







COMM JOURNAL

SPRING 2021



Adapting through Communication

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About the Cover



Cover design by Taylor Shipley

For many [School of Communication](#) alumni, students, faculty and staff, home became the place to work, learn and teach from the spring of 2020 to present.

This is the inspiration for the CommUNO 2021 cover. Students in the spring and fall 2020 semesters of the Magazine Editing, Design and Production class worked on design ideas to represent the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic based on the publication theme Adapting through Communication.

The spring 2021 students discussed design mock-ups and began work on finalizing the colors and plan for the front and back cover. Senior Taylor Shipley completed the design using her skills with Adobe Creative Suite.

The front cover shows a home with different family members in the various roles for work, studying and teaching. The back cover features a student looking longingly at the Arts and Sciences building from afar.

Tells us what you think about the cover! If you have any ideas for future publications or want to submit a class note and photo contact: Melodae Morris, Editor-in-Chief, melodaemorris@unomaha.edu.

[See all CommUNO publications dating back to 1991 on University of Nebraska at Omaha, Digital Commons.](#)

Director's Column — 2021

By: Professor Hugh Reilly

This has been a very difficult year.

In March 2020, our lives changed. Covid-19 changed the way we taught and interacted as faculty. It transformed the college experience for our students, but it did not alter our passion to provide them with the best education possible.

COVID-19 also coincided with my last year at UNO. While this isn't how I hoped to end my career, there's a finish to everything and a wrapping up that must be done.

I can't believe it has all gone by so quickly. It seems just yesterday I was moving into my office and getting ready to teach my first class. Now, 20 years later, I'm packing up my books, taking the artwork off the walls, and getting ready to say goodbye.

I need to say thank you to all the people who have helped me along the way. To Professors Hugh Cowdin, Warren Francke and Bruce Johansen who served as mentors and provided guidance. To Dr. Deborah Smith-Howell who took a chance and hired me. To Parwin Ibrahimi, Michelle Thies, and Mary Gum who ensured I signed the correct forms and made sure I didn't screw up too badly. To all my brilliant colleagues these past decades with whom I shared laughs, failures, and triumphs and to the hundreds of students who taught me far more than I ever taught them. And of course, to my father, Professor Robert T. Reilly, who shaped me and served as my model for what a professor should be.

This year we hired seven new faculty members. You'll be introduced to each of them later in this magazine. This is part of a continuing evolution in faculty, a reshaping of who we are built upon those who preceded us. In the eight years that I served as Director, we hired fully two-thirds of our current faculty.



Professor Hugh Reilly

A colleague recently asked me what I hope to leave behind as a legacy. I hope that people will remember me kindly, and believe I respected them and wished the best for them. I hope students will believe our faculty made a difference in their lives and their careers. And I hope everyone I had a hand in hiring will remember that no one lives more completely than when they are serving others.

Hugh Reilly



From the Editor: Everyone has a story

By Melodae Morris

The official announcement came on Thursday, March 12, 2020 at 2 p.m. The Coronavirus, now commonly referred to as COVID-19, shut down the University of Nebraska at Omaha campus for an early spring break.

The shutdown postponed or canceled all on- and off-campus university sponsored events that involved more than 20 people through the end of the Spring 2020 semester.

None of us fully predicted the impact that would follow on the entire world.

The pandemic forced the cancellation of many School of Communication events such as the High School Media Conference, breaking a run of over 60 years of annual events. We also canceled the traditional School Awards event recognizing students, alumni and faculty. As COVID-19 continues to spread in our community the cancellations of 2020 extend to 2021.

By March 31, the campus announced that students graduating in May would be recognized through an online streaming ceremony on May 8. At that time, plans called for students to participate in the December 2020 commencement ceremony at Baxter Arena. However, on December 18, the UNO community saw another virtual event for graduation.

We've continued to adapt in 2021 with a new way of operating on the UNO campus. Everyone has a story about the changes in our personal and professional lives--and in some ways--how we view the world.

Some news reports say the COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever with the swift shift away from in-person classroom learning to the adoption of widespread classes fully online, remote or some form of hybrid courses. Students, faculty and their families have adapted.

At the time, students in the spring 2020 Magazine Editing, Design and Production course chose the theme "Adapting through Communication" for the CommUNO 2021 publication, they had no idea how relevant this theme would become this year.

Face masks became a part of daily life and what we all commonly refer to as "PPE" or personal protective equipment. Hand washing, social distancing and "de-densifying" on campus provided the shield to help slow the spread of the virus. And we may never forget the great 2020 toilet paper shortage.

We've protected our seniors, experienced losses, managed our resources and have adapted to living, working and learning differently. At the same time, we became accustomed to home delivery of some of our most basic needs. Platforms and apps such as Zoom and Facetime have enabled us to stay close, stay involved and stay informed, but have also brought fatigue.



Melodae Morris, APR, SHRM-SCP, lecturer, CommUNO editor-in-chief and adviser. Photo by Naomi Yanike

After all we've endured, we're turning the page. On Dec. 14, Sandra Lindsay, an intensive care nurse at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, was the first person inoculated with a COVID-19 vaccine. History made on Dec. 15, 2020.

Closer to home, we're now moving through the process of the grand-scale vaccination of the masses.

In this issue, we compiled a small glimpse of stories reflective of alumni, student and faculty adaptation in the past year. Our students couldn't do in-person interviews or to do typical photo shoots to help tell those stories. Yet again, another way we've adapted.

Yes, everyone has a story to tell. We're all adapting through communication in our own personal ways. In a year mixed with disruptions, struggles, achievements, successes and steps forward, there is hope. In the School of Communication, we're a mighty part of the resilient whole that is UNO.

Melodae Morris

News Briefs

Pickering: new assistant director

■ By Annie Nice

Working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Barbara Pickering, Ph.D. says she truly misses being in her workspace and having her energizing classroom discussions with students more than anything.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha can thank small town Syracuse, Nebraska for leading Pickering to Omaha. In the fall semester, she assumed a new position as assistant director for the School of Communication.

Pickering says adapting to the changes is difficult during an election year. She is very passionate about politics and invites students to be as well.

Before the pandemic, Pickering led several community campus events. These included Debate Watch events hosted on the UNO campus. Unfortunately, the events couldn't take place due to COVID-19. She says her favorite part of doing Debate Watch was hearing focus groups reactions following the debate.

"There's some research that shows when people have the chance to talk about the debates without listening to the political pundits that they can come to agreement on things in ways that might not happen with listening to the commentary afterwards," Pickering says.

Pickering has had the privilege of traveling across the world because of her career. At a point in Pickering's life, she lived in Virginia. Before she



Professor Barbara Pickering, Ph.D., began her duties as assistant director of the School of Communication in fall 2020. Photo by Erin Chance.

moved back to Nebraska, she taught in Virginia and had an opportunity to coach the international debate team in Japan.

Pickering's advice, she says, for new professors is: "Think strategically about what you want to do, have some plan on what your individual goals are. Goals on where you want to be in the university that you're working at are also important to have in the back of your head."

#Omaha2020 talks social media change over the decade

■ By Courtney Klaasmeyer

The School of Communication hosted a conference that opened on Oct. 10, 2010, known as #Omaha 10-10-10.

The conference brought students and professionals together to talk about trends in social media.

Fast forward a decade and Omaha 2020 took place in an all virtual format. The event was held on Oct. 8, but it wasn't quite what was expected 10 years ago. While there were always going to be remote guests doing their talks online, it's not quite the same.

The event was held over a Zoom conference, with everyone channeling in from the comfort of their own homes. Adjusting to the global changes

was a main theme of 2020 and the conference did what was necessary to adapt.

"Going forward with the global pandemic, it's a challenging time for everybody and yet we still have the opportunity to envision a better future," Lipschultz says.

The speakers still focused on social media just like they did in 2010, but with a slightly different view.

"So, you know, fast forward 10 years to today. I think we're more sober about social media, I think we saw the opportunities," Lipschultz says. "I think we're more attune now to the challenges of misinformation, disinformation and manipulation."

The event hosted a multitude of speakers, including State Senator Megan Hunt, Rick Murray who was the keynote speaker of Omaha 101010, Wendy Townley, executive director of the Omaha Public Library Foundation and many more. They covered topics such as social media and social change, higher education in 2020, race, media and information literacy. Social media has changed immensely over the past decade, with new issues being brought to light.

You can view a playlist of all the speakers' videos on the YouTube playlist, #Omaha2020.



Photo by Jeremy Lipschultz, Ph.D.



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee working together to build strong CFAMily

By Anastasia Malysheva

"The best kind of home helps us feel more than just safe, it means we are trusted and supported too," says Herb Thompson.

Thompson, communication studies instructor, serves as co-chair of the College of Communication Fine Arts and Media Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee.

Thompson says he has gained priceless expertise in the field by taking this effort to the masses, working in the nonprofit sector, and teaching at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Thompson sees CFAM as a "CFAMily" where everyone feels at home.

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee formed in the summer of 2019. Since then, the committee has engaged in ensuring an inclusive CFAM climate for all stakeholders – students, faculty and members of the support community.

One of the crucial goals is to make inclusion and equity a priority for the CFAM community.

"The nature of equity requires committed action," Thompson says, "it isn't a default setting for any group."

The DEI Committee includes active and diverse members, each of whom brings a great contribution to the development of the organization. Thompson says that with himself being "mixed" is an advantage.

"Growing up mixed in our age affords a perspective that is valuable, not only in the race dimension of diversity but for overall attention to differences and how they can supplement each other," Thompson says.

The DEI Committee's diverse and dynamic team has ambitious plans for the implementation of its mission. Although any group faces challenges

in the early stages of its growth, he notes that these can be solved by the establishment of a common, close-knit endeavor, which inspires and motivates its members to achieve the DEI's worthy goals. The committee takes pride in enacting the culture of inclusion and equity not only within the CFAM halls but also in the lives of each member of the CFAMily.

"We have plenty of growth, Thompson says, but we are committed to the effort."

For the DEI Committee, commitment is a lifestyle, and Thompson says, "it is self-explanatory, a commitment to diversity is a commitment to differences, and that's what it looks like, to me, in practice."

Anyone can make a difference and contribute to the development of an entire culture, the culture of inclusion, and equity at CFAM.

"Home, it's that place where everyone knows they are an insider, where differences are a strength, not a liability," Thompson says. "Let's do it together and build our strong CFAMily where everyone feels home."



Herb Thompson, instructor, says that promoting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee goal is crucial for a progressive organization. Photo by Erin Chance.

Committee envisions art on the north side of ASH

By Taylor Peak

Part of the renovation of Arts and Sciences Hall features a new art project, says Randall Adkins, Ph.D., senior associate dean of the social sciences and graduate education

Adkins serves as committee liaison between the College of Arts and Sciences and unit of engineers, architects, and construction managers that renovated ASH.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha ASH 1% for Arts Committee has been working on a new project. The state's 1% for Art has produced over \$5 million in artwork within the University of Nebraska system. In fact, a variety of artwork has been showcased throughout Nebraska's state buildings and institutions. according to the Nebraska Arts Council.

With this in mind, Adkins says, the process required an individual who understood the criteria and who had a keen eye for art.

Receiving funds, the ASH building was selected as the upcoming location for the next arts initiative.

"NU Facilities evaluates and scores all buildings to determine how long the mechanical, electrical and plumbing (MEP) have before they need replaced," Adkins says.

Each year, numerous projects are directed once standards are met. For example, buildings must be in suitable locations and have community access. Later, art selection committees are formed to select qualified artists.

"ASH scored higher than other buildings on campus," Adkins says. "The renovation focused primarily on MEP, but there were upgrades to some of the classrooms to improve accessibility.

UNO's 1% for Arts Committee was represented various units within the ASH building.



Randall Adkins, Ph.D. says UNO's 1% for Art Committee decided to focus on the courtyard, which is in front of ASH on the north side. Adkins says the iconic building is important to campus because This anticipated project will beautify the ASH building and attract people to spend more time within it.

Continued on page 9

UNO and UNMC collaborate on augmented realities and art

By Robert Slater

Jack Zerbe, director of the University of Nebraska at Omaha School of Arts, discovered a new way to experience art through the use of augmented environments with the help of iExcel and professors at University of Nebraska Medical Center.

The New Paradigm Media class is the first of its kind and started from an idea, Zerbe says. UNO and UNMC work together using their specialized disciplines.

"I own a watercolor of Central Park that is called 'Poet's Walk' and I thought we need to make a digital 'Poet's Walk,'" Zerbe says. "People need to be able to walk down the walk and talk to the artist and have some entertainment and have this experience."

Christine Allmon, program manager of the augmented and virtual reality at iEXCEL, and Michael Hollins, director of community and business engagement at iEXCEL wanted to do something artistic with their simulation lab.

Zerbe says Allmon and Hollins told him iEXCEL has one of the best holographic theatres in the country with an augmented virtual reality cube. The possibilities needed to be explored.

The Poets Walk was the original idea for this new media but Zerbe says he realized this needs to be in Omaha.

"In the Old Market passageway, there's a gallery called the Garden of the Zodiac," Zerbe says. "I realized this is going to be the lobby of our public art space."

Once these pieces came together, Zerbe says he knew this was the perfect place to start. The next piece of the puzzle was figuring out what to do with it. He figured out that this would be a research location. It's something that has never been studied before. That's how the class was born.

"You have to think like a gamer," Zerbe says. "What happens when you touch something?"

Zerbe says they used a green screen for the first adaptation of exploring the spaces. The students work together to build these spaces to discover a new way to experience the arts.

Kylie Squiers, a student in the School of Communications, is just one of the three students with different majors who are working collaboratively in this class.

"It's really awesome to be in this class with people from different majors working together to create something new," Squiers says.

James Sewing, instructor and director of technology for the College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media, is teaching the students how to work together to create storyboards that will eventually move to 360-degree photography and photogrammetry that will end with augmented reality programming.

"Our main class project is to help recreate the Garden of the Zodiac as a part of the virtual reality project by creating storyboards," Squiers says. "The supporting visual communication media will be used in the following course in the special topics capstone."

Faculty Fellows Subramanian and Weare promote community

By Robert Slater

Two School of Communication professors have taken advantage of the University of Nebraska at Omaha's redesigned faculty fellow program for the 2020-2021 school year.

This allows faculty members to work with Big Ideas or to serve as a liaison to each of the academic colleges to increase community engagement. Roma Subramanian, Ph.D., serves as a faculty fellow for the Ted Kooser Center for Health Humanities. Andrea Weare, Ph.D., works as a Faculty Fellow for the Engaged Scholar Transcript Designation.



Roma Subramanian, Ph.D.

When Subramanian learned of the opportunity, she says she knew it would put her at the intersection of two of her passions: public health and community engagement.

"The number one thing that drew me to it was the opportunity to work across disciplines, across departments, across different fields," Subramanian says. "The innovative ideas come at the intersection of different disciplines."

Subramanian says UNO's tradition and passion for community engagement drew her to the School of Communication. The faculty fellows program allows her to be a part of a collaborative effort.

"Health is a fundamental human right," Subramanian says. "I believe in quality healthcare and it's something everyone should have access to,

but in order to make that possible, you need accurate, understandable and strategic communication about health to understand that right."

Weare, says she wanted to be involved in the faculty fellows program because of her commitment and experience in service-learning.

"I know how to do service-learning, and part of the job of being a fellow is to help others create service-learning classes, or to help students enroll in the engaged scholar transcript designation," Weare says.

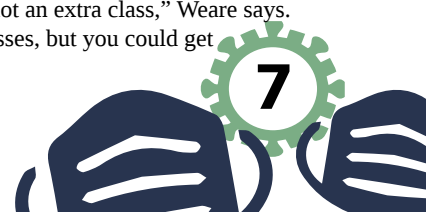
Weare, who also is one of the School of Communication academic advisers, says, the engaged scholar transcript designation helps students "stand out when they go out into the job market."

Part of Weare's work as a faculty fellow until July assists faculty members create service-learning classes. She also helps professors who already work in the community develop their classes as designated as a service-learning course. She says it's important to demonstrate the benefits to both students and faculty.

"My goal is to show students that it's not an extra class," Weare says. "You could already be taking these classes, but you could get it on your transcript so that you stand out or Creighton student in Omaha."



Andrea Weare, Ph.D.



Job Outlook 2020-2021

Spring 2020 Graduates: Compiled by Caitlyn Morrissey

This story chronicles the experience of School of Communication May and December 2020 graduates through the pandemic to post graduation.

Kieran Carter

“The job search is frustrating at times because it feels like you are flipping over a bunch of rocks and just not finding the right one that you hid your key under to unlock the door to your future,” Kieran Carter says. “But there are times where you learn a lot about yourself, how much you are willing to fight to be successful and what you need to do to become a better candidate.”



“Luckily enough, I have learned that I am willing to fight for what I want and that I believe in my own ability and the information and skills that I sharpened at UNO.”

Update: Carter is an inside sales representative at Financial Transmission Network, Inc. **Photo submitted.**

Okina Tran



“To be frank, the job search has been incredibly difficult. I have an Excel sheet that has helped me keep track of the jobs that I’ve applied for,” Tran says. So far, I have applied to 50+ jobs and have seen more rejections than interviews. It’s really hard to not feel pessimistic and mad at the world during this process.”

“Luckily, I’ve stepped back and reflected on some good things that have come out of graduating college during a pandemic.”

Tran says she’s proud of her professional development opportunities such as:

*Made genuine connections with women of color in the advertising industry. *Participated in an agency simulation and case competition as a brand strategist. *Served as a mentor for a rising senior in high school during the quarantine.

Update: Tran is now a junior associate, Weber Shandwick, Washington D.C. **Photo by submitted**

December 2020 Graduates: Compiled by Karissa Madrigal

Caitlyn Morrissey

“I have a full-time job so I am not concerned, but that can change at any moment during a pandemic,” Caitlyn Morrissey says. “I have still been looking at job openings as a backup. I have started to freelance more just to make sure I am financially stable.”

Update: Morrissey is marketing manager for Bike



Masters and a design and production assistant for Arrow Creative Group Marketing. **Photo by Abbey Edwards.**

Katheryn Lopez- Chavez

“I’m concerned about job security as businesses and companies continue to face uncertain socioeconomic conditions during a global pandemic,” says Katheryn Lopez-Chavez says. “It’s stressful to think that even though I may find a job, there’s still a possibility that the COVID-19 pandemic could impact the longevity of that position.”



Update: Lopez-Chavez recently worked as communications advocate at Nebraska Family Planning. She is now a Multicultural Advertising Program internship fellow working as a strategy intern at FIG in New

York City. **Photo by Christian Robles**

Candice Mayfield

“Many soon to be graduates are finding themselves scrambling for their future career-- thankfully, I’m not. I’m very fortunate to have a secure job in my desired field, especially before receiving my degree,” Candice Mayfield says. “However, I know that this pandemic has the ability to change things in a flash, but I also know that I’m confident in my abilities to get through whatever is thrown my way.”



Update: Mayfield is working as a multimedia marketing associated for OMNE Partners. **Photo by Noah Morales.**

Weber helps students gain real life experience in their field

By Ashlee Rowe

Whether it’s for advising meetings or classwork help, Karen Weber, journalism and media communication adviser and lecturer, says she aims to help students be successful in any way she can.

In pre-pandemic semesters, many students walked through Weber’s door. The last two semesters have made this a little more difficult when it comes to helping students find internships. With the global pandemic continuing on throughout the spring and summer semesters, Weber says students had to get creative when trying to find internships.

“Some highly motivated students are looking outside of the Omaha metro and are applying for internships or fellowships in major cities like New York or Washington D.C.,” Weber says.



Karen Weber, lecturer, serves students as internship coordinator. Photo by Sydney Schneider.

Committee envisions art on the north side of ASH—Continued from page 6



Site of the UNO 1% for Arts project in progress slated for the north side of the Arts and Sciences Building.

School of Communication senior sees exciting future for swimming

By Abbie Leonard

Just keep swimming; just keep swimming.

“I could not be more excited for my team, this program and the UNO,” says Sydney Schneider, School of Communication senior.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha is welcoming Men’s Swimming and Diving to its athletic department for the 2021-22 season.

Schneider, from Lincoln, Nebraska, competed in 100-yard and 200-yard butterfly and 100-yard and 200-yard backstroke.

As captain alongside teammate Alyssa Parsons, Schneider has led her team this past season. However, COVID-19 brought challenges.

“This year has been like no other. Having to wear masks while working out in both the gym and outside. Also, having to wear masks diving into the pool and then having to put them on wet afterwards has been hard,” Schneider says.

Additional members of the committee include: Camille Adair, student; David Helm, College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media, sculpture; Brad Mueling, project manager, Melodae Morris, School of Communication, lecturer; Jody Neathery-Castro, Political Science; and Lowell Neuhaus, Facilities and Landscaping.

“You have to have different units in the building and different units on campus represented,” Adkins says.

The project timeline has been affected by issues with the pandemic, but Adkins says he expects completion sometime in 2021.



Senior Sydney Schneider glides through the water as she completes her 100-yard backstroke. Photo by OMavs.

The pandemic meant less bus trips and team bonding. However, Schneider says with all the obstacles from this past year, it has taught her how to be a better leader.

“Although I am graduating and will not be able to be a part of this history making at UNO, Schneider says, “being the only Division I Men’s program in our area is quite the honor.”

High School Media Conference optimistic for 2022

By Sydney Schneider

The School of Communication has hosted the High School Media Conference for over 60 years.

However, the pandemic canceled the 2020 and 2021 events. The conference showcases a media contest in which high school students from Omaha, Council Bluffs and surrounding areas compete in categories of print journalism, ad design and audio and video news and features. The awards were still given to students but were mailed to the schools to distribute.

School of Communication practicum students, graduate teaching assistants and a committee of faculty, including Melodae Morris and Andrew Stem, co-coordinators, plan the event. Morris says they worked on the event planning and the contest from fall 2019 until March when COVID-19 closed the campus.

“It involves a tremendous amount of coordination from many people to make the contest happen, from handling of the entries to judging. Then there is the event planning and logistics, and it is all hands-on deck for the event,” Morris says. We were ready to go with the conference when it was canceled about two weeks before the date.”

Over the summer, Morris and Stem visited with some of the school advisers and decided against doing the contest or conference for 2021 because of the lack of time and resources for the staff and faculty at UNO or at the high schools.

“The School of Communication maintains a commitment to continuing the tradition of the contest and conference in the future,” Morris says. “This is a part of our outreach to the community and helping to prepare future journalism and media communication professionals and we’re optimistic about 2022.”

Features

Students and faculty adapt to COVID-19

By Erin Chance

Gabriela Rodriguez-Reverol never imagined she'd finished her undergraduate career in the midst of a pandemic.

"Looking to the future, I knew that the situation wasn't particularly going to get better," Rodriguez-Reverol says. "So, I can't just leave my education behind. I have to do my best to kind of keep going with it."

A third-year biological systems engineering student, Rodriguez-Reverol, says Sunday through Wednesday were her most stressful days. She used the beginning of her weeks to watch recorded lectures from professors and complete any assignments. Rodriguez-Reverol spent the rest of her week reviewing her assignments and lectures. She had to plan a new routine when the COVID-19 pandemic forced classes to shutdown at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in mid-March 2020.

For students, this meant no close interactions, no gatherings and the use of face masks. COVID-19 hasn't just affected personal lives but professional as well. At UNO classes resumed online March 30 for the rest of the semester.

The spring 2020 semester was Rodriguez-Reverol's last semester at UNO. She says her engineering program has students attend UNO for a minimum of four semesters, and then biological systems engineering students move over to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus.

"So, I did get to experience how UNO handled the whole transition into online," Rodriguez-Reverol says. "But right now, I'm at UNL and so far, most of the classes work very similar to UNO because I have a sister at UNO, and so I can kind of gage some of it."

She says she wanted to stay in school during the pandemic because she built up so much knowledge. However, she found communication was difficult.

"It's so hard to get in touch with some people sometimes because being accessible in these times is kind of hard," Rodriguez-Reverol says.

"It's so hard to get in touch with some people sometimes because being accessible in these times is kind of hard," Rodriguez-Reverol says.

In the fall 2020 semester, the UNO School of Communication Public Speaking Fundamental classes were moved online or made hybrid. Cameron Logsdon, public speaking course coordinator and lecturer, says that they learned it was "quite the undertaking" to try and fit everything from the classroom to an online setting. Course coordinators had to cut some assignments if they didn't translate well online.



Rodriguez-Reverol provides insight on learning during COVID-19.

Even the Speech Center has moved to an open Zoom call for students to join anytime between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Thursday, he says.

"For me, I think the most difficult thing is just losing an opportunity to connect with students in a real face-to-face setting," Logsdon says.

"For me, I think the most difficult thing is just losing an opportunity to connect with students in a real face-to-face setting," Logsdon says.

Logsdon says he is more of an extrovert himself but still points to advantages to online and hybrid learning.

"I think students who are sometimes more reluctant to speak in class or that might be a little quieter, they're given an opportunity online to maybe be a little bit more themselves because they might have a level of comfort in their own homes," Logsdon says.

When students are behind a computer screen, Logsdon can encourage them, he says, "We're getting to hear some voices that we don't, normally."

Virtual learning comes with many obstacles for students such as having a Wi-Fi connection, a computer and a comfortable space to focus on school. Wi-Fi may not be as big of an obstacle as expected as over 85 percent of Americans have access to the internet, according to Statista.

While taking online courses, it's important to have access to your email every day because someone may try to contact you about an assignment or project, Rodriguez-Reverol says.

Logsdon says: "I think the number one positive thing is just that we exist, and we're still doing it and we've adapted. I'm proud of everyone at UNO. I'm proud of the students, the graduate teaching assistants, the faculty and the administrative support we've received to help keep us going. I think that's the biggest win we can take away from all this."

Logsdon says with the faculty and administration at UNO working to ensure students receive the best education they can give; students can be confident in their school and themselves.

Rodriguez-Reverol says the transition from in-person classes to online at UNO was handled well, and she continues to be awestruck by the University of Nebraska's response to COVID-19.

"I'm very impressed with what they've done, like adapting lectures and school into an online setting," Rodriguez-Reverol says.



Cameron Logsdon new Public Speaking and Course Coordinator facilitated the mass move of classroom courses to online and hybrid formats.

Graduate program shows a year of flexibility

By Abby Korinek



Adam Tyma, Ph.D., says that 2020 was difficult but the School of Communication graduate program had positive outcomes. Photo by Randy Mattley.

If there's one fact, Adam Tyma, Ph.D., wants you to know about the University of Nebraska at Omaha School of Communication Graduate Program, he says, it's "We're still here!"

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has changed nearly every aspect of the graduate program, applications are still being accepted and funding

GTAs adjust to new normal in online learning

Braden Rapp, second-year graduate teaching assistant, says balancing moving classes online has been twice as challenging.

In the fall, Rapp was in two graduate-level classes and taught Public Speaking Fundamentals, as well as supervised the Speech Center.

"Leading up to spring break, it was just a lot of gray, as far as what was going to happen," Rapp says, "The biggest challenge now is not teaching face-to-face and not having that interaction, while trying to still foster connections."

As a GTA, Rapp's public speaking course is made up mainly of new or lower-level undergraduate students, so this semester may be their first experience with a college course. Since it's 100% online, Rapp says he is making sure his students know that he is still available.

"We put together a survey for our students," Rapp says, "Just to get a gauge of where everyone's at. We've worked hard to make sure students are still getting consistent updates and that came through on the survey."

Rapp says, while about half the students had never taken a course online before, the class was split when it came to instruction methods. Half said they preferred the online format.

Since he teaches totally online, Rapp spends six to seven hours a day on Zoom, Rapp says. He's pretty tech-savvy, so he hasn't faced many challenges. But being online all day does have its downsides.

"It's really exhausting," Rapp says. "The main thing I've had to work on is making sure I take breaks, getting outside and move around, and all that kind of stuff. Because taking care of my actual body becomes like an after-thought."

is still available, says Tyma, who coordinates the School's Graduate Program.. However, the program is understanding when life gets in the way.

"Grad school is still happening," Tyma says, "But we had three or four (students) who were in the program and they lost their jobs and says, 'I can't do this, I can't do grad school.'"

He says his response is, "That's fine. We'll delay you, not a problem."

With so many unknowns, flexibility has been one of the biggest themes for the graduate program this year.

"We're making sure that faculty who are teaching are still a little understanding with what the expectations are and adapting deadlines," Tyma says, "And with grad school that's tough because there is a little higher expectation."

No matter how difficult 2020 has been, Tyma says that there are a few positives to come out of the negatives.

"We can now make the argument that yes, we can teach our classes online," he says, "We also can make the argument that the synchronous experience is an effective teaching method."



A signature Zoom profile photo shows another way to connect to students. Photo submitted.

"The biggest challenge now is not teaching face-to-face and not having that interaction, while trying to still foster connections."

-Braden Rapp, Graduate Teaching Assistant

Eggenberg transitions to new job during pandemic

By Michaela Farley

Kayla Eggenberg faced the challenge of moving to a new job at the start of the pandemic.

“It’s super weird switching jobs during a pandemic,” Eggenberg says.

Eggenberg had just transitioned to Smith Kroeger in Omaha where she is working as the PR and content strategy director.

Eggenberg is currently works from home a few days a week, but also has the opportunity to go physically into Smith Kroeger to work. The agency follows the COVID-19 safety measures in a “new normal” environment.

Eggenberg graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s School of Communication in 2017 with a Bachelor of Science in Communication, with an emphasis in public relations and advertising. Eggenberg was heavily involved with UNO AD Club, MaverickPR, The Gateway and was the editor of CommUNO magazine.

Heading into her freshman year of college, Eggenberg initially had plans to study news-editorial journalism because she liked the storytelling aspect of communication. Shortly after working as an intern at a local news publication in Omaha, she says she wanted to take a new direction.

“We had speakers come from different advertising agencies in town and Bozell was one of them and I’m pretty sure that’s how I learned about their internship program,” Eggenberg says. “So, I ended up applying first for the copywriting position again kind of going back to ‘I thought I would be a writer’ and I got rejected and then I applied for a second time and came in for an interview for the public relations intern position and ended up getting that one.”

Eggenberg spent her last two semesters of her senior year interning at Bozell and in return, the agency offered her a full-time position where she worked before moving to Smith Kroeger.

“Internships are something that students hear a lot about but I really do think that those things are what kind of led me to where I am today,” Eggenberg says. “And, it helped me figure out, that maybe I didn’t want to be in news-editorial journalism, but I then found my way into marketing and public relations side of things.”

Today, Eggenberg says she doesn’t mind working from home.

“I would say that it would definitely be more fun to be in the office with everyone and kind of a get a better feel for that culture because the people who are working at advertising agencies have such big personalities,” Eggenberg says. “We kind of feed off each other and it adds to the creative environment more but hopefully that will come soon.”

“Internships are something that students hear a lot about but I really do think that those things are what kind of led me to where I am today,” she says.



Kayla Eggenberg says she doesn’t mind staying home and working because she is very productive and self-motivated. Photo submitted.

Eggenberg says that her work involves such tactics as writing news releases, to getting media releases prepared for a launch for a client, working on blog posts, to working on different types of social media content.

Eggenberg says she loves how collaborative her job is in working with people such as creatives and copywriters.

“I’m also working with the client directly so that’s kind of cool to be able to see the real impact that the team has on these businesses,” Eggenberg says.

Her words of advice for college seniors and the newly graduated, is get some form of experience in the communication field. Know the kind of worker you are. Knowing yourself in regards to how you thrive and how you’ll be happiest, is the best when searching for a full-time job.

“I find that if you’re the type of person that gets bored easily or you don’t like doing repetitive things then agency life is probably going to be really exciting and fun for you,” Eggenberg says. “It’s also very busy, and you have to be good at prioritizing and be good under pressure with deadlines.”

As she advances in her career, Eggenberg says she’s still striving to accomplish her goals.

“I would be lying if I said I wasn’t going to be thinking about where I’m going to be growing or what my path is within a certain company and I think that everyone should kind of do that,” Eggenberg says. “I would say that right now I’m very content as the director of public relations, I think I have so much to learn and I’m learning every day.”

UNO Alum's Education Added to his Expertise

By Molly Ashford

For Brian Pickering, APR, adapting through communication has always been the norm.

Pickering, who graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism in 1990, serves as the vice president of marketing at Cobalt Credit Union. His career has made him an expert in many different facets of communications.

"I had an interest in writing, editing and designing publications at an early age," he says, "from working on the newsletter in grade school to the student paper at Omaha Central High School."

Pickering landed a spot on the business staff of the Register, Omaha Central's student-led newspaper, during his senior year. Through this position, he sold advertisements to local businesses to support the production of the paper.

At the start of his time at UNO, Pickering says he had planned to focus on advertising. As he continued through college, though, taking a variety of journalism and public relations classes swayed the direction of his career.

"I decided that was the direction I wanted to go with my career rather than focus strictly on advertising," he says. "I liked the variety offered with a communication focus."



Alumnus Brian Pickering, APR, uses available technologies for meetings and working from home and cites clear and concise communication being even more important during the pandemic. Photo courtesy of strictlybusinessomaha.com

Post-college, Pickering has worked at a myriad of organizations ranging from Madonna Rehabilitation Hospitals to Lutheran Family Services to his current position at Cobalt Credit Union.

"Over the years, I've had the opportunity to learn about and work in many aspects of communication and marketing—including advertising, media relations, public relations, graphic design, community relations, internal communications and product promotion," he says.

At Cobalt, Pickering has taken his skills to new heights with responsibilities like web design, digital marketing and, generally, "anything that falls in the areas of marketing and communications," he says.

In the era of COVID-19, clear and concise communication is perhaps more important than ever before. Above all, Pickering says communication and messaging needs to be "free of jargon, consistent across all communication platforms and delivered in a timely manner" in order to meet the needs of customers and clients. Pickering also uses Zoom and other digital meeting tools as a valuable component of working in the online landscape.

"When my team was working from home during the early months of the pandemic, it was really important to stick to a routine," Pickering says. "It was critical for team morale to connect virtually for staff meetings, brainstorming sessions and whenever we needed input from one another."

Pickering's education at the UNO School of Communication prepared him for a long and successful career in the field. He regards his involvement in the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) as a foundational piece in building his career. He now holds an Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) and has served as the PRSA Nebraska president.

As a manager who has hired many interns, he encourages students to get involved in any way that they can.

"It all counts," he says, including on campus student activities, volunteer roles, internships. The students with well-rounded experiences are the ones with resumes that get my attention first."

Outside of work, Pickering spends most of his time with his family. He and his wife, Amy, have three children, the youngest of which will go off to college next fall. The family hopes to "make up for lost time" in the new year by traveling—ideally to the beach.

"The students with well-rounded experiences are the ones with resumes that get my attention first," Pickering says.





Allison Wakin School of Communication instructor has balanced home life, just like many others, while teaching online. A focus on scheduling has been more intense during the pandemic. L-R: Corrigan (with Polo the puppy), Andrew, Louie and Allison Wakin. Not pictured is the family's newest addition, Ireland Rose, born in April. Photo by August Ivy Photography.

CMST Instructor adapts to online teaching and learning

By Rachel Brader

Allison Wakin has taught communication studies courses at the University of Nebraska at Omaha for years but she says has never experienced a year quite like 2020-21.

"Teaching wise, this year has truly humbled me," Wakin says. "It has reminded me that you don't have to be a perfect teacher, you just have to be there to listen and learn along with your students."

Wakin isn't alone. Instructors from all over the world from Pre-K classes to graduate-level courses had to adapt to teaching fully online in a matter of days due to the COVID-19 pandemic that started in full force in early 2020. The pandemic closed at least 124,000 of America's schools seemingly overnight, according to EdWeek. Wakin also wasn't the only one in her household navigating online learning, her children were as well.

Eight-year-old Corrigan and 4-year-old Louie were right by their mom's side in March adjusting to online school.

"We didn't do anything for a week after UNO closed," Wakin says.

She and her husband, Andrew Wakin, had just adopted a new puppy,

Polo, the day the university and the children's schools had closed.

No one thought the shutdown would last as long as it did, Wakin says, so they bunkered in as a new family of six and waited until spring break.

"Teaching wise, this year has truly humbled me," Wakin says. "It has reminded me that you don't have to be a perfect teacher, you just have to be there to listen and learn along with your students."

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At the outbreak of the pandemic, the campus switched to all virtual learning. The semester would finish out online for everyone, even Louie who was only in Pre-K at the time. Polo, who was going through potty training, would be the only one in the Wakin household learning anything in person.

Wakin says balancing teaching Public Speaking, Small Group Communication, and Thompson Learning Community classes online, as well as monitoring online Pre-K and elementary school for her children was a feat in itself. Wakin's husband works as a nurse practitioner, so there was no option of him working from home. They had to adjust their schedules so someone was always there to be with the children and dogs. It turned their lives upside down in a matter of days.

Taking the stress off early-pandemic was also a challenge for Wakin. A natural extrovert, she says, not being around friends and family as much presented new challenges she had never considered before. The normal part of her life was brought to a standstill. Stress relievers such as her part-time Pilates teaching brought another.



Wakin solved the challenge of part-time Pilates teaching. Outdoor classes have become a stress-reliever. Photo by Andrew Wakin.

However, like many people, she adjusted. It took about a month, and Wakin she was “about to lose my mind” in mid-April. This is when she realized she couldn't just be locked in her house with her children and husband all the time if this was going to be long term.

Time spent with family was over Facetime and Zoom calls with friends becoming a regular occurrence in her life. Wakin and her husband eventually decided it would be OK for their children to socialize with some of the other neighborhood children just so they could get out of the house.

Wakin spent time teaching driveway Pilates now, until it became too cold, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Wakin says it's a nice escape from the children, even though they're just inside the house most of the time. They've learned how to set boundaries in their confined space and don't feel like they're all stepping on each other's toes as much as they were before.

Andrew Wakin is not only very busy at work being in healthcare, but he is also a textbook introvert, Wakin says. This means she has found ways to fill her schedule with activities like socially distanced happy hours with the other moms in her neighborhood, her driveway Pilates classes, and video chatting with friends and family.

All these adjustments didn't come easy, she says. Like many of us, it took trial and error, figuring out what everyone's comfort levels are with socializing, determining how big you can allow your social bubble to be, patience and lots of time. Having a social life looks a lot different for her and her family now, but they have found new ways to stay connected

“As educators, it's our job to adapt to this and find new ways to connect with students,” Wakin says.

With the option of in-person instruction in the fall for both of her children, Wakin and her husband settled into a more normal routine. She says without the craziness of a brand-new puppy, as well as simultaneously adjusting to a global pandemic as an educator with young children, it became easier.

With her classes offered both in-person and online, she now focuses on trying to connect with her students over Zoom and in the classroom. This form of hybrid class is another challenge many educators didn't see coming. Integrating Zoom students with the in-person students has presented its own set of challenges, Wakin says, especially when it comes to connecting with students.

Her goal is to be the students go-to in a time of need when they don't understand a course concept, or just need some guidance.

“As educators, it's our job to adapt to this and find new ways to connect with students,” Wakin says.

Community Engagement

[UNO Social Media Lab](#) students worked during the spring 2020 semester with David City, Pierce, Seward and Valentine, Nebraska on their social media plans, goals, strategies and tactics

Two communities are developing online shopping portals to promote new business. Other tools include use of a weekly newsletter, a new Facebook public group, and new social media sites. The RFI Rural Prosperity Nebraska (RPN) work is designed to spark community engagement across

From the UNO Social Media Lab
February newsletter





For Cameron Logsdon, School of Communication lecturer, he says when life is at its worst, it seems like it's never a bad idea to crack a joke. Photo submitted.

Pause for Laughter: How comedy has shaped Cameron Logsdon's life

By: Jack Hoover

The news is hardly ever funny.

Open a newspaper or flip on a television and you'll see stories about civil unrest, global pandemics, and contentious elections. All of these topics aren't, objectively, not funny.

However, for Cameron Logsdon, University of Nebraska at Omaha lecturer in communication studies, humor can be found in even the darkest of events. Nearly every week on his personal YouTube channel, Logsdon posts "One Minute Monologues" wherein he breaks down the past week's news. These aren't just regular recaps though. These videos are Logsdon's ways of trying to find the humor in the bad.

"Olympic legend Usain Bolt has tested positive for the coronavirus. If it's any consolation, the race for a vaccine just got a whole lot faster," Logsdon quips in one of his videos.

Logsdon is hardly ever afraid to joke around about a serious matter. It's not in his nature, he says. While by day, he might be an erudite professor, by night (and also sometimes by day), Logsdon finds his true passion in comedy.

By looking at Logsdon's resume, it's clear that he has fully immersed himself in the world of comedy. He's done standup shows across the city and the country. He's been the creator of several viral videos online. He's

"The thing that I'm most proud of is that I've been able to have what I think is a diverse experience with comedy," Logsdon says. "So far, comedy has given me a lot of opportunities to do things that I probably wouldn't have gotten to do."

starred in the sketch comedy TV show "Omaha Live!" In 2016, he participated in NBC's "Late Night" writers workshop program.

"The thing that I'm most proud of is that I've been able to have what I think is a diverse experience with comedy," Logsdon says. "So far, comedy has given me a lot of opportunities to do things that I probably wouldn't have gotten to do."

Logsdon is grateful for all the opportunities that he's been given in comedy. However, during his time in high school, he faced challenges. While at Bellevue East High School, Logsdon's life seemed to go in a

Continued on page 17

different direction. During his junior year Logsdon and his girlfriend found themselves expecting a child together. As it goes for most people, impending fatherhood meant a whole new outlook on life, he says.

“By the time I was a senior, I was saying ‘I need to get my life together, I need to try a little harder at things,’” Logsdon says. “I tried to start to focus on school a little more. I started to do speech.”

From this moment of uncertainty, Logsdon says he found clarity. His new role of a teen-father would get him involved in speech and debate. Involvement with speech and debate would launch him into the world of comedy.

Logsdon’s involvement with the Bellevue East speech team was notable enough to warrant an opportunity to compete for UNO’s MavForensics team. While in high school, Logsdon didn’t figure college into his post-graduation plans. After all, no one else in his family had gone to college.

The allure of doing competitive speech proved too powerful for Logsdon. After enrolling at UNO, he found himself thriving. He says speech became an outlet for him to express himself and his feelings. As it turned out, Logsdon was good at this. Good enough to win two national titles for MavForensics.

From that point, Logsdon would only find himself more and more involved with UNO and with speech. After graduation, he accepted a position as a graduate assistant, and a speech coach. Within a few short years, he was a full-time faculty member.

While Logsdon says he enjoys his work and felt rewarded by helping his students grow into better communicators, something still felt like it was missing.

“When I finished [my master’s degree] and I was employed, I was thinking ‘Now I’m coaching, I’m helping people channel their creative activity into something that challenges them,’” Logsdon says. “But what was I doing for me anymore? I wasn’t doing anything!”

Logsdon says comedy became the thing he did for himself. It was a creative outlet, and since doing his first standup session in 2013, he hasn’t looked back, even if he did stumble out the blocks initially.

“[My first stand-up gig] went terrible! It went terribly! But that was the thing I liked most about it,” Logson says. “Stand-up just so happens to be a great equalizer.”

This has proved true in more ways than one. When Logsdon makes his “One Minute Monologues,” he’s not just making a short, funny video for the heck of it. He’s doing it to take a little sting out of the “big, bad” news cycle of the day.

For example, in October of 2020, Logsdon teamed up with local Omaha magazine “The Reader,” to make an informational, yet comical video, about the city of Omaha’s ‘red-lining’ policies. In the video, he cracks jokes about the typically heavy topic of racial segregation. These jokes are a way to call attention to an issue that needs more public awareness.

This video isn’t the first time that Logsdon has tackled such serious topics before with his own type of gravitas. In one other video, Logsdon has used his platform to lampoon local and national politicians, celebrities, and sports stars.

“In the year 2020, sometimes, we need somebody to pitch us something that makes a complex issue fun and digestible,” Logsdon says. “But other times, we need something not to feel like it sucks.”

“[My first stand-up gig] went terrible! It went terribly! But that was the thing I liked most about it.” Logston says. “Stand-up just so happens to be a great equalizer.”



Cameron Logsdon uses comedy to take the sting out of the “big, bad” news cycle each day. Photo submitted.

Truth, transparency and timeliness guides UNMC communication team through chaos

By: Mariah Koeneke

Since January 2020, the University of Nebraska Medical Center has taken all the necessary precautions to keep their employees safe, healthy and employed. Then, in late March 2020, almost all of his staff began working from home.

“Obviously, today I’m sitting here in my office, but there’s one other person actually working in the office today in a group of 20,” says Bill O’Neill, executive director of strategic communications at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Adapting through communication has become even more prevalent during the pandemic, which happens to be changing drastically daily. From in person meetings to daily zoom calls-which can be compromised due to bad internet connections- almost nothing is the same for communication professionals. Despite the challenges of adapting through COVID-19, O’Neill, says he takes each day head on with a positive attitude.

O’Neill graduated from University of Nebraska – Kearney in 1995 with his Bachelor of Science in Journalism. Thanks to his internship at the Kearney Hub, the Friday after his graduation, O’Neill started there as a general assignment reporter. In April 2000, O’Neill moved to Omaha and began his journey at UNMC and his Master of Arts, Communication which he earned in 2011, O’Neill says.

“It was my first choice in part because of the wonderful program and in addition to a tuition break because I worked at UNMC, and the ease at which I could fit the classes into my schedule both professionally and personally.”

Speaking to Bill O’Neill through a Zoom call, he is nearly alone in an office at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. It’s quieter than usual due to almost all of his staff working from home.

Picture the “Brady Bunch” Zoom calls that have become the new normal.

“My day is filled with Zoom meetings now, instead of in-person meetings,” O’Neill says. “We’ve become very versed in Microsoft Teams and shared drives.”

The mental health of people who work from home has become paramount during this pandemic, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website.

“You want to be cognizant of the whole person,” O’Neill says, “You have people with kids at home, and you need to make sure you’re working with them and their mental health, and they aren’t overwhelmed, and you aren’t creating more stress by either piling on a workload or not even listening to what can be done.”

When news started coming from China in January of 2020 about a Coronavirus, the communications team was ready.

“Shortly thereafter, we were pretty involved,” O’Neill says.

UNMC and Nebraska Medicine had professionals involved in crisis communication, the pandemic response teams and the incident command teams. For much of the duration of the pandemic, that person was a Nebraska Medicine employee, actually, over with the Global Center for

Health Security,” O’Neill says, “Early on, I think I counted over a weekend with 10 communication folks on a text string from Nebraska Medicine and UNMC, and we had nearly 212 texts messages just back and forth.”

UNMC is a hotspot for the media, O’Neill says, but with all of the CDC guidelines and precautions, media relations has proved difficult.

“You want to be cognizant of the whole person,” O’Neill says, “You have people with kids at home, and you need to make sure you’re working with them and their mental health, and they aren’t overwhelmed and you aren’t creating more stress by either piling on a workload or not even listening to what can be done.”

“There have been various media requests that were coming our way,” O’Neill says, “various communications that we needed to be on top of with the federal government, state government and city leaders, ensuring that our messaging was consistent and on-point.”

“A lot has changed, and Nebraska Medicine has remained busy and a leading source of information, and a trusted resource for not only the general public and the media, but for government leaders,” O’Neill says. “It’s been fun and challenging but fulfilling professionally.”

Given the severity of the pandemic, technology was also something O’Neill and his team continues to adapt to technology.

“Using technology to our advantage has become much more paramount,” O’Neill says.

Crisis communication is more important now than ever at UNMC and Nebraska Medicine.

“The guiding principles of truth, transparency and timeliness are part of our culture here at UNMC and Nebraska Medicine,” O’Neill says.

With guidelines changing weekly, daily and hourly, O’Neill says he wants to ensure that UNMC and Nebraska Medicine are, “making sure that through all of our communication channels that information is disseminated accurately and properly.”

“I’m grateful at UNMC and Nebraska Medicine that communication is seen as a key ally and component of the overall plan, O’Neill says, “and that we have a seat at the table and can hear information directly as new information is gathered.”

New information is put out every single day that has changed the course of this pandemic. From city-wide quarantines and shelter-in-place



UNO alumnus Bill O'Neill is executive director of strategic communications at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), taking each day head on with a positive attitude. In January, he earned the Professional of the Year Award from Public Relations Society of America Nebraska chapter. Photo submitted.

Truth, transparency—Continued from page 18

orders, everything is changing, and communication plays the biggest role. His job, O'Neill says, his personal life has changed, too. His wife, Jen O'Neill, works at UNMC as a clinical nurse coordinator, and has seen more time off and time at home with him and their three children. Nowadays, there are few, if any, after-school activities.

“Pre-pandemic, we were starting to get back to that, pretty much every night of the week we had an activity or two activities,” O'Neill says. “My wife and I had to worry about flight patterns and who was taking who to which activity and who's picking who up from school. So, I think early on, the pandemic actually provided the, ‘Wow, it's six o'clock

and we don't have anything to do except go on a walk with the family dog, go out in the back yard and play catch.’”

Everything around us is changing, moving and shifting almost daily. Being able learn and adapt is key. “Any young communication professional should know and appreciate that you're going to be a life-long learner,” O'Neill says.

“If this pandemic showed us anything,” he says, “it's that the people who flourish are the people who can adapt and adapt quickly.”





Hayley Jurek, former Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant, graduated in May 2020, remains on campus employed by the STEM TRAIL Center putting her communication skills with graphic design and animation to work. Photo by Naomi Yanike.

Haley Jurek uses communication skills on the STEM TRAIL

By Owen Rush

As an undergraduate and a graduate teaching assistant, Hayley Jurek put her creative skills in graphic design to good use.

Then in the middle of the pandemic, Jurek used her connections in the School of Communication to land a dream job — communication and design specialist for the STEM TRAIL Center.

Jurek earned her communication degree from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2017 and majored in mass media with a concentration in public relations. She says she originally wanted to be a broadcasting major and did not think it fit. Her mom suggested she try public relations and Jurek found the “perfect fit.” During her undergraduate studies, she spent her time in organizations such as the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and in Chi Omega sorority.

She became a graduate teaching assistant for the PR and Advertising Design course where she taught InDesign, Lightroom and Illustrator.

Jurek landed her job in middle of the pandemic when positions were few and far between. She thanks Professor Melodae Morris for helping her find her current job. The STEM TRAIL Center needed a graphic designer to do illustrations and design for lessons about STEM for children

Jurek’s experience designing a book cover for one of her former professors, Hugh Reilly, School of Communication director, validated her skills.

“Now I finally feel like I can say I am going to do my favorite thing every day,” Jurek says.

She started working part-time in the summer and transitioned full-time in September 2020. Half of her time she is spent illustrating booklets for children, and the second half she is spent doing public relations for the STEM TRAIL Center.

Jurek’s passions have always been design and photography, and says she has never thought she would see herself working for a STEM organization. At first, she felt like she did not belong and was almost like an impostor where had doubts in her skills talents and accomplishments. She says now she feels comfortable and has adapted.

“It is not that I am doing STEM, I am supporting this really intelligent person,” Jurek says. “I am almost like their liaison to everyday people.”

Jurek says her experience in design, public relations and communication are instrumental in making STEM easy and accessible to all people. Graphics and illustrations make it easier for people who do not understand STEM and make it fun and enjoyable.

One of the most enjoyable part so her job is working with kids and seeing her growth. A few summers ago, she did an internship at an Easter Seals camp. This experience has been applicable to her new job, coming full circle.

Jurek says she loves to be involved and networking, which is something she has benefited from. Her willingness to be involved has helped her gain experience. She created the sorority recruitment book for UNO’s Collegiate Panhellenic Council, received photograph awards and was the journalism and media communication Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant in 2019.

“I am just doing my best,” Jurek says. I just want to do what I like to do.”

Jurek says she found her support system.

“I have this really strong foundation of people that support me,” he says.

Jurek credits people like her group of best friends who she grew up with, her family and her graduate program cohort of friends. She also credits Professor Morris, whom she considers family.

Jurek says she appreciates the connections she made at UNO.

When the pandemic hit, she says she wasn't sure about her job prospects. As a communications professional, working in the STEM area was not something she initially saw coming.

The advice that Jurek gives is having people to surround you and support you. She says you need people to remind you that when you are feeling down or a bit panicked, you can come out of that and they help you move forward.

CFAM and School of Communication collaborate in Big Ideas

(Portions of this story originally appeared in the October 2020 STEM Trail Center newsletter)

Emily and her friends conducted a chemistry experiment to make “elephant toothpaste.”

Emily is one of several characters being created in animated and print lessons as a part of the [NE STEM 4U](#) program to create and field test new educational experiences as a part of the Nebraska Children's and Families Foundation and Beyond School Bells Expanded Learning Opportunities: Centers of Excellence grant.

The College of Communication Fine Arts and Media, School of Communication is collaborating with [STEM TRAIL Center](#) “Big Ideas” project, including this specific grant surrounding the NE STEM 4U program, which is led by faculty advisers Christine Cutucache, Ph.D., Department of Biology, College of Arts & Sciences; Neal Grandgenett, Ph.D., Department of Teacher Education, College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences; and William Tappich, Ph.D., Department of Biology, College of Arts & Sciences. To-date, the program has welcomed 200 undergraduates and more than 6,000 youth across Nebraska.

Melodae Morris, APR, SHRM-SCP, lecturer in the School of Communication, began collaborating with the team over the summer on ways to develop and promote program materials for the \$30,000 pilot grant project. As a recent graduate from the communication master's program at UNO, Hayley Jurek joined the team with graphic design and photography skills to create a large and engaging cast of characters, including Emily and her elephant toothpaste, to bring materials and existing program lessons to life.

“The School of Communication has a long and successful history of working with its UNO colleagues on cross-departmental projects,” says Hugh Reilly, professor and director, School of Communication. “We are delighted to be able to participate in projects with the STEM TRAIL Center Big Ideas project and the Beyond School Bells grant.”

Specifically, this grant aims to help the team brainstorm innovative ways to expand the reach of NE STEM 4U using digital materials and novel content delivery approaches. First, it moves lesson designs into a web format and downloadable book format, using engaging best practices including interesting activities, marketing, public relations and graphics to fully engage all learners while making them accommodating and accessible.



This is one example of the lesson booklet covers that Hayley Jurek designed.

Another aim is to generate an innovative model for “STEMware,” for a mailed box-delivery system available for monthly or bi-weekly delivery to serve students without internet access and those in rural locations.

Further, these science kits will enhance learning experiences for youth in after-school, in-summer programs, and at home with their families via hands-on experiments and online guided learning (“STEM Kits”).

“The NE STEM 4U program was created more than eight years ago now and our long-term dedication to this program and supporting students remains steadfast. We aim to provide STEM learning for all students during their childhood, and then welcome them to UNO for their formative years to embed them into experiential learning opportunities and take them through an exceptional education, Cutucache says.

The NE STEM 4U program seeks partners for resources and specialized skills like CFAM, which already has a history of collaborating with other organizations.

“We are pleased that our faculty and graduates can apply their skills to collaborative projects such as NE STEM 4U, supporting students in our communities, who are the STEM- educated professionals of the future,” says Michael Hilt, Ph.D., Dean, College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media.

New Faculty

Bedsole brings passion for culture to teaching

By Robert Slater

Despite the uncertain times brought on by COVID-19, Nathan Bedsole remains optimistic about the future as Omaha becomes his adopted home.

One of the new faces on the School of Communication faculty this fall, Bedsole began his career at the University of Nebraska at Omaha teaching communication studies courses.

Growing up in North Carolina and completing his doctoral studies at the University of Colorado, Bedsole had never been to Omaha before interviewing at UNO.

Bedsole says he has heard “great things about Omaha,” but COVID-19 has put a damper on exploring the city. He’s looking forward to experiencing all the arts and culture that Omaha brings.

While attending school in North Carolina, Bedsole worked at a music venue/arts/culture hub/café and loved it. He says he discovered his love of culture and his passion for music.

“It was such an amazing time where riding your bike to work and smelling like coffee was the cool thing to do,” Bedsole says. “I played in bands, worked in a café and just did young person stuff.”

After earning his bachelor’s and master of arts in communication from Wake Forest in Winston Salem, North Carolina, Bedsole began his doctoral studies in the field of rhetoric and culture.

He describes rhetoric as shaping our reality through communication. He doesn’t think great communication will make you a better person, but he says it does make a person better at sharing the world with multiple different people across different cultures.

Bedsole taught communication courses at the University of Colorado while working on his doctorate. Like most professors, he’s worked hard to adapt to the teaching challenges of virtual learning during the pandemic.

“I think the bulk of the labor is not going to be in teaching my expertise, grading or lecturing, it’s going to be organizational prowess,” Bedsole says. “This is going to be defining a chapter for what the next decades are going to look like.”



New to Omaha and to UNO, Nathan Bedsole enjoys experiencing more of the city. Photo submitted.

UNO instructor brings relatability and love of communication studies to the classroom

By Haley Leigh



Amy Jo Ellefson brings an international experience to share with students. Photo by University Communications.

As a first-generation, nontraditional college student, Amy Jo Ellefson brings a familiar story to her School of Communication course at University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Before her time as a communications studies instructor, Ellefson lived on a college campus in China, spent time managing social media for Opera Omaha, served as a barista at Starbucks and worked in retail at Nebraska Furniture Mart.

Ellefson shares experiences relatably to many nontraditional students.

“I had kids, I had a career, I had all of those things. I went back to school to finish my bachelor’s degree,” Ellefson says. “Not everybody gets it right the first time, and I definitely did not.”

She also had the opportunity to live abroad in China on a college campus while she was researching and giving guest lectures. She offers some advice for anyone considering travel or study abroad:

“If you have the opportunity to travel, take it. Take it. Don’t worry about other things, your life can pause, even if it needs to pause for six months, Ellefson says. “Take it. It’s unlike anything else.”

Ellefson also relates to the anxieties and family difficulties behind going to college. When she graduated high school to go to college, her family questioned her decision, and she faced the pressure of going into the workforce right away to find a job.

“As a young person you, know you need to go to college,” Ellefson says, “and I have that shared experience.”

Continued on page 23

Ellefson received a bachelor's degree in health care administration and master's degree in communication studies at Bellevue University. She also received a master's degree in east-west studies from Creighton University and is working on her dissertation for a doctorate in communication studies from the University of Southern Mississippi.

Ellefson teaches Fundamentals of Public Speaking but says she hopes to teach courses in gender communication and family communication someday.

"Gender is my area of specialization," she says. "Gender, family, and

conflict is my other passion."

Ellefson is especially passionate about conducting research on issues impacting the transgender community. She has a personal connection because she has loved ones in her life who are transgender. Ellefson says she resonates with the experience of a parent or family member to trans people.

As a new full-time faculty member this year, Ellefson says her expectations are always evolving due to the uncertainty of COVID-19

Lei Guo says she's always up for a new challenge

By Kieran Carter

Moving to a new city and starting a new job is a daunting task without a pandemic to complicate life further.

Lei Guo, Ph.D., took on this challenge in August 2020 as she joined the School of Communication faculty as an assistant professor. Guo says her life experiences leading up to this move prepared her well for any new challenges.

Guo says she first entered academia in Beijing, China when she attended the China Agriculture University to earn her bachelor's degree in rural communication. From there, the quest for more knowledge led Guo to Hong Kong where she expanded on her education, earning a master's degree in journalism and mass communication from the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

While most future professors would then chase their doctoral degree right away, Guo says she dove into the professional world of journalism. She worked as a political reporter and editor for multiple publications for five years in Hong Kong, focusing on Chinese politics and the effects of political news on the audience. This professional experience played a key part in her return to academia.

"Because I was a front-line reporter in Hong Kong, I have a lot of different connections to the industry," Guo says. "This is why I can invite some guest speakers who are front line reporters to speak to my students."

Guo earned a master's degree in philosophy and communication and then moved to the U.S. to begin doctoral studies at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. After achieving her doctorate, Guo joined the Maverick family.

In the fall, Guo taught three online classes: Media Writing, Electronic News Writing and the Journalism and Creative Media Capstone. The pandemic limited her options to teach in-person but she says she met the challenge head-on.



Lei Guo, Ph.D., joined the School of Communication in the fall and met the challenge of the pandemic head on. Photo by University Communications.

"The coronavirus has really interrupted my teaching style. So, I needed to think about strategies to engage students." Guo says, "I have read a lot of good journal articles on how to engage with students over Zoom."

While adapting to the reality of teaching students during a pandemic, Guo says she saw a unique opportunity for research. The time spent in a socially distanced world allowed for many deep dives on interesting ideas and even helped complete her dissertation.

"I spent four months just focused on my dissertation, with no one really interrupting me." Guo says, "You could think about lots of great research questions and ideas, like how the effect of the pandemic on people's daily lives and communication in the future."



Graham says he's a Maverick through and through

By Kieran Carter

Returning to the place where you started is sometimes bittersweet or emotional for Trae Madero Graham.

A return to the University of Nebraska at Omaha is not only a return to campus, but a return to the family who helped shape him.

Graham earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees from the School of Communication. From there, he spent time in South Africa with his wife before deciding to return to the familiarity of Omaha. When Graham returned to the U.S., it was only fitting he took a job at UNO as an admissions representative.

"It helped me understand UNO in all different facets," Graham says. "It helped me get kids into school, it helped me further my communicative abilities."

After his two-year stint in the admission's office, Graham spent a year away from UNO to broaden his life experiences. Though it was a short time, Graham says he values the growth he made as a communicator and as a person. This fall, Graham joined the School as a communication studies instructor and assistant director of [MavForensics](#), UNO's competitive speech team. He is also teaching courses such as Argumentation and Debate and Public Speaking Fundamentals.

"I try to be very engaging and fun, while also helping them understand the material because I know what it was like in those classes," Graham says.

Putting this philosophy into practice is even more important with the emphasis on digital teaching. Graham says he works hard to find ways



Trae Madero Graham says he uses his experience as a student to make classes enjoyable for all his students. Photo by Cameron Logsdon.

to make every interaction engaging and more than just a simple answer to a question.

His philosophy does not stop at just engaging students in the classroom, but also connecting students to key resources like multicultural services throughout the university. These resources can be key avenues for students to cope with the daily grind of college and the world as a whole.

"I want to help my students get connected with those spaces," Graham says. "That way, if they ever feel frustrated with what's going on in the world, or want to learn more information or just talk to someone who is like them, I want to give them that resource."

Storck uses personal experience to navigate teaching during a pandemic

By Caitlyn Morrissey



Katie Storck says she hopes her students take what they have learned in her classes and apply them to their lives. Photo submitted.

Katie Storck uses her expertise in interpersonal communication to transition to online learning.

When the pandemic threw the world into chaos, Storck had to rethink the structure of her courses. Like so many teachers, she needed to adapt her three online classes.

Her public speaking expertise lends itself well to empathizing with the students, Storck says. She understands the changes COVID-19 has brought to learning firsthand she finished her doctoral studies at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln.

She has utilized her skills both personally and professionally. Storck

says she has learned to be present in the situation and aware of the world and others around her. This has helped her to be sensitive to the community.

The goal is to reduce the uncertainty from last spring's abrupt conversion to virtual learning.

Storck says: "I have taught online before and I'm teaching online again and I think if you have that approach from the beginning you are able to do a lot of that organizational work on the front end. That makes the course online run really smooth."

Her class, Fundamentals of Public Speaking, also gives her a forum to not just teach 'theory,' but to help her students put into practice what they are learning.

"Regardless of where my students are coming from within the university, I know that there are things from this course that they will be able to take out and apply to their lives," Storck says. "Even if it won't be in your job now maybe it's in your relationship maybe it's with your family maybe it's as the CEO of a company in 40 years. However, you use these skills they're there and they're practical."

Storck says she has a great support network of faculty to rely on to help her transition not only to online learning but to the UNO campus life. In addition to an online faculty orientation, she has peers within the faculty who are already experienced developing online courses she can reach out to for ideas.

Throughout the pandemic, Storck has prepared herself for additional changes as everything is subject to change at any moment.

"There isn't necessarily a ton of certainty, but there is a ton of support," Storck says.

Andrew Stem works hard to make virtual connections with students

By Rachel Polanco

Andrew Stem admits he would much rather teach his classes in the School of Communication in person. But he works diligently to make virtual learning the best it can be for his students.

“I don’t like it nearly as much,” Stem says. “You know, it’s really hard to make your personality shine through as much in an online course as it is in person.”

Stem began teaching full-time at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in the fall of 2019 in a temporary line. In 2020, he joined the faculty in a permanent instructor line and teaches Media Writing Lab, Information Literacy and Internship Career Prep.

For Stem, the transition from in-person to online teaching was not as difficult as it was for other faculty members because he had experience teaching online courses.

Media Writing proved the most time consuming when making the conversion to virtual learning. Having the support of other faculty members teaching the class was helpful, Stem says.

Stem says the Media Writing class was the most work-intensive one. Converting it was a slight challenge but with help from a few other faculty members, they came up with a solid plan for the future.

Virtual learning can take place in real time when the class normally meets or it can be through self-paced instruction. Stem says he prefers

to let students work at their own pace. He records lectures, updates assignments and uploads PowerPoint slides to allow students that freedom.

In his recorded lectures, he provides students with the additional “tips, bits and nuggets” they may not pick up in the PowerPoints alone.

“I also try to be as available as possible through email,” Stem says. “I’m one of those people who gets push notifications to my phone.”

For students who had never had the online experience, Stem says he hopes last spring and fall semesters helped “get their feet wet.”

“You know the situation dictates that’s what’s safest for everybody so we’re going to do what we can to keep everybody safe and still get them through,” Stem says. “Then, hopefully, we can return to ‘normal’ sooner rather than later.”



Andrew Stem uses tools such as the discussion board to help students with questions. Photo by University Communications.

Lisa German brings her expertise to the communications program

By Eddie Okosi

Lisa German returned to Omaha after a 10-year stint in New Mexico.

“When I saw a chance to come back to UNO,” German says. “I was super excited about that.”

German is back at the school she knows and loves, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, teaching communication studies courses.

German knew it was time to come back to Omaha, after she started a doctoral program with a focus on health communication. So, when she saw an opening in the School of Communication at UNO, she went through the job qualifications process. German says it was such a whirlwind process, as everything happened so fast. But now, she’s happy to teach at the same school she attended as a student.

“It is interesting having been at UNO before, being somewhere else for 10 years, and coming back and incorporating both experiences together,” German says.

Before German started UNO years ago, she was an undergrad at The University of Nebraska-Lincoln for two years. She became a teaching assistant and through that, she helped teach public speaking and worked individually with students.

“When I got to the master’s program and started having my training as a graduate assistant, I started getting interested in that and how I could help students be better at public speaking,” German says.

After two years in Lincoln, German moved back to Omaha for family-related reasons, so she finished her program at UNO. German says she felt so welcomed and supported, especially in the School of Communication. She loved that her teachers knew her, and she got to know them as well.

German primarily teaches Fundamentals of Public Speaking where she brings her experience in instructional communication apprehension into the classroom.

“I love creating and coming up with new ideas,” German says, “and for me, each semester I look at what went well, and what I think could have gone better.”

German says she plans to explore the stigmas surrounding mental health, the aspects that people don’t want to talk about when it comes to mental health and how to become more of an advocate through public speaking. German says she believes in using her talents for good, to make a difference in her chosen work.

“We are all human,” she says.



As Lisa German forges her new path at UNO, she plans to help develop and grow the public speaking program. Photo submitted.

Retirements

Reilly follows his father's footsteps and completes his academic journey

By Ashanti Allen

Affecting people's life in a positive way is what Professor Hugh Reilly says he likes about teaching.

"Life is so much richer if you are able to contribute to other people," Reilly says.

Reilly has experienced a long successful career as a teacher and the director of School of Communication at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and retired at the end of the spring 2021 semester.

Reilly's path to teaching was really an accident, he says. "I was working for Boys Town, and I was traveling around doing leadership training, and I was reading this magazine, and I always thought that to get a master's degree it is equivalent to getting an MBA."

Reilly says he knew he didn't have any interest in an MBA. Then he read an article about how you get a master's degree in other fields such as communication.

"I thought that is an interesting idea," he says.

Reilly started taking graduate classes at UNO, and he liked it. He started teaching a class, and he liked that, too.

"It's such a great fit. Everything I've done in my life has led up to this point, and all my experience prepared me to do this job," Reilly says. "I loved it from the beginning and I've never looked back."

Reilly has been working at UNO since 1999 and became a full-time assistant professor in 2001. Before working at UNO, Reilly worked in several different media jobs. He had worked for newspapers in Nebraska and in Colorado, and for cable television stations in Washington DC, Denver and Chicago. He also worked for a film studio in Tucson, as a copywriter.

Reilly served as director of the School of Communication for seven years. He says it's been a challenging time being responsible for



After teaching at UNO since 1999 and being director of the School of Communication for seven years, Professor Hugh Reilly is retiring. Photo by Randy Mattley.

two-thirds of the faculty is not easy. In the last five years, 15 to 20 people have been hired in the School of Communication.

"Whatever legacy I leave behind me will be the people who I had a hand in hiring, that will shape the school for years to come," Reilly says. "That's been the most challenging thing probably, just trying to make sure that we hire the best possible people."

Reilly has written several books, starting with a marketing handbook he wrote under contract for the United States Air Force. Then, he wrote several historical books about Boys Town, and a biography of Father Flanagan, the founder of Boys Town. His most recent book is "Drinking with my Father's Ghost." It combines his own research on Irish pub culture with a project his father started in 1980. Reilly found his father, Robert Reilly's project after his death. His father taught classes at UNO from 1972 to 1987.

After he retires, Reilly hopes to write more and get his health situation in control, so he can travel internationally. He says that his family will be happy for him to get away from the stress. After 20 years of being a teacher, Reilly wants his legacy to be what he did for others.

"I hope that when I'll be remembered; people would say he was a good guy," he says. "He was kind. He cared about the students. He cared about their success. He cared about his family. He cared about the world."

COVID-19 drives instructor to make a change

By Ashanti Allen



Janet Raddish retired in the fall.

COVID-19 has displaced a lot of people, and one person, in particular, is has hung up her teaching job.

Omaha native Janet Radidsh received her bachelor's and master's degree from the University Nebraska at Omaha. She majored in journalism and speech communication. Even while studying she was thinking of ways that her degree could be useful, she says. Raddish retired from teaching in the School of Communication Studies in the fall 2020.

Raddish's journalist experience began as a teenager. Radish wrote her own column in the South Omaha Sun newspaper.

After graduating from UNO, Raddish wanted to teach but there weren't any positions available, so she took a job at the Bellevue Leader as a news reporter for six months when a position came available in the Omaha Public School District. Raddish worked at both Omaha Northwest High School and Omaha Bryan High School as a journalism teacher for 22 years before retiring the first time. Then she began teaching as an adjunct for seven years before accepting a full time position last year teaching Speech Communication and Public Speaking Fundamentals.

Raddish made the decision to retire, yet again, when COVID-19 hit and classes moved to totally online. Raddish says "she enjoys the face-to-face learning," and if she couldn't see her students in-person in a classroom setting, then that was the time to retire for good.

Awards and Scholarships

School of Communication scholarship recipients

Scholarships and awards are presented to outstanding students, alumni and communication professionals at the annual awards reception in April to celebrate accomplishments of students and faculty during the past year. Because of this time of adapting, the awards were presented in a virtual celebration.

Hartman Memorial Journalism Talent Scholarship

Abigail Russman

Hugh P. & Juliette L. Cowdin Communication Scholarship

Joey Gruber

Joe Henry Baker Memorial Scholarship

Hannah Rodrick

Kim Jones Passion Scholarship

Jadyn Andersen, Rose McCaffrey

Marcus Family Scholarship

Patrick Caveye

O.P.C. Judy Horan Scholarship

Diana Muñoz

O.P.C. Floyd Kalber Scholarship

Cristian Robles

O.P.C. John Davis Scholarship

Liz Rollin

O.P.C. NBA Scholarship

Ana Bellinghausen

O.P.C. Panko-Roberts/President's Memorial Scholarship

Ana Bellinghausen

O.P.C. Paul N. Williams Scholarship

Molly Ashford

Paul & Fern Borge Communications Scholarship

Jackson Hardin, Hayley Jannenga

Public Relations Society of America Nebraska

Taylor Shipley

Raf Czarnecki Legacy Scholarship

Alexis Schulte

Sue Francke Memorial Scholarship

Diana Muñoz

Virginia Allen McIntire Scholarship

Madison Bonin, Geiler Damian, Angela Gahan,
Kaylea Kuhlman, Taylor Peak

JMC Top Student Award and graduate: Katheryn Lopez-Chavez

By Britney Bearfield

If there was a limit to a students' involvement and academic success, Katheryn Lopez-Chavez might surpass that limit.

Originally from Columbus, Nebraska and born from Mexican immigrant parents, Lopez-Chavez says she came specifically to Omaha for college and graduated in December 2020 with a bachelor's degree in communication.

"I thoroughly enjoyed coming to Omaha," she says with a smile, "I was seeking to expand my horizons upon high school graduation, so I visited UNO and instantly knew that this is the school I wanted to go to."

During her time at UNO, she has been involved with Public Relations Student Society of America, MaverickPR and The Gateway newspaper. She is also the recipient of the JMC Top Student Award.

Lopez-Chavez says she was taken back by the email she received as the JMC Top Student especially during the times of the pandemic. She says, "it felt really rewarding" to receive such an award.

"I felt like all of the sacrifices I've made, all of the hours I put in, all the time and energy has finally paid off," Lopez-Chavez says.

A lot of her academic success is dedicated to her loved ones and to her involvement in school organizations where she gained hands-on experiences to be the best professional she can be.

"Being involved in school organizations was huge for not only my professional development but for my own personal growth," she says.

As the first person in her family to earn a college degree she shares her accomplishments with her loved ones and the people who have supported her throughout her journey in school.

Lopez-Chavez says she plans on gaining more professional experience and would like to eventually take her talents outside of Omaha.

"One of my ultimate career goals is to have the experience of working in an advertising agency because after my time at Maverick PR I really enjoyed that agency rhythm and project management."



Katheryn Lopez-Chavez is a Multicultural Advertising Internship (MAIP) Fellow and strategy intern at FIG in New York City. Photo by Kylie Squiers.

William Kunkle garners communication studies top award

By Britney Bearfield

William Kunkle says he has always been involved with speech and debate since his freshman year of high school.



William Kunkle, transferred to the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2019 and plans to attend law school post-graduation. Photo submitted.

Kunkle graduated in 2017 from Schurr High School in Montebello, California. He attended East Los Angeles Community College before transferring his talents to the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2019.

During his time at community college and involvement in speech and debate, Kunkle developed connections with Abbie Syrek, a communications lecturer at UNO. This led to him being recruited by the MavForensics team.

"They had seen me compete in California and the director of forensics at the time, Abbie Syrek, reached out to me advertising UNO," Kunkle says. "I fell in love with the team and what the environment here looked like, so I transferred over as a communication studies major."

Kunkle is finishing his degree in communication studies and graduated in May 2021. He is also the recipient of the CMST Top Student Award.

While attending community college at UNO, academics started feeling "a lot more important," Kunkle says.

"To go from a place of indecision and a place of lack of care for what I was involved into being awarded the CMST Top Student really means a lot," Kunkle says.

"It also came at a really good time because during winter break my father had passed away from COVID-19, so I entered the spring semester very disheartened and unmotivated to work," he says.

Even though he recently lost someone very close to him, Kunkle says he continues to stay with academics and involvement in school. He is primarily involved in the speech team, MavForensics, and works for the Nebraska Center for Justice Research in the College of Public Affairs and Community Service.

Kunkle says his "ultra-dream job" is to be a Supreme Court justice one day. Post-graduation, Kunkle plans to attend law school where he hopes to achieve the same level of academic excellence as Supreme Court Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor and the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

"I'm currently applying to law schools right now, so after graduation, I hope to attend law school," Kunkle says. "I would hope to get into Stanford Law School, that would be nice."

Outstanding Graduate Assistant shows a passion for learning

By Melodae Morris, APR, SHPR

Braden Rapp says he appreciates the opportunity to teach and supervise students through his work as a GTA.

“I hold quite a bit of gratitude in my heart for the experiences I’ve had as a GTA—this award speaks to the value of those experiences,” Rapp says.

Rapp is the 2021 Outstanding Graduate Assistant voted on by the School of Communication graduate program faculty. He says he was surprised and honored by the award.

“My time in this program has been a bit of a roller coaster, to be honest,” he says.

From the Public S peeking program overhauls to the pandemic, this time provided him opportunities to talk about new pedagogical practices with those on the front lines of teaching.

“Hopefully, the next generation benefits from the ideas and strategies born of these conversations,” Rapp says.

In addition to teaching, Rapp was given additional duties as the School of Communication speech center supervisor, overseeing other graduate teaching assistants who also provide supplemental support to students. When the pandemic hit in March 2020, students visit began visiting the virtual Zoom room and to the GTA on duty for extra support and advice on crafting their speeches. Rapp says that often this is simply a space for encouragement and confidence-building.



These have been strange times in which to be part of the program and to teach within it, Braden Rapp says but the “strange times” have afforded him opportunities he never could have foreseen. Photo submitted.

About the Speech Center

The Basic Course Room is an open lab available to current CMST 1110 students, and is open using Zoom Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. This is a free service offered by UNO. All students need to do to get help from a Public Speaking Instructor is to access Zoom and join the meeting any time.

-Source: [UNO Speech Center](#)

Outstanding Graduate Student dedicated to lifelong learning

By Melodae Morris, APR, SPHR

Cris Hay-Merchant, APR, is a lifelong learner and she set her sights on a master of arts in communication.



Cris Hay-Merchant says she has a serious commitment to her profession. Receiving this award is an honor she says. Photo by Angel Stottle.

“Although, I have not yet completed my thesis, my graduate work has already helped me, she says.

“It has demonstrated to work colleagues and bosses that I am serious and committed to excellence in my professional field.”

Her thesis work, she says, will focus on how adult siblings manage privacy in social media settings.

Hay-Merchant served as director of Strategic Communications for Bellevue University for four years. And she recently earned the University of Nebraska at Omaha, School of Communication. 2021 Outstanding Graduate Student.

“It’s not so much about me personally but recognizing the importance of graduate education, where a person is able to specialize and dive deep into a discipline that is important to them and valuable in the world today,” she says.

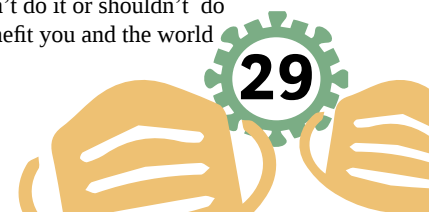
Full-time working professionals going back to school on a part-time basis for graduate school often becomes somewhat “slow and steady,” she says. However, Hay-Merchant has found the process of seeing her own research and analysis skills improve over the course of the program. Each graduate student is often motivated differently in pursuit of an advanced degree.

“I have significant practical work experience and as my career progressed,” she says of her motivation. “I wanted to make sure that I had equally appropriate theoretical and academic preparation and credentials.

Hay-Merchant credits her success to the “enthusiastic and unfailing support” of her husband. “He is my biggest fan and has cheered me on every semester, she says.

She also gives thanks to her graduate studies adviser, Adam Tyma, Ph.D. along with “all of the faculty in the School of Communication,” for their support throughout her graduate education journey. Hay-Merchant offered advice for those considering pursuing a graduate degree.

“Don’t think of all the reasons you can’t do it or shouldn’t do it,” she says. “Think of how it will benefit you and the world around you.”



Outstanding Graduate Thesis spotlight:

How society can affect the political lens of children

By Eddie Okosi



Through Allegra Hardin's research, she thoroughly observed the aspect of political socialization.

Allegra Hardin took the opportunity to observe politics in the past decade from a specific point of view — children. Hardin has been selected as the 2020 Outstanding Thesis Award recipient. Hardin titled her research, “Trump toys for tots., cultural identification, and MAGA building blocks.” The research primarily focuses on how a conservative toy company condensed political agendas to appeal to children.

“In 2018, around the mid-term elections, there was a conservative toy company, and they had these new toys that they had created for children ages 5 and up,” Hardin says. “They are similar to Lego blocks, but they were called MAGA building blocks.”

Hardin says the set was offensive as some of the characters were racists towards Latin American immigrants.

Hardin says the ordeal is terrifying. But she says, it was fascinating to her because at the time these immigration policies Trump campaigned

on in 2016 were now taking shape and immortalized in these children's toys.

“I am one of those people who picks research topics that got me very angry or very happy, Hardin says. “it's because that helps fuel my research.”

“It was really interesting to look at and see what kind of stories and narratives these toys we're creating,” Hardin says.

In response to critics, Hardin says, “Some people go, ‘it's just all stuff that you made up because it's your thoughts.’

However, she says, they are educated thoughts.

Hardin says she observed the thesis through the lens of Stuart Hall who talks about cultural identity and how it can be established through playing with the toys.

“When we talk about methods to analyze an artifact,” Hardin says, “it's a little different than a quantitative research paper.”

She says she is using a particular method to analyze what is being communicated from the toy.

The winning thesis is simple, “When we talk about something like political socialization or how you develop what you believe in politically. Hardin says, “It starts at a young age.” It's critical to examine what society's influence is in that.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Graduate school....UNO's School of Communication offers a Master of Arts degree emphasizing a broad theoretical knowledge of speech and mass communication. Graduate students achieve in-depth understanding of communication processes and effects, acquiring the skills needed to conduct original research and grow professionally.

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Student Organizations

Brownlee creates normalcy remotely

By Grace Bellinghausen



Jodeane Brownlee, lecturer, applied her own learning of best-practices in hybrid and online learning to prepare her classes during the pandemic. Photo submitted.

Jodeane Brownlee, like many other School of Communication faculty members, had to change her class structures from the bottom up after COVID-19 closed the campus.

Since lock down began in mid-March, all University of Nebraska at Omaha classes converted to virtual learning for the remainder of the spring semester. While the 2020-21 academic year allowed the return of some in-person classes, most instructors taught in hybrid, remote or totally online. This forced professors to plan a more permanent transition to teaching online.

At first, Brownlee says she was terrified. She didn't mind being behind a microphone and camera and meeting new people. But teaching virtually was a far cry from the in-person help and support she typically provides to students daily when the campus is open.

Brownlee, faculty adviser for MavRadio and the Women in Media Club, teaches journalism and media communication courses in the creative media concentration. Many faculty members were unsure how to continue making classes interactive for students and more "human."

"I opted to learn more about hybrid teaching to prepare for online," Brownlee says. "We took a class called humanizing online teaching which lasted three weeks, and additional six weeks of training."

Much of the content Brownlee learned, she applied to the classes she teaches, especially Radio I and II.

Dividing classes into breakout rooms, utilizing groups and group documents and allowing students to associate with each other the best and safest way possible.

Brownlee says she'll continue to learn new ways of teaching and embracing Zoom in the future, but looks forward to going back to classes safely face to face as soon as possible.

"Some students have UNO as their safe place, and don't have that kind of peace at home, campus provides a sort of oasis from chaos that I'm sure they miss that support, I miss it also."

MavRadio/TV stay connected from a distance

By Grace Bellinghausen

Communication student clubs like MavRadio and MavDigital Network have been a hub for students to create and collaborate with their peers.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, students and team members alike have adjusted while working virtually. Both organizations continue to overcome these challenges, as the pandemic continues.

The groups have socially distanced anchors, virtual interviews and new studio guidelines to keep both staff and students safe.

"We can't have in-studio interviews, but with everything online we've gotten savvy and conducted our interviews via zoom," says Ana Bellinghausen, MavRadio sports director.

Members of both organizations have not shied away from hitting the reporting field socially distanced or covering stories of how the pandemic has affected sports and beyond.

On top of facing the challenges of COVID-19 cancellations, spring sports were pushed to fall requiring reporters to cover both spring and fall sports simultaneously.

"This year, we lost a lot of great talent but have also seen people take leadership roles and do great," Bellinghausen says. "We need all the manpower we can get."



MavRadio students continued to cover stories socially distanced during the pandemic. Front row L to R: Anna Bellinghausen, Danny Bolanos, Chance Oliver, Shane Thomas, Corey Osborne, Joey Colbert, Jacob Thimjon, Aaron Thomas. Back row L to R: David Festner, Jack McGonigal, Ethan Wolbach, Matt Kirkle, Alex Dewerth, Drew Petersen and Bill Pickett (photo bombing). Photo by Jodeane Brownlee.

Listen at: <http://www.mavradio.fm/>



Founding members of UNO Women in Media. L to R: Ana Bellinghausen, Alexa Blase and Avarie Howard. Photo by Jodeane Brownlee.

UNO's Women in Media club emerges from Covid-19

By Robert Slater

Ana Bellinghausen, president of the [Women in Media](#) club at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, grew up with SportsCenter on her television all-day long as a child, and dreamed that one day, it would be her behind that desk.

"I saw a need for more women to step up at UNO because I know the talent is at UNO. It's just starting," Bellinghausen says. "This club offers a gateway to start off at UNO and to get your foot in the door at different departments especially TV and radio."

Bellinghausen says she knew of the gender gaps in media and wanted to create a place that if other women wanted to be in media, they wouldn't feel intimidated. She wanted a place where they could empower each other to reach their dreams and overcome the obstacles that women face.

Statistics show 31% of the bylines in news by Associated Press and Reuters are by women, 37% of prime-time news broadcasts feature women, 40% of online news and 41% of print news is written by women, according to Women's Media Center.

"The idea came from seeing other schools have women in media clubs," Bellinghausen says. "They have a lot of national women in sports media, kind of like sororities, across the United States at different campuses and we needed to start that at UNO."

The Covid-19 pandemic allowed Bellinghausen with the help of friends and co-vice presidents Alexa Blase and Avarie Howard, to start the process to become a sanctioned student club, earning approval in September 2020. Jodeane Brownlee, a School of Communication lecturer, serves as faculty adviser.

"It was towards the tail end of quarantine around May and I thought there's not a better time to start a club than now," Bellinghausen says. "Avarie Howard plays soccer and her season was halted. I didn't have any sports to really report on at the time and we wanted to fill that void to do something good with our time."

UNO's Women in Media club holds monthly meetings and invites women who currently have professional careers in media to speak as a guest as well. The hope for this club is to allow other women who want to be involved in media to join and not feel alone in an area dominated by men, Bellinghausen says.

Bellinghausen says: "I want it to continue to keep having 20 to 50 members, but I want every woman who is in the School of

Communication to at least to have heard of the club or to have attended an event. Men too, I want allies in there."

She says it takes both ways to work.

"We can't do it alone," Bellinghausen says, "I'm excited to see the people that we create and the women that we send into the workforce."

Ad Club hopes to gain more members in 2021-22

By Taylor Shipley

One of the UNO Ad Club's most popular annual events is the "Best and Worst Super Bowl Ads" event where local advertising experts judge the ads.

In February 2020, the Ad Club held the event at the Milo Bail Student Center with an array of snacks for students to munch on as they watched the ads on the big screen.

Fast-forward one year into the pandemic and students watched this year's Super Bowl Ad event over Zoom. This is just one example of how student organizations at the University of Nebraska at Omaha have adjusted their activities since the pandemic shut down the campus last March and limited in-person gatherings for the 2020-21 academic year.

But holding meetings via Zoom has one silver lining—students aren't limited to local speakers. Dr. Nicky Bi, Ad Club faculty adviser, says she'd like to continue exploring speakers from across the U.S. who offer diverse perspectives.

Ad Club offers an excellent way for students to network with advertising professionals and gain experience outside the classroom, Bi says.

Affiliated with the American Advertising Federation of Omaha, Ad Club connects students who are interested in advertising, design, and creative work with the AAF. Students who join UNO's Ad Club automatically become members of AAF.

Recruitment remains a top focus of the club. "I want to increase the number of members," Bi says. "Becoming a member of Ad Club has a number of advantages and looks good on a resume."

Another major professional development opportunity for Ad Club members is the annual Meet the Pros Conference. This year the event was held virtually on Zoom March 1 and March 2. Meet the Pros Conference featured many experienced advertising professionals such as Jackie Miller, chief marketing officer and owner of Bozell and Greg Andersen, CEO of Bailey Lauerman.

Ad Club also set up a virtual agency tour of Emspace + Lovgren, a local agency in Omaha. In the fall 2021 semester, Ad Club hopes to return to in-person agency tours and collaborate with other agencies in Nebraska.



Continued on page 33

Ad Club—Continued from page 32

Another advantage to attending Ad Club’s monthly meetings is hearing from alumni working in the field. This past year, students heard from two former Ad Club presidents: Daylee Olsen, marketing campaign specialist at Oriental Trading Company and Kerrigan Flynn, marketing coordinator at Carlson West Povondra Architects.

“The one thing we’ve done this semester is create a new website,” Bi says. “It is where you can look for future events, how to join and membership benefits.”

For more information on UNO Ad Club, go to:

<https://unoadclub.weebly.com/>.

MavForensics adapts to new changes in 2020

By Taylor Shipley

The night before the University of Nebraska at Omaha closed its campus due to the outbreak of COVID-19, MavForensics held its “Night before Nationals” showcase.

This night gave team members the opportunity to highlight their work before the 2020 national competition. The team received saddening news halfway through the event--nationals were canceled. The season abruptly ended.

“It was such an emotional end of the evening,” says Amanda Von Goodrich, the new MavForensics director. “The seniors performed knowing that was their last performance ever.”

Von Goodrich, along with Trae Madero Graham, led the MavForensics team this season through adapting to COVID-19 protocols. The team competes virtually along with the entire forensics community across the country. Team meetings and tournaments are held via Zoom and other video platforms.

With support from the School of Communication, the team can socially distance, meeting in separate various classrooms as members work toward competing in tournaments as they qualify for districts and nationals.

“It has been crazy successful,” Von Goodrich says. “Truly, adapting through communication is a perfect theme.”

With the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Hastings College and Doane University also in the top 20 schools in the country, Nebraska is one of the most competitive states for speech and forensics.



The highly competitive MavForensics team at the state event. Front row L-R: William Kunkle, Santiago Lopez, Matt Denny and Trae Medero Graham, coach. Middle row L-R: Maria Mendes Pinto, Veronica Peck and Addison Parr. Back row standing L-R: Elizabeth Hansen, coach; Amanda Goodrich, coach; Jaden Berlin, Riley Smith and Cheily Arreola, coach. Photo submitted.



Socially distanced and adapting the MavForensics team continues to be successful always working toward competing and qualifying for district and national events, Director Amanda Goodrich says. Photo setup by Riley Smith.

MavForensics has won six championships in the last 10 years. This year, the team placed 2nd overall in open division team competition with two state championships in Riley Smith and Matt Denny in DUO Interpretation and UNO’s first ever champion in Extemporaneous Speaking, William Kunkle. Senior, Maria Mendes Pinto won a revered Spirit award, which is a vote cast by other schools in the state.

The team looks forward to the 2021-22 season following nationals. Plans call for more in-person classes this fall, so members are hopeful for a return to in-person tournaments. However, MavForensics has thrived despite the challenges brought on by COVID-19.

“We have some excited recruits,” Von Goodrich says. “We have no idea if virtual competition will continue, but I think they want to join MavForensics regardless.”

Von Goodrich says she and Graham look forward to working with the team next year.

“I’ve been working with the team since 2014 and coaching forensics for about 12 years,” VonGoodrich says. “This is my dream job.”

Update: MavForensics placed 11th at the National Forensics tournament held virtually for the first time in April 2021.



While MaverickPR students adapted to working with clients virtually, their hard work paid off being rewarded with several PRSA Nebraska Paper Anvil awards. Bottom L-R: Robbie McEvoy, Taylor Shipley, Rebecca Kisicki, Karen Weber, adviser, Rachel Brader, Liz Rollin and Kyle Christensen. Top L-R: Makayla Rounph, Miranda McCord, Emily Nguyen, Kathryn O'Connor, Rose McCaffrey, Annaliese McCain, Courtney Kilroy and Sydney Scheider. Photo set up by Sydney Schneider.

MaverickPR adapts client services through COVID-19

By Rebecca Kisicki

[MaverickPR](#) staff members gathered in Arts and Sciences Hall Room 110 on March 12, 2020 as they worked on tactics for a variety of clients.

The news COVID-19 would close the campus after spring break met with shock and confusion. One by one, clients needing event planning and video services, canceled their contracts.

The rest of the spring semester, students met over Zoom and focused on social media and graphic design work. Over the summer, the staff continued to meet virtually and adapt client work. For example, videographers had to create a series of videos to promote the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) College of Business human resources major mostly over Zoom.

During the fall and spring semester, mask-wearing students met on Tuesday afternoons in Arts and Sciences Hall, Room 101, a large lecture hall that allows for proper social distancing. Students continued to meet their clients through Zoom and work to learn the new ways of communicating completely online.

"I'm most proud of the students' way of adjusting to COVID-19 without missing a beat," says Karen Weber, MaverickPR faculty adviser. "They did great adjusting to the protocols and a new way of doing business. They also fight Zoom fatigue."

Founded by Weber in 2007, MaverickPR is a student-run public relations firm, that has earned national affiliation with the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). MaverickPR has garnered national recognition as well, earning PRSSA's top national chapter award for student firms.

"It's an opportunity where students can gain a variety of experience in creating assets for real clients," Weber says. "This results in an impressive portfolio and resume that makes the student more marketable to the job force when they graduate."

Weber says she has much evidence that the agency experience prepares students for the job market from contact with MaverickPR alumni who work in a variety of communication fields.

The firm serves an average of 10 campus and community clients per semester that include nonprofits and small businesses. Students gain experience in advertising, branding, copywriting, graphic design, media relations, photography, social media, videography, and website design.

"MavPR provides a team-oriented, supportive environment because we are surrounded by other like-minded students with the intentions to learn from one another and grow as young professionals," says Makayla Rounph, firm director.

The hard work the students put into this firm has paid off. At the 2021 PRSA Nebraska Virtual Awards Gala the firm won two awards. These were Awards of Merit in "Outstanding Branding Campaign" for an Emerging Ladies Academy Branding Campaign and "Outstanding Strategy to address a Problem" for an Omaha Collegiate Consortium Social Norming Campaign.

Rounph says: "MavPR has built my confidence to be the next generation of communicators, who value being ethical, honest and fair. I strongly believe not only MavPR but UNO as an entirety is educating a generation of world-changers."

PRSSA creates opportunities for students despite COVID-19

By Rebecca Kisicki

The outbreak of COVID-19 last March 2020 forced the [Public Relations Student Society of America](#) chapter to wrap up its spring donation drive for the MICAH House early.

The campus shutdown and canceled all in-person activities and banned travel.

Kylie Squiers, chapter president, planned to represent the University of Nebraska at Omaha at the PRSSA National Leadership Assembly in Scottsdale, Arizona. She attended the event virtually from her laptop computer.

For the past year, UNO PRSSA has continued its commitment to community service and professional development despite the challenges from COVID-19.

The 40-member chapter is part of a national pre-professional organization with more than 300 chapters and 7,000 students. PRSSA offers students professional development through conferences, workshops, webinars, service, scholarships and competitions.

“Building your portfolio, expanding your network, getting real-life experience early and volunteering are all reasons to get involved with PRSSA,” Squiers says. “We have the ability to network and connect with other professionals and students around the country and sometimes around the world as well.”

UNO also earned two other national chapter awards, Outstanding Community Service and third place in the Cystic Fibrosis National

Competition. Karen Weber, UNO PRSSA faculty adviser, earned National Faculty Adviser. In addition, the chapter took home five awards with three top-scoring entries at the 2021 PRSA Nebraska Awards Gala.

The pandemic has not prevented UNO PRSSA from continuing its legacy of success. For example, “Let Life Bloom,” a digital campaign to promote organ donation in partnership with Live On Nebraska, earned first place in the National Organ Donor Awareness Competition.

This spring, a team created “Humility Not Hostility,” a campaign to promote civility in public discourse as part of the PRSSA National Bateman Case Study Competition.

The chapter also adapted its community service initiatives. Unable to hold its annual Santa Paws fundraiser for Hearts United for Animals, members decided to create a “Winter Wonderland”-themed activity coloring book for children.

Members didn’t let COVID-19 stop them from exceeding their fundraising goals. The chapter converted its annual fundraiser, La Notte Italiana, from an in-person buffet dinner to “Italian Night on the Go,” delivering catered Italian dinners DoorDash style. Dinner sales earned \$2,400, nearly \$500 more than in 2019.

“We’ve all supported each other with the changes over the past year and I’m really proud of us coming together and making things happen,” Squiers says.



Members of UNO PRSSA E-Board posed for photo. Bottom L-R: Miranda McCord, Karen Weber, adviser, Rachel Brader and Annaliese McCain. Top L-R: Taylor Shipley, Kylie Squiers and Makayla Roumph. Photo by Sydney Schneider.

Class Notes



69 Jacy L. Sedlacek (BA) lives in West Des Moines, Iowa and is owner/president of J.L. Sedlacek Incorporated. He writes: “Thank you. I am grateful beyond words for UNO and my journalism degree. ‘You don't have to know all of the answers if you know

the questions!’ Joe McCartney or Paul Peterson 1969. I moved that skill set into a business that was sold in 1998. Met my wife of 52 years, Brenda Williams Sedlacek.” Photo submitted.

77 John Fey (BS) lives in Plattsmouth and writes:

“Technically, I'm retired after about nine years at Peak Performance, the running store. I'm also in the finishing stages of a book on South High School baseball star Buddy Hunter, who played for the Boston Red Sox and later managed in the Red Sox farm system. If you'd like a copy, indicate your desire to:



hunterbook2020@gmail.com. I'm also in the process of writing a book on South High School baseball star Buddy Hunter, who played for the Boston Red Sox and later managed in the Red Sox farm system. I owe my 20-year career at the Omaha World-Herald to my degree from UNO and two years working on The Gateway.” Photo submitted

81 Jacquie Montag (BS) lives in Omaha and is a quality improvement coordinator at Nebraska Total Care. She writes: “Successfully bringing my undergrad learning into the 21st Century. I am using a mashup of communication, writing, and interpreting policy and regulations in order to promote health care in underserved populations.”

82 Leo Adam Biga (BA) lives in Omaha and writes: “Leading up to 2020, the second edition of my book ‘Alexander Payne: His Journey in Film’ was published by River Junction Press and I authored ‘Nebraska Methodist College at 125: Scaling New Heights.’ Plus, I was a finalist in the Great Plains Journalism Awards. Once 2020 arrived, it proved an eventful year. First, I came on board as a contributing writer and editorial consultant with NOISE (North Omaha Information Support Everyone), a grassroots, community-based news and information platform. Second, I landed a sweet commissioned project

to write original content for a special publication marking the opening of the Tri-Faith Center. This community center has joined a synagogue, a mosque and a church on the shared Tri-Faith campus in Omaha in a bold experiment to promote interfaith understanding and radical welcoming. During 2020 I personally marked two career milestones as a freelancer: 30 years as a contributing writer for the New Horizons newspaper and 25 years as a contributing writer for The Reader newspaper. Finally, my life partner and fellow UNO grad, Pamela Jo Berry, and I road-tripped it with her daughter and family to Galveston, Texas to visit loved ones over Christmas. That getaway represented our escape from the isolation and separation of the pandemic.”

84 Deborah Steele (BA) lives in Omaha and is a training specialist and instructional designer for the State of Nebraska and writes: “After getting my undergraduate degree in journalism, a year late, I was accepted into the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern. That one-year accelerated program cured my desire to become a broadcast journalist! Instead, I set my sights on a corporate communications career eventually promoting into a senior-level communications manager at both Key Bank in Ohio and Zurich North America back in Omaha. Life's twists and turns eventually landed me back in my earlier training and development world where I'm currently enjoying my work as a learning specialist with responsibilities for instructional development and design. When I'm not working, I enjoy flower gardening and sewing. And pre-COVID, I managed to squeeze in a couple of cruises with my sis. I can now cross jumping off a waterfall cliff, para sailing, ziplining and power snorkeling in the ocean off my bucket lists. And I must say, I'm sooooo looking forward to retirement — seven years from now, lol.” Photo submitted.



86 Joe Foreman (BS) writes of “The Opinion-Tribune newspaper in Glenwood, Iowa, receiving two first-place awards recently in the Landmark Community Newspapers annual Excellence in Journalism awards competition. Foreman received first place in the Excellence in News Photography competition for his photos of the 2019 Purple Heart Honor Flight to Washington, D.C., and the 2019 Missouri River flood in southwest Iowa. Foreman and associate editor Joel



Stevens shared the first-place award for Best Ongoing/Extended Coverage for the newspaper's overall coverage of the 2019 flood. Foreman is completing his 35th year as a full-time newspaper reporter and editor. Prior to joining the staff of The Opinion-Tribune in 1988, he spent time as

the sports editor of the Custer County Chief (Broken Bow) and as a sportswriter for the Kearney Hub. He's also been a free-lance college football and college baseball writer during his journalism career and is currently a contributing writer for the Catholic Voice newspaper for the Archdiocese of Omaha. While a student at UNO, Foreman was a sportswriter for The Gateway and a part-time sports reporter for the Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil." Photo submitted.

90 David Jahr (BA) lives in Santa Barbara, California and writes: "Hello! I'm proud to be a UNO alum and what I learned as part of The Gateway staff. It launched my career in journalism, then public relations, and now I'm a ghostwriter for celebrity doctors and CEOs, with three New York Times best-sellers in my quiver. My goal is to reform health through the mind, body and soul. But it all started at UNO and The Gateway. We ushered in the Mac desktop era and featured so many talented writers who are now doing awesome. Sending love to you all!" Photo submitted.



94 Hillary Luton (BGS) also holds an MBA from Southern Columbia University lives in Spring Lake, North Carolina has reported many changes in the last year and writes: "I am now working as a Department of the Army civilian in a department that handles allocating Army forces for deployment both within the U.S. and overseas. Am I still using my degree from UNO? Well, with a degree in communication, I'm always using my degree. I do think my department appreciates the fact I have good writing and speaking skills since information often needs to be drafted and present to senior leaders and the Department of the Army. I also serve as a lay leader in my church and open the services every Sunday. I have never regretted getting a degree in communication from UNO. I use that degree every single day."

08 Cassandra Kay Loseke (BS) lives in Goodyear,



Arizona and married her partner of six years, Luke Eaton of Bakersfield, California, on a farm in Buckeye, Arizona Nov. 6, 2020. She writes: "After a

short ceremony full of laughter, love and tears, the couple threw a Pusheen cat in lieu of a bouquet, smashed porcelain with their guests in the German Polterabend tradition and enjoyed their favorite burgers and fries from the Aioli Gourmet Burgers food truck. The couple also requested donations for a local cat nonprofit organization, Kneading

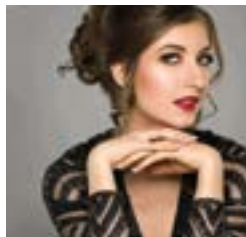
Kittens Rescue, inspiring a cat adoption. Cassy and Luke reside in Goodyear, Arizona with their cats, Indy and Sadie. Goodyear has been home to Cassy's communication and branding agency, Controlled Chaos Consulting (www.ControlledChaosConsulting.com), for over four years. Her husband is a nuclear engineer with Arizona Public Service at the largest nuclear power plant in North America." Photo by Anna Marisol.

12 John D. Haskell (BA) lives in Omaha and writes: "I am working as a marketing strategist at RCG Advertising & Media. I lead a team of marketing experts for our contractor marketing division serving the unique needs of home service and commercial contractors in major markets across the country. I continue to utilize the set of skills I began developing at my time in UNO. My broadcast journalism training serves me greater than I ever realized. If it's wearing multiple hats at a production, I have a bedrock of experience from my days at the UNO TV studio. When communicating massive amount of detailed information, my communication skills are always growing, but I draw back to lessons learned from all my experiences. Finally I have enjoyed connecting with other alumni from the same programs in my professional career. Anyone who spent time working for MavRadio can share that connection and memories with our excellent professors and friends like Jodeane Brownlee and Mark Dail.

Brent Lubbert (BA) lives in Omaha and writes: "I'm currently the founding executive director at a food systems and gardening educational nonprofit called Big Muddy Urban Farm. We provide service-learning programs for all ages that center around growing food on vacant lots and promoting health and safety in an older neighborhood of Omaha, Nebraska. To get the organization off the ground, I relied heavily on my communication background, especially in video production and social media. Those skills helped get our story out there and recruit both participants for our programs and donors to our cause. I could not have produced these videos and posts in an efficient and effective manner had it not been for the skills and knowledge learned at UNO School of Communication. Now, my role is changing as our organization grows in staff and geography, and I'm getting more involved with public relations and organizational communication skills that I learned at UNO, too." Photo submitted.



13 Natalie Christine McGovern (BS) lives in Omaha and writes: I am a theatre and music reviewer for The Reader and have had the privilege of covering an interview feature on Grammy-nominated artist Tori Kelly. I have also worked in corporate communications for Physicians Mutual. In 2019, I received the Nebraska Admiralship from Gov. Pete Ricketts for my contribution to arts advocacy in the Omaha community. I will be releasing my first music single this year.” Photo by FELS Photography.



14 Megan Schmitz Nelson (MPA) (BA-2011) lives in Omaha and writes: “She is a proud two-time alumna of the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her degree started in the School of Communication as an undergrad, and immediately went on to receive her Master of Public Administration from the UNO School of Public Administration. Megan and her husband Matt (also a UNO alum!), are the founders of Nest with the Nelsons. Their mission is centered on helping homeowners create the healthy home of their dreams by providing virtual design recommendations—all based on a budget. The business just launched and has been built on the shoulders of Megan’s communications and marketing experience from UNO. She also teaches classes as an adjunct faculty member and works as the communications specialist for the UNO College of Public Affairs and Community Service.” (Photo credit to alum, Nicole Ferguson of Nicole Fertography.)



17 Mackenzie Bolte (BA) lives in Omaha and writes: “Since graduation, you could say a lot has changed! Immediately following graduation, I accepted an internship at Bailey Lauerman assisting with its social media and public relations. At Bailey Lauerman, I worked on some amazing accounts including Pepperjax, Cuties, Kendall Motor Oil, Panda Express and many others. I gained so much experience from Bailey Lauerman and was fortunate enough to work with some of the biggest and brightest in the advertising industry. After my internship, I had recently got engaged, to my now husband, David Bolte, and began planning our wedding, which was held on Nov. 9, 2019. Today, I am proud to hold the position of social media manager at Titan Medical Group, a healthcare staffing agency. I have been with Titan Medical Group since April 2018. While



social is my focus at Titan Medical, my role includes so much more than social media. I spend most my days reporting both web and social analytics, creating content, planning out-of-state conferences, coordinating internal office events and implementing employee satisfaction surveys. Most importantly, I continue to hold the values of my communication degree by meeting and connecting with new individuals every day from external vendors, to our traveling healthcare professionals to my amazing coworkers. Never would I have imagined after graduating in 2017 that I would not only learn to navigate working through a pandemic in 2020 but be lucky enough to hold a position that is comparable to what I learned during my time at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.” Photo submitted.

Sara Hernandez Atkins-Rauwald (BA) lives in Omaha and works at LinkedIn as an abuse and content enforcement agent. She writes: “Life post-graduation has been anything but simple - especially during this pandemic - however, I’ve been loving every minute of it. February of 2019 marked the end of my corporate job, which I grew strongly attached to during my time at UNO. While the termination was stressful, it gave me the opportunity to focus on myself and rediscovering my creativity. I launched ARSAR Photography, and, by the end of 2020, I earned 2nd place for Best of Omaha. Unfortunately, the pandemic put my photography on a slight hold, as the world braced for the light at the end of the tunnel. In the meantime, I got married to my dance partner and best friend, and have begun planning a secondary, and more personal brand to showcase the multiple faces of my photography. I am grateful for all of the connections I have retained from UNO, as these very kind and genuine humans have been there to guide me through some of the toughest parts of professional adult life, post-graduation. It takes a village to succeed, and there’s no better village than the one we are gifted with as members of the UNO student or alumni community. Thank you, professors, for everything you do to ensure students succeed in and out of the classroom.” Photo by Nathaniel-Jensen-Photography---Omaha-Nebraska Wedding Photography.



Ryan Lance (BA) works as a marketing operations specialist at Nebraska Furniture Mart and writes: “You can catch me on the intersection of 72nd and Dodge, looking all disheveled and defeated hold a cardboard sign reading, ‘Will Journalism for Food.’”

19 Juli Lynne Oberlander (BA) lives in Omaha and after a stint at Lukas Partners as an account executive for the public relations firm, she accepted a position in July with The Reader as a freelance writer. That later turned into a full-time job in communications for LoCo Omaha, a local food delivery service. At The Reader she writes that she helped plan Omaha's annual Food Day event (held virtually this year) and wrote 23 feature stories for the website about local food-related organizations who have supported the community during the pandemic. For the event, Oberlander also created Facebook content and helped generate news coverage from local media. In addition, she wrote four stories for The Reader's annual Best of the Big O! content. Photo submitted.



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Arts and Sciences Hall 107T**

20 Emily White (BS) lives in Wilmington, Delaware and writes: "The skills and experience I gained from UNO helped me gain a job in public relations in the Philadelphia area! Just taking it day by day through this pandemic. Wishing everyone in Omaha and at UNO well in these crazy times!"

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The School of Communication provides a student-centered, dynamic environment designed to elevate, empower and engage students to become skilled, ethical citizens and professional who can excel in diverse local and global communities.

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