that focus has brought her to questions of inequality and injustice in modern society.

Davis, an assistant professor who received her Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in 2016, investigates the social aspects of interpersonal communication such as race, ethnicity, and gender identity. Much of her work is centered around gender and race relations and the issues that black women face in the world, particularly when it comes to communicating feelings of stress to friends of other races.

In 2017, Davis conducted a study on support among women of different races. She found that while women of the same race were able to discuss their stress issues, there was a noticeable gap in women talking about their stress to women of different races. In addition, Davis has been working on creating a safe space for black women who have been victims of microaggressions. Microaggressions are statements or actions that intentionally or unintentionally discriminate against another race. Examples range from thinking that two people of the same race look the same, to something as simple as walking to the other side of the street when seeing a person of a certain race. Davis' support group, *Sistahs support sistahs*, is intended as a safe space to help women of color to understand that they are not alone when they feel discrimination or disrespect from another

race. The group encourages black women to freely discuss the verbal and nonverbal discrimination they have faced in their daily public and professional lives. This type of safe space strengthens communication between black women, improving their comfort in navigating difficult social situations. Davis also found that humor helped women to open up more about race issues, mainly as a way to break the tension that racism typically evokes.

Davis's work is essential in a time where many people struggle with issues of difference, while other people commit microaggressions that can have damaging consequences. Understanding how microaggressions can impact day to day interactions among people from different backgrounds is critical to improving relationships for all citizens. Providing venues where people can express themselves freely and discuss the challenges they face when encountering difference all help individuals to navigate complex social problems.

Recently awarded a Ford Fellowship in honor of her research, Dr. Davis continues to advance her work in understanding how racial tensions, discrimination, and gender play into everyday interpersonal communication. As she moves forward in this research, she has the opportunity to impact an entirely new generation of black women as they learn to manage complex social problems.

# Communicating Environmental Advocacy on Campus



By Jackie DeMuyt and Krista Raciti

With global temperatures still on the rise, it is no shock that UConn dining services have officially terminated their use of plastic bags.

UConn's Department of Dining Services, including its retail and Grab & Go locations, have ditched plastic bags for the spring, 2019 semester. This decision comes as part of ongoing environmental initiatives on campus; specifically the result of a joint effort between Dining Services and the Zero Waste Campaign of UConnPIRG, a student-run activism and advocacy group on campus.

While the impact of shifting from plastic to 100% reusable paper is notable, those paying careful attention could see the change coming for some time. The Storrs campus is no stranger to environmental advocacy, with recent movements to ban plastic straws and pay careful attention to waste generated in day-to-day operations paving the way for eliminating plastics. These eco-friendly efforts have a large impact in reducing the university's environmental footprint.

Beyond campus policy, the UConn community has grown increasingly aware of environmental issues and is eager to spread information outside of Storrs. Since 2015, the university has sent both students and faculty to the annual United Nations climate change summit. Fifteen students and six faculty members attended the 2018 summit, COP24, in Katowice, Poland. A number of undergraduate attendees spanning various majors blogged about their experience for University communications via UConn

today (<https://today.uconn.edu>). The first hand accounts showcase just how close to home environmental concerns hit.

While news attention and awareness are needed to combat rising global temperatures, at the core of these efforts is effective communication. **Ken Lachlan**, Professor and Head of the UConn Department of Communication, sees the role of science and environmental communication as critical to the future of the field. "Much of what we study and promote concerns the conveyance of science knowledge to different audiences," Lachlan said. "Historically, this has included information about health interventions, crises and risks, and so on. Pro-environmental behaviors belong right alongside these, as our focus

is on finding the best ways to inform people of these behaviors and persuade people to adopt them."

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences notes that more students major in Communication than any other Humanities discipline. Similar trends are reflected at UConn, where COMM has quickly grown to be one of the largest majors at the university. Lachlan sees this growth as a chance to influence environmental issues and policy by training students and scientists in communicating scientific information to the public. "We have an opportunity to bring environmental awareness to a great number of students," he explains. "I think environmental awareness is becoming a more salient consideration not only at UConn, but across our culture on the whole."

Both behind the scenes at UConn and in our daily news coverage, researchers, students, and journalists alike are eager to spark the conversation about environmental awareness. Lachlan, who built his career studying crisis and risk communication and has researched critical world events such as Hurricane Katrina, knows that environmental change takes time and effort, but the payoffs are worth the work. "I am old enough to remember when people didn't bother to recycle, or disposed of toxins in regular sewer and waste lines," he notes. "Policy changes like the plastic bag ban are just another logical step in this direction. It may sound cliché, but it really does start with each of us doing our part to help. It will be a long road, but I think we are headed in a good direction."

# In Focus: How New Courses in Communication are Born

By Jessica Arujo, Joshua Buckley, and Daniel Nixon

Every semester, students at UConn scour the course catalog in search of courses to enroll in for the following term. What many students - and former students - perhaps don't think about is the process by which new college courses emerge. As we've learned, this process - particularly in the Department of Communication - requires a great deal of thought and hard work.

In recent years, UConn's Department of Communication has undergone a large curricular overhaul to respond to recent student and market demands. Now more than ever, the department is combining well-established theory courses with new applied courses that help students graduate with a collection of tangible skills they can use in the real world. Dr. Ken Lachlan, the head of the department, explained how some these new courses come to fruition: "There are two main paths from which new courses arise; faculty expertise and student feedback. Starting a few years ago, there was a large uptick in demand for applied courses. Students wanted more applicable skills at the senior level, so we made sure to introduce them."

The process of adding new courses is not taken lightly. To ensure quality control, a new course proposal is overseen by teams of faculty. Dr. Stephen Stifano, who teaches a number of the communication department's applied courses, explains the rigorous procedure new courses must undergo to transform from brainchild to reality: "First, a course is conceived by a faculty member, who makes a proposal to the Communication Undergraduate Studies Committee. The committee then provides feedback and, if in support, presents the course to the department's full faculty. Typically the faculty then make suggestions and ask important questions; it's a very collaborative process." If approved by the department faculty, a new course moves on to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Committee on Curricula and Courses (CLAS CCC) whose members will review and provide insight on the proposal until it is satisfactory. Finally, if approved by the CLAS CCC, the new course will move on to the registrar's office for scheduling. Dr. Lachlan tells us this process can take up to a year to complete, which means that planning ahead is critical. Nonetheless, while universities have several bureaucratic procedures this is one that really serves a purpose - to make sure that every new course holds merit to help students in their academic and professional careers.

Lachlan emphasized that one of the Department's biggest curricular objectives is to strive for uniqueness, ensuring that undergraduate students experience as little redundancy as possible. Dr. Rory McGloin, who served as the Director of Undergraduate Studies for seven years, believes

that working in tandem with other professors to provide a balance between theoretical and applied courses is critical for a communication curriculum. When asked what the most important aspects of the curriculum are for students, McGloin stressed the fundamentals of good communication, "as well as an ability to analyze, ask critical research questions, and produce communication messages through a range of channels using what they learn in the classroom." The department has worked hard to create a difficult but rewarding curriculum that pushes students to get the most out of their studies. Stifano - who represents the department on the CLAS CCC - hopes that students feel challenged on a personal level, but grateful for the experience. "Although courses are rigorous," he stresses, "The payoff is well worth it in the end."

In staying up to date with the field and tweaking the course catalog accordingly, the department of communication ensures that students have access to the tools they need to succeed. It's an exciting time to be a student in the communication major. The department's growing list of course offerings has been majorly enhanced by its new collection of applied courses and subjects targeted toward faculty strengths. Now, current students are able to pursue topics like public relations, marketing, advertising, social media, and digital video production while seeking their degree at the university. As new developments in the field of communication unfold, so too will curricular changes at UConn, ensuring that students consistently receive a top-flight education.

## WHAT'S NEW: RECENT COMM COURSE ADDITIONS

### 2014-2015

4200, 4200W: **Advanced Interpersonal Communication**  
4035, 4035W (Now 4300, 4300W): **Advanced Media Effects**  
4130: **Marketing Communication**

### 2015-2016

2100: **Professional Communication**  
2940: **Fundamentals of Digital Production**  
4250: **Communication in Conflict Management**  
4430: **International Communication and Conflict**  
4650: **Human-Computer Interaction**  
4940: **Narrative Digital Video Production**

### 2016-2017

4222, 4222W: **People of Color and Interpersonal Communication**  
4640, 4640W: **Social Media: Research and Practice**  
4320: **Media and Diverse Audiences**

### 2017-2018

2110: **Presenting in the Digital Age**  
4941: **Nonfiction Digital Video Production**

# On Behalf of UConn: Meet Stephanie Reitz

The University of Connecticut hosts over 30,000 students from over a hundred programs. But, when time comes to announce the latest breakthroughs and ambitious initiatives, there's only one woman with all the answers: University Spokesperson Stephanie Reitz.

By Neel Razdan and Trevyon Robinson

## What are some of your responsibilities as UConn Spokesperson?

The ones that people notice the most, the most public facing is answering press calls. It involves getting questions from the media on topics and getting back to them or connecting them to faculty or people for their stories. The best way people know my work is also more institutional; I write for the website and attend a lot of meetings. Briefing Q&As, factsheets – just lots of writing involved.

## What are some of the difficulties that you encounter? Any incidents with students/public?

Actually, my connection with students has always been great. Even when students have had issues that concern them, or made them angry or stressed, they've been great to talk with and seek solutions with. [I've] never felt any kind of strife working with students. There have been times when we've had controversial speakers or initiatives people don't understand – mostly like strangers outside of the university or the state who responded very negatively. For instance when we launched Scholars House, we had a lot of nasty feedback from people who I think had never been in CT. That was hard for me because I was impressed by the students in the program. Some of the responses were hate-based. You come to deal with it and learn to deal with people of all types. When we've had controversial speakers, we've been often asked why do you allow so-and-so on your campus, and we try to explain because university campuses are a place where you're supposed to be able to get a large representation of thoughts and speech. A lot of people don't want to hear that, so I can only explain it but I can't force them to understand it.

## Does your job require any work regarding UConn alum? Or do you strictly deal with the public and the student body?

Well I know a lot of alum through journalism circles. Many people I've met were UConn graduates from the journalism program. Throughout this job, I've met a lot of alum who graduated in law and communication and it's really exciting to know what it was like when they were here and what do they think of the changes now. I like getting a sense of how they felt their education has served them.

## What pushed you toward PR? Something you've always seen yourself doing or was it more of a demand type of thing?

I was really interested in what UConn what was doing. I was working at the AP [Associated Press] before this, but UConn has changed a lot in the 25 years I've lived in Connecticut, UConn has evolved so much as an institution. It is ambitious



Stephanie Reitz, University Spokesperson (credit: UConn Communications)

and going places and I wanted to be part of that.

## How does PR for a university differ from other PR jobs?

First and foremost, the thing you're pushing for and advocating for is education. I don't want to throw shade at anyone, but everyone agrees that education is worthwhile and worth pushing for. Once you get into a detail how different institutions run, people can agree to disagree on policies and procedures on how it's run. In the broadest sense, higher education is something everyone seems to be supportive of.

## What does your ability as a journalist/author give you the ability to do?

I think it's to ask a lot of questions. You're going to need to know the answers to things. As a reporter, you're going to be writing a story. In my case, I am going to be telling reporters information and they're going to be asking me what that means – being able to translate jargon for instance. There's a lot of language in higher education, and people who have been in college for decades understand it, but if I were to give a quote to a journalist using those terms, it might be confusing or ridiculous. In that regard, it's a lot like journalism because you're really asking a lot of questions and to simplify whatever to a lay-person's description.

## What advice would you give to a soon to be college graduates/alumni looking to break into the PR field?

Try to gear your search toward something that you really enjoy and believe in. In my case, it doesn't seem like hard work because I love the university. I've indoctrinated my son and my hope will be for him to come here. When I speak about the university, it's with my whole heart. I'm a 1000% and believe strongly in it. For anyone going into PR, it's more fun when you really do feel connected and invested with what you're involved in. It doesn't have to be higher education. I know someone whose wife is in PR at Pepperidge Farm and they get all the cookies and snacks. Even if it's a car company you love, if you can get a PR job talking about a place you love, you're 3/4ths of the way there.



# The Department of Communication: Past, Present, and Future

By Alexandra Casiano, Salma Yousif, and Colleen Daly

The field of communication has been around for many years, and in that time society and technology have all made rapid advancements. Similarly, the Department of Communication at UConn has evolved and changed in more ways than we can count, but it has always focused on one thing: human interaction. To find out more about the changes the department has undergone, we spoke with alumni, faculty, and graduate students. The goal was to get a sense of what the department once was, what it is now, and where it plans to go in the future.

UConn alumnus **Maura Daly** graduated in 1991 with a degree in communication and said she has seen a significant change since she was an undergrad. “I never had one on one advisement as you do now,” Daly said. “I never had the ability to meet with anyone to keep me on track.” Daly mentioned a few special topics courses she was able to take, but stressed that there was not nearly as wide of a variety of courses to choose from as there is today. “The department did have persuasion, mass media, and interpersonal,” Daly said. “but the world is changing and I’m glad the department is changing with it.”

Professors alike say they have seen a positive change in the department over the past few years. They agree that the department has grown and enhanced itself in various ways but still has room for future endeavors. Assistant Professor of media and new technology **Anne Oeldorf-Hirsch** has been part of the department for five years and says she has seen the program grow immensely in that time. “I’m looking forward to our continued progress into new research areas such as social media, racial and gender identity in communication, and science communication,” Oeldorf-Hirsch said.

**Thomas Meade**, an Assistant Professor in-Residence who joined the department in 2016, had similar opinions about the trajectory of UConn’s communication program. “This department has a lot of excellent members and leadership,” Meade said. “I think that there is always room for growth, and I would love to see more undergraduate involvement in the department in the future.”

The Department of Communication continues to expand its curriculum by incorporating business relations, new technology, and science and health communication into its research and teachings. Doctoral student and teaching assistant **Maria DelGreco** shared her thoughts on some of the changes throughout the department. “One change that I’ve noticed is that the department



Storrs Campus, circa 1903

has shifted more towards interpersonal- and technology-based research and somewhat away from the mass media research,” Delgreco said. She suggests that analyzing individual user data, technology, and human relationships is helping to modernize the way the department teaches communication.

**Carl-Marvin Louis**, class of 2018, is the social media director at a marketing company in Norwalk, CT. Louis said that his foundation in communication and analytics was quite helpful to his career, though he suspects that future students will benefit from more applied work that better integrates with the business and professional side of the field of communication. The department has already expanded these offerings in recent years, including the launch of a new Undergraduate Certificates program in 2018, to meet students’ needs as they enter the workforce.

**Laura Couch**, Class of 2018, was one of the first inductees of UConn’s Lambda Pi Eta chapter, the honor society of the National Communication Association. Couch said the addition of Lambda Pi Eta sets a precedent for the incoming communication majors to join. “Lambda Pi Eta will continue to bring our constantly expanding communication department together by rewarding academic achievement while networking to strengthen student connections within the department and in the workforce,” Couch said. Lambda Pi Eta and the Undergraduate Certificates program both represent changes for the department’s undergraduate program - changes geared toward a bright future. As with the field of communication, things continue to change in Storrs - but with those changes come new and exciting opportunities for the COMM students of tomorrow.

# Catching Up With the Class of 2018

By Maggie Mulshine, Emily Mineau, & Rachel Francini

## LILY SCHWITTER

Recruiter | Insight Global, LLC

*How did UConn help you?*

One thing that really helped me was UConn's spring career fair. I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do so I went to get a feel for what was out there. I honestly didn't think anything would really come of it, but I ended up talking to the representative at Insight Global and they set me up for an on campus interview the very next day. I don't think I would have found this company had it not been for the UConn career fair.

*How does your education set you apart?*

I think it was important that UConn had public speaking as a requirement for all comm majors because I think it was the most beneficial course I took in college. Public speaking is something we do a lot in the office and in the real world, so it is imperative that I am aware of things like volume, tone and pace when speaking.

*Advice for future UConn graduates?*

My biggest piece of advice would be to go the Career Fair! Another thing I would say would be to keep your options open. Do as much networking as you can because ultimately your people skills will be what help you get a job in our field. It is very important to build rapport and make those connections right away.

## JULIE PYRCZ

Account Trainee | BMW Golf at Octagon

*How did UConn help you?*

The internship experiences that I had were most helpful because they allowed me to apply all of the things that I was learning in my classes and build my resume, plus I was getting credit for them through the Department of Communication's internship course.

*How does your education set you apart?*

I would say it's the big name and the network that UConn offers. I can almost always find someone anywhere I go that I can share that UConn connection with which is really cool.

*Advice for future UConn graduates?*

Market yourself, and do not get discouraged. Putting yourself out there and going to events and talking to people and making connections is so important and it gives you a great opportunity to sell yourself, learn about jobs, and then land a job. The process of looking for jobs can be really discouraging when you keep hearing 'no' or just getting no response at all to your applications, but you have to keep your head up and be confident that the opportunity that's right for you won't pass you by.

## JORDAN ARNOLD

Associate | Strategies for Wealth

*How did UConn help you?*

The Department of Communication, and UConn as a whole, helped prepare me for the interview process and taught me how to present myself in both a professional and personable manner. Students have access to mock interview practice, resume critiques and review, and alumni network connections that make the transition and acclimation to the real world much easier.

*How does your education set you apart?*

I realized instantly how important and beneficial the skills were that I gained from Communication courses. Being able to effectively communicate and understand the basis of relationships and how to work with others are invaluable skills that really set you apart from others in the workplace. If you can communicate and present yourself professionally, you truly can work in any industry that you desire.

*Advice for future UConn graduates?*

The most important thing is to not let the process stress you out too much. It is so easy to get overwhelmed with many rounds of interview and disappointment if you don't receive an offer for a position you want. Go into your job search with an open mind and the belief that your first job is a way to step foot into the adult-working world and gain real experience.

## SOPHIE BUTCHER

Account Service Representative |  
NBC Universal Lifestyle Group

*How did UConn help you?*

The UConn Department of Communication gave me real-life work experience in my classes, especially my junior and senior year. A lot of my classes focused on projects that we would most likely work on in our future jobs. I was able to gain confidence and momentum going into my first job!

*How does your education set you apart?*

I made lifelong connections and was supported by many supportive and successful staff that genuinely wanted each student to succeed. The COMM classes got more competitive each semester and it pushed me to be a better student and carry on the skills that I learned to the workforce. I'm a proud alumni!

*Advice for future UConn graduates?*

Use your connections in whatever way possible. Navigating the workforce post grad can seem super daunting and scary but reaching out to those who can help you out is always very informative!

# To Bright Futures



*Without change there is no innovation, creativity, or incentive for improvement. Those who initiate change will have a better opportunity to manage the change that is inevitable.*

*- William Pollard*

As the Department of Communication moves forward, we are excited to embrace the challenges and opportunities of a changing world and a changing field. We are excited for the opportunities ahead of us to serve our students and our discipline with the best possible educational experiences, research initiatives, and professional training. We thank you, our alumni, for all of your support and accomplishments along the way.

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