COMMuno
Spring 2022

We Rise
In the Spring of 2020, the world we knew turned upside down. Classes moved completely online, and we stayed in our homes to protect ourselves and others from COVID-19.

It was especially dark at times as the pandemic ravaged our communities.

The theme ‘We Rise’ is especially meaningful to this year’s CommUNO staff. We have each dealt with difficulties in and out of the classroom due to the pandemic. However, we have risen above the challenges and continued to persevere. Fortunately, we collaborated on CommUNO 2022 in-person. We made meaningful connections and continued to build upon our design, editing, photography and social media skills.

The Spring 2021 staff selected the theme, and the Fall 2021 staff brought the vision to life.

This year’s cover features a sun rise and vines winding around outstretched hands. This design represents the idea that even after the toughest times, the sun will always rise on a new day. The outstretched hands remind us that we should always strive to see the good.

Throughout the magazine, you’ll also see floral elements. The flowers and vines represent the growth that we continue to see in ourselves and our community. ‘We Rise’ embodies the growth, students, faculty and alumni of the School of Communication have experienced in the past year.

The faculty and administration are working with me to consider “what’s next” for the School of Communication. We’re proud of our legacy and are always willing to provide updated teaching techniques, and current curriculum to ensure our students are prepared for the next phase of their lives. It’s an exciting time in the department to imagine the future and determine where we can continue making those important and meaningful impacts on our students’ lives, the community, and our world.

The pandemic did not stall us; it allowed us to figure out creative ways to continue educating our students. The next two years will be wildly different than the last two, and I invite you to join our journey.

We welcome your continued support and contributions, as students, alumni, emeriti and community members.

Thank you.

Heather Hundley, Ph.D., looks forward to her second year as the School of Communication director. Photo by Bre Smith.
"No one has a crystal ball that can tell what our future will be with COVID. That's the message given to our fall 2021 Magazine Editing, Design and Production class.

Students in this class worked on the annual CommUNO magazine slated to be completed in the spring 2022. The publication is truly remarkable having received awards from the Public Relations Society of America Nebraska chapter consistently each year since 2014. In 2021, CommUNO earned the top Award of Excellence in the professional division for magazines. This is a rare opportunity for students who excel in their academics and extracurricular activities.

As teachers, we take pride in how our students have risen to meet the challenges of producing this magazine. We’ve heard from alumni across the state, country and abroad how much they enjoy reading about the accomplishments of other alumni, faculty and students. Our readers enjoy both news and features that showcase the School of Communication’s programs and events.

So, it became rather fortuitous that back in August we talked about “We Rise.” The theme reflects a desire to rise from more than a year of uncertainties and hardships that came from the pandemic. We all wanted to move onward and upward in a spirit of hopefulness.

With students hopeful about a relatively COVID-free semester, they ran with the publication theme, “We Rise.” The theme reflects a desire to rise from more than a year of uncertainties and hardships that came from the pandemic. We all wanted to move onward and upward in a spirit of hopefulness.

As proud UNO alumni, who earned our Master of Arts from the School of Communication, we felt compelled to continue the production of this annual magazine. We’ve heard from alumni across the state, country and abroad how much they enjoy reading about the accomplishments of other alumni, faculty and students. Our readers enjoy both news and features that showcase the School of Communication’s programs and events.

In this issue, you’ll meet Heather Hundley, Ph.D., our new School of Communication director, whose vision for the future is truly inspiring. As teachers, we take pride in how our students have risen to meet the challenges of producing this magazine. We’re confident their talent, versatility and perseverance in creating CommUNO 2022 will carry wherever their career path takes them.

From the Editors
By Melodae Morris and Karen Weber

The award-winning student-run public relations firm agreed to take on the School of Communication as a client to complete the CommUNO. Fortunately, several students in the fall magazine class now worked for MaverickPR such as Tristen Menichetti, Lexy Schulte, Jordan Speckman and Tanner Thorngren. We appointed Schulte as account executive and editor-in-chief and added four more students to the team.

The transition proved seamless, and we want to thank these dedicated students from fall and spring who worked so diligently to carry on this legacy.

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However, when the spring semester arrived, the class was canceled due to lower-than-expected enrollment. Not to be deterred, MaverickPR, the award-winning student-run public relations firm agreed to take on the School of Communication as a client to complete the CommUNO. Fortunately, several students in the fall magazine class now worked for MaverickPR such as Tristen Menichetti, Lexy Schulte, Jordan Speckman and Tanner Thorngren. We appointed Schulte as account executive and editor-in-chief and added four more students to the team.

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Faculty Achievements
During the 2021-2022 academic year, faculty in the School of Communication accomplished the following:

- 19 scholarly research articles published
- 1 book published
- 7 book chapters published
- 19 scholarly research articles published
- 35 scholarly or teaching presentations
- 2 Ph.D.s earned (Herb Thompson III, Ph.D. and Katie Storck Ph.D.)
- 2 popular press publications
- 4 media interviews
- 1 keynote speaker
- 8 grants exceeding $117,500
- 4 Top Papers at the National Communication Association (Joy Chao, Ph.D., Nathan Bedsole, Ph.D.)

Retiree Spotlight: Dave Ogden, Ph.D., may be retired from the School of Communication but he’ll never retire from baseball research. A Pittsburg Pirates fanatic, Ogden published his article, "Community of Inquiry: A blueprint for bringing baseball to African American youth" in the 2021 Baseball Research Journal.

Other Highlights

Jodeane Brownlee
BEA Award of Excellence in the Faculty Audio Competition,
Short-Form Production
UNO Graduate Student Employee Award
Western States Communication Association Outstanding Service Award
UNO Outstanding Faculty Service Award
UNO Outstanding Faculty Service Award
Top Panel at the Central States Communication Association
appointed to serve on the PRSSA National Faculty Advisory Council

Saeed Dabbour
UNO Graduate Student Employee Award

Heather Hundley, Ph.D.

Cameron Logsdon
Top Paper at the National Communication Association

Abbie Syrek
2021 Baseball Research Journal

Adam Tyma

Karen Weber

CFAM Mental Health Committee helps students stay connected
By Jordan Speckmann

As the pandemic waned on, advisors and instructors in the School of Communication took notice of students who struggled with their mental health.

Upon hearing this, the College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media formed the CFAM Mental Health Committee. Melissa Berke, Ph.D., CFAM associate dean, and other faculty within the college, wanted to reach out to students and engage them on their mental health.

“We wanted to give them some simple and easy to implement ideas or things to offer that little bit of connection,” Berke says. “Just to let students know that we’re here for you, we care about you, we want you to be successful, and we know that you might be struggling.”

The committee offers students playlists to add new songs, conversation starters for classroom connections and other mental health advice. These tips give students a way to connect to their faculty, staff and peers about mental health.

Davidson helps students and professors make shift to humanized teaching and learning
By Sam Craft

Marlina Davidson, Ph.D., has a mission: to help students and professors be more comfortable with technology and online learning.

Davidson, a former communication studies faculty member, now serves as the lead instructional designer for the University of Nebraska at Omaha IT Academic Technology.

After teaching for 15 years, Davidson says she looked forward to the challenge of making online education more engaging.

“I think it was a little bit serendipitous for me when I moved into this role where I would be helping faculty who are teaching with technology or online,” Davidson says. continued on page 7

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Distance enrollment education programs have increased 144%, according to The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements.

She says the change of teaching style was very challenging for education everywhere. Faculty who never taught an online course had to alter their entire curriculum.

“Research says that creating relationships in the classroom is really important to student learning,” Davidson says.

“During this pandemic, we began researching how we can help faculty understand how they can use technology to reach their students in a different way,” she says.

“We’re here for you, we care about you, we want you to be successful.”

“They’re getting ready to launch what they’re calling health and wellness coaches,” Berke says. “They have actually selected faculty on campus who are going through specific training modules to be certified.”

As the pandemic pushed mental health to the forefront, the need to help students who are struggling became more urgent, she says. Creating conversations about mental health can provide support to those willing to talk about their mental health concerns.

A trained core of faculty members will provide assistance to students. They will support students who say, “I’m having trouble getting motivated for this class, or I’m really having trouble with my time management” Berke says.

“During this pandemic, we began researching how we can help faculty understand how they can use technology to reach their students in a different way,” she says.

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#UNO1ForAll takes on social media and freedom of speech
By Tristen Menichetti

In determining if truth will win over falsehoods, Lipschultz asked such questions as: “What do we do about hate speech? How do we address the need to have open dialogue within a free society to make good decisions within our democracy?”

“The panel came together to support protecting the First Amendment, even if that means supporting speech they disagree with,” Lipschultz says.

The panel featured Adam Goldman, New York Times reporter; Daxton “Chip” Stewart, Texas Christian University professor and lawyer; Jasmine McNealy, University of Florida professor; Tret Eckstrand, University of North Carolina professor; Kyu Ho Youm, University of Oregon professor and Lipschultz. Panelists covered topics such as hate speech under the First Amendment; social media’s role in the organization of political extremism; and the public’s distrust in journalism and the media.

“We want them to talk to each other,” McNealy says. “As long as they’re talking to each other, and they’re not blowing stuff up or committing violent acts.”

Highlights of the UNO1ForAll panel can be viewed on Lipschultz’s YouTube channel, along with other interviews that delve further into issues surrounding social media.
Chancellor Li calls for alumni buy-in to help students succeed and build community

By Sara Meadows

Chancellor Joanne Li says she believes that every challenge offers an opportunity. That’s why in her first year as chancellor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, she rose to the challenge of navigating the campus through a global pandemic.

Li is the first woman of color to serve as UNO chancellor and the first Asian-American in history to hold an executive leadership role for a public research university in Nebraska. Li brings 15 years of leadership experience in higher education.

The pandemic has affected many educators including Li, but she continued her commitment to improving student outcomes, growing enrollment and programs, enhancing diversity, and building community partnerships. When Li assumed her chancellor role on July 1, 2021, a COVID-19 spike began in the Omaha metro.

Li knows firsthand the difficulties first-generation college students face and the critical role mentors play in their path to success.

Growing up in Hong Kong, she took advantage of opportunities in the U.S. as an international student. She earned her Bachelor of Science in finance and economics and her Ph.D. in finance and corporate governance from Florida State University.

Li says the University must also ensure students have opportunities to build character.

“During the pandemic, my blood sugar went up, my cholesterol went up,” Li says. “It’s just a very stressful situation but you try to do the best you can.”

In her first year as chancellor, Li says what surprises her the most is that students, including first generations and students of color, continued to succeed and build community.

The pandemic forced the University to hold classes virtually or as a hybrid, which created extra work and stress for faculty and staff to adapt. But the central question for Li: “Is learning really happening?”

“I remember being interviewed quite a few times over the past two years,” Li says, “and people ask, what is really keeping you awake at night? And I will tell you the burnout ratio of faculty and students. Going forward, you must rekindle that commitment, and it’s really my students that matter, so we’re going to do everything we can.”

After nearly a year as chancellor, Li says what surprises her the most about UNO is the number of good stories to tell and the opportunities for the University to advance its mission.

“UNO has a lot of great people, our students are adorable,” Li says. “They are absolutely hardworking students.”

Li also highlighted the progress UNO has made in research conducted on campus. 2021 was the record year for research at UNO, resulting in $26 million and so far in 2022, research dollars have exceeded $35 million.

Li says UNO has two overarching goals: student performance and workforce development. Student performance breaks down into four small pillars.

• Complete your degree.
• Optimize the time it takes to complete your degree.
• Make retention a priority from freshman year to earning your degree.
• Recruit strategically to bring more jobs to the state.

“You come to college to finish your degree; you don’t drop out,” Li says.

That’s why it’s so important for all academic advisers to help students stay on track and meet the University’s retention goals.

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Li says the University must also ensure students have opportunities to build character.

“Our goal is relation, not transaction,” Li says. “Our job is to make sure that we are not just a one-time partner, but a lifelong partner.”

Li says UNO must be the leader in workforce development because regardless of what students pursue as a course of study, they need to be gainfully employed.

“It doesn’t just happen because the chancellor said so,” Li says. “It happens because everyone believes in it, and we are committed to it. It is my job to let the outside community know that this is an urban university that is so committed to success.”

“Seeking partnership with UNO even after you graduate is especially important because the success of the University is defined by the success of its alumni.”

Li’s advice for the School of Communication and other departments is to enhance community engagement by strategic planning, being mindful about advising and remaining focused.

“We ask the School of Communication to help us to promote the vision of UNO,” Li says.

Whether it is a service-learning project or an internship, the School of Communication plays an influential role in promoting UNO’s vision.

Li says alumni engagement is especially important because the success of the University is defined by the success of its alumni.

“When we have a diverse alumni network, we have the power to actually influence a wide spectrum of communities.”

Li says UNO’s goal is to lift everyone, not just one segment of the population. The best way to engage with alumni is to create a real partnership, bring them back to campus, utilize their talents and ask for their mentorship.

“Having them here is great but having them really connect with us and engage with our student body is even greater,” Li says.

Moving forward, Li says the University must be very mindful, intentional, and deliberate to bring our alumni back to campus. The efforts to encourage alumni participation in UNO activities and events is important as an urban university.

School of Communication alumni can help UNO by sharing stories, encouraging businesses to hire students, and most importantly, mentoring students.

“Seeking partnership with UNO even after you graduate is especially important, to build the future of not only UNO,” Li says, “but the future of the community.”

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Hundley inspires new vision for School of Communication

By Molly Ashford

Heather Hundley, Ph.D. stepped foot on the University of Nebraska at Omaha campus with a passion for change and a desire to improve.

She is an active researcher with an interest in the field of journalism and communication. She brings 22 years of administrative experience to her role as School director.

“A lot of times, people have a research trajectory,” Hundley says. “They have one topic that they start researching and kind of stay on, but mine is much more eclectic. I would describe my current research as areas of social justice, generally, but I also love critical cultural studies.”

As a college student, Hundley focused her studies on communication. She earned her undergraduate and master’s degrees at California State University in Sacramento and later earned her Ph.D. from the University of Utah.

Hundley taught and served as the assistant dean at the San Bernardino Palm Desert Campus in the Coachella Valley.

In California, Hundley served as the executive director for the Organization for Research on Women and Communication for three years. She later spent six years as the executive director of the Western States Communication Association.

After a 17-year stint at CSUSB, she moved to Tennessee in 2016 to become a professor and department chair at Middle Tennessee State University. The program was completely revamped with Hundley’s help, including a new name for the department and major.

“I completed a lot of curriculum changes in Tennessee,” Hundley says. “It was a lot of working with the students and faculty to completely revamp the major and the department. It was kind of starting from scratch.”

During her time in Tennessee, Hundley oversaw a complete overhaul of the degree, courses, prerequisites and department policies re-development. The department grew and began to attract new students. Still, something was missing for Hundley.

“When I started at San Bernardino, I worked a lot with the graduate programs,” Hundley says. “Once I moved on, I realized just how much I missed it, and how fun it is to work with graduate students.”

Hundley says UNO’s metropolitan campus and graduate programs attracted her to the director position. She has appreciated the warm welcome since her husband, and their three dogs have moved into their new home.

“I had three sets of neighbors come over and say hello, which has never happened anywhere I’ve lived before,” Hundley says. “We really appreciate that it’s been such a welcoming city.”

Hundley spent the fall semester familiarizing herself with the current state of the school, getting to know the faculty, and analyzing the curriculum.

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Heather Hundley, Ph.D., embraces role as the School of Communication director.

Heather Hundley, Ph.D., listens during a panel presented by PRSSA to promote organ and tissue donor awareness on campus.

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Photo by Bre Smith.

Heather Hundley, Ph.D., listens during a panel presented by PRSSA to promote organ and tissue donor awareness on campus.

Photo by Lexy Schulte.
Investments in the School of Communication help students rise

By Bre Smith

Despite the pandemic, the University of Nebraska Foundation set a record for donations in 2020 and has set its sights even higher for the 2021-2022 school year.

“I think we are poised to rise,” says Camtrice Bexten, director of development for the College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media. “We have a new director of the school, Heather Hundley, which is really exciting. We have a new chancellor who is incredibly passionate about UNO and moving us forward. And I think we are right at the cusp of doing some really amazing things at UNO and taking it to the next level.”

In the 2020-2021 school year, the University of Nebraska Foundation saw a record $343 million in donor pledges. Bexten says donors that raised $11,065, Bexten says.

During the interactive, day-long event, each college sets “giving goals.” The 2021 event resulted in 2,400 gifts, nearly doubling the amount raised in 2020. The School of Communication secured 130 donors that raised $11,065, Bexten says.

Donors can contribute to CFAM through payroll deduction, a series of gifts, a single donation or a scholarship fund, Bexten says.

As a UNO CFAM alumna, Bexten says she better understands the importance of scholarships to students and what motivates people to give.

“We are on the cusp of doing some really amazing things at UNO.”

Marcus gives back to the School of Communication

By Lexy Schulte

The University of Nebraska at Omaha has always been a familiar place for Howard K. Marcus.

Growing up in Omaha, he often found himself on campus. When it was time to choose a path after high school, UNO was a natural choice—it was the hometown university and both of his parents had attended UNO.

“I just always had a good feeling whenever I was on campus,” Marcus says.

Declaring a journalism major was also a natural choice for Marcus. His mother had been a journalism major, and he had read many of her old textbooks as a child. In high school, he worked on both the yearbook and newspaper.

In 1983, Marcus graduated from UNO with a bachelor’s degree in journalism and has since built a long journalism career in Omaha. He started out working for the Midlands Business Journal, and then went on to work in the Omaha World-Herald newsroom for 32 years.

Nearly 40 years after graduating from UNO, Marcus returned to UNO in 2019 to teach photography and media writing. But he’s given back more than just his time in the classroom to the program.

In 2011, Marcus established the Marcus Family Scholarship. The scholarship is given to a journalism student at a junior or senior level standing with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or above. The scholarship was first granted in 2013. The scholarship honors every member of his immediate family he says, including his mother, Joan K. Marcus, his late father, Milton Marcus and his sister, Elaine S. Marcus.

It was important for the scholarship to be in his family’s name because every member of his immediate family has ties to UNO, Marcus says. His parents attended UNO, and his sister, who has intellectual disabilities and autism, benefited from research done through the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Marcus says he knew he wanted to start a scholarship. However, it all came down to timing.

When the Omaha World-Herald was sold to Berkshire Hathaway, Marcus, a shareholder in the company, says he found the perfect timing.

“My very first call after learning of this good fortune was to call the representative at the NU Foundation who deals with the School of Communication,” Marcus says.

The scholarship also allows Marcus to leave a permanent legacy at the school where he built his journalism foundation, he says.

“Most things that we do in our lives are very transitory, they’re here one day and they’re gone,” Marcus says. “But a scholarship is an ongoing thing. It’s set up to go in perpetuity.”

Being an adjunct professor on campus also allows Marcus to meet the students that his scholarship benefits. One of his photography students, Jessica Wade, received the Marcus Family Scholarship. Wade now works in the Omaha World-Herald newsroom.

While the scholarship helps students ease their financial burdens, Marcus hopes it goes one step further.

“I think a lot of students who receive scholarships realize that when they receive a scholarship, it really represents the idea that someone believes in them,” Marcus says.

See story on page 34, “Marcus says photography gives voice to people.”
Scholarships and fellowships lead to new opportunities for students

By Angela Gahan

A s a cheerleader for students’ success and chair of the School of Communication Scholarship Committee for years, Karen Weber says she delights in awarding money to deserving students. However, there’s more than just School of Communication scholarships to apply for.

“My money is out there,” Weber says. “You just have to know where to look in it.”

Students are often unaware of opportunities offered by organizations such as the American Federation of Advertising, Public Relations Society of America and the National Broadcasting Society. For example, PRSA offers up to 10 national scholarships open to eligible PRSSA members.

“I’m so thankful for the foundation I built at UNO through getting experience with organizations in leadership and handling real clients and projects,” Squiers says.

Love of writing leads Air Force vet to communication career

By Andrew Herley

D uring his time in the Air Force, Robert Slater’s assignment put his writing skills to good use. He wrote articles about base activities that reached bases throughout the world. When Slater left the Air Force, he decided to attend the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

“When I was getting out of the Air Force, I did a lot of research into what I wanted to go to school for,” Slater says. “I found the public relations concentration at UNO. I read about it and thought it sounded like a pretty fun degree to get.”

However, the transition from Air Force to full-time college student proved difficult.

“You go from a set schedule with everything you need to do, and then on campus, you are around people, going through school and trying to figure out how life works outside of the military,” Slater says. “Luckily, everyone at UNO was very accommodating, so that made it really good.”

One of those people was Karen Weber, School of Communication lecturer and Slater’s academic adviser.

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Loza’s commitment to her community earns her the Ten Outstanding Young Omahans award

By Sara Meadows

T he Omaha Jaycees has named Josefina Loza one of the Ten Outstanding Young Omahans for her commitment to the community. Loza, a University of Nebraska at Omaha alumna, currently serves as publication manager for The Gateway campus newspaper.

In October 2020, she created Lozifina, LLC, an Omaha-based marketing and public relations company. She wanted to continue to assist small business owners and nonprofits. Her goal was to strengthen its communication and marketing plans during the pandemic.

“I could not imagine having the know-how in marketing and public relations and not helping others,” Loza says.

Loza says she’s honored to receive this award. “Nominations are anonymous, which makes the award that much more amazing.”

The Omaha Jaycees, the oldest youth organization in Omaha, is best known for creating impactful changes in the Omaha community. The Jaycees honor individuals between the ages of 21 and 40 who show commitment to improving the community through selfless acts of kindness.

Loza started her journalism journey right after high school when the Omaha World-Herald hired her to work in the newspaper’s library filing and researching documents for reporters. This quickly led to an opportunity in the newsroom as part-time breaking news and night police reporter.

In addition to the work she did outside of school, Loza also worked for The Gateway. She started as a freshman and worked her way up to news editor and then editor-in-chief.

“I love unlocking the potential of others,” Loza says. “Something I truly enjoy doing because it’s soulful.”

Loza is also a founding member of the Midlands African Chamber, Inc., established in July 2020 as a resource to help African and African American businesses prosper.

On top of her passion for journalism, Loza is also a hobby artist with her work currently being displayed at several galleries in Detroit. Her patrons are art collectors from around the world including Germany, South America and Omaha.

As for current projects, Loza says she does ghostwriting and personal writing, as well as building two other businesses centered around healing and the arts.

“We elevate as people when we cherish one another,” she says, “and release the concept that everything has to be a competition.”
Powell builds community with equity

By Kendall Weisdorfer

Tunette Powell’s official job title is director of Equity, Inclusion and Community at the Mirman School in Los Angeles. However, she is an “activist mama” and “disruptor” first, she says.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha alumna considers herself a warrior who has dedicated her life to disrupting the status quo. Known as an activist scholar, Powell has built her career as an advocate for equity in the classroom, workplace and community.

“This work is personal,” Powell says. “I am raising three beautiful black boys. If I can create a better world for them, it will be one for others. For me, this work begins and ends with education.”

Powell persevered, graduated high school and took a few college courses. Powell says she felt stuck between having earned a few college credits to dropping out. But the possibility of being the first woman in her family motivated her to go back and complete her degree. When she moved to the Omaha metro with her husband, an active-duty Air Force serviceman, she enrolled at UNO and began a course of study in communication.

“I really do credit UNO for where I am in this very moment,” Powell says. “It was a game-changer because the professors really saw me.”

Powell graduated in 2012 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication. While an undergraduate student, Powell won national honors as a member of MavForensics, the School of Communication’s competitive speech team.

Powell juggled raising her sons, age 3 and 4, while completing her degree. Powell says she was “shocked” when her sons’ preschool suspended them on multiple occasions. Later that year, the U.S. Department of Education released data that illustrated the preschool suspension disparities between Black and White students.

“I went through this myself,” she says. “To me, it was a wake-up call.”

Powell says her experience with her sons being suspended motivated her to fight for inclusion and equity. Her story captured national attention in the Washington Post, CNN, NPR’s “This American Life” and MSNBC. Powell, who had already served in leadership roles for youth-serving nonprofits, wanted to make a change in school districts across the United States.

Since 2014, Powell has worked with Omaha Public Schools, The Los Angeles Unified School District and Dallas Independent School District. Included in Powell’s accomplishments in the education system, she currently teaches critical race theory at the University of California, Los Angeles.

“For Black students, our current education system is not a passport of possibilities, but a pipeline to prison,” Powell says. “I want to reimagine the education system. It is important to build a community with equity.”

Powell continues her work in education as a nontraditional teacher and alternative school facilitator. Powell says she often works with gifted students to spread equity and inclusion within the classroom and to build and strengthen relationships with the power of words.

Through her work in education, Powell remains a steadfast advocate for families of Black students.

Although her goals are ever-changing, Powell says she aims to continue disrupting the status quo. This begins and ends with the education system.

“This isn’t business as usual,” she says. “Our kids deserve this inclusion.”

But it doesn’t just end there. Powell says building this community of equity and dignity is not only for students but for adults as well.

While her work focuses mainly on students, parents are the first teachers to their children. She stresses the importance of disrupting what it looks like for families to interact with school systems and to work from the outside in.

“None of us can rise until we all rise, and none of us are free until we are all free.”

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From Powell’s early childhood, she has risen from the challenges she faced growing up in San Antonio, Texas with a drug-addicted father, who spent years in prison. Powell shared her story in her book, “From Daddyless to Destiny: Finding Freedom in Your Story.” She also authored the book, “The Other Woman.”

Growing up, Powell faced difficulties in school and racial and socioeconomic disparities. “That’s where it started for me, it really shaped everything,” she says. “At that early age, I had to choose to rise or be a statistic.”

Powell says she and her younger brother received school suspensions and expulsions on multiple occasions.

“The fact that I am an educator now embodies this concept of rising,” Powell says, “despite these systems that were designed to bury me.”

Powell persevered, graduated high school and took a few college courses. Powell says she felt stuck between having earned a few college credits to dropping out. But the possibility of being the first woman in her family motivated her to go back and complete her degree. When she moved to the Omaha metro with her husband, an active-duty Air Force serviceman, she enrolled at UNO and began a course of study in communication.

“I really do credit UNO for where I am in this very moment.” Powell says. “It was a game-changer because the professors really saw me.”

Powell graduated in 2012 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication. While an undergraduate student, Powell won national honors as a member of MavForensics, the School of Communication’s competitive speech team.

Powell juggled raising her sons, age 3 and 4, while completing her degree. Powell says she was “shocked” when her sons’ preschool suspended them on multiple occasions. Later that year, the U.S. Department of Education released data that illustrated the preschool suspension disparities between Black and White students.

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Mount Rushmore sculptor Gutzon Borglum, who grew up in Fremont, Nebraska, is quoted as saying, “Nebraska people have the heart and power to create real beauty and art if they will only wake up and do it.”

While Sam Petto, a lifelong Nebraskan, doesn’t create art, he knew from a young age he wanted to help better his state and its people. That’s why, in 2019, Petto accepted his dream job as communications director for the ACLU of Nebraska, a job that fit his true passion for advocacy.

“My mom was always civically engaged, and although we don’t agree on everything, from the time I was young I knew my heart was in advocacy and helping others,” Petto says.

Earlier in his career, Petto’s ambitions led him to pursue broadcast journalism. He graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2008 with a bachelor’s degree in communication with a concentration in broadcasting. He spent more than four years as a producer at WOWT, the Omaha NBC affiliate, before returning to his alma mater in 2016 to work as an editor for University Communications. Three years later, he earned a promotion to director, editorial and media relations. While working in the communications office, Petto earned his Master of Arts in communication.

“It was a tough decision and a lot of work going back to school, but with the financial benefits of being an employee for the university, it was the right time,” Petto says.

During his five years at UNO, Petto says he appreciated the opportunity to tell UNO’s story and do his part to promote the University’s mission.

“I love this university,” he says, “and it will always be special for me.”

As a senior at Westside High School, Petto says applying to UNO was an easy choice because of its reputation and proximity.

Although Petto enjoyed producing for WOWT, he knew that it was not a dream job. However, his experience on the news side helped him to be a better media relations director.

When the ACLU position opened, Petto saw it as an opportunity to explore his true passion for advocacy. In his position, Petto remains committed to protecting the rights of his fellow Nebraskans.

Petto says the ACLU sheds light on civil liberties being attacked and defends the hard-won victories for those freedoms.

“You couldn’t beat the affordability and quality of education that UNO offers,” Petto says.

While working on his degree, Petto credits professors Chris Allen, Ph.D., and Jeremy Lipschultz, Ph.D., for their mentorship that helped him find opportunities beyond the classroom. As a senior, Petto landed an internship at WOWT, which later turned into a full-time position. He quickly moved up the ranks to become a producer of the overnight newscast.

“In the news world, it is very stressful as you are trying to produce a show on short notice and focus on stories that happened or scrapping your whole timeline for breaking news,” Petto says.

“Be open to new experiences, and you want to end up where you want to be with whatever you are passionate about.”

Sam Petto follows his passion for advocacy at ACLU Nebraska. Photo submitted.
Glover brings women together with the power of collaboration

By Skylar Vance

Carina Glover has forged a career path that transforms the lives of women.

She officially launched the HerHeadquarters app in May of 2019, and today her company holds a partnership with Forbes and is recognized by Harper’s Bazaar, Cheddar and Thrive Global.

With hopes of someday becoming a prosecutor, Glover majored in pre-law at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. After some trial and error, Glover changed her major to journalism and media communication with a concentration in public relations and advertising. She graduated in 2014 with a Bachelor of Science in communication.

Her journey that led to the creation of HerHeadquarters began in the fall semester of her senior year at UNO. Glover realized her talent in event planning and looked for ways to build a career in this field. To fulfill her graduation credits, Glover needed to complete an internship. To fulfill her graduation credits, Glover needed to complete an internship.

“Prior to this, I never had a hard time finding a job,” Glover says. “If I quit a job on Monday, I would have a new job offer by Friday. So, when I finally found something, I wanted to do as a career, I was excited and expected to have the same track record as before, but that wasn’t the case.”

Glover says she had a difficult time finding an internship, and soon realized she needed to take matters into her own hands. "I started my first business out of frustration and retaliation," Glover says and adds she didn’t need someone else to validate her work.

She launched her event planning business in the fall of 2013 and admits her first few years were tough, due to her lack of experience and client base. Little did she know, what the future had in store for her.

One day after partnering with another business, Glover landed a contract with the Grammys. She was still living in Omaha at the time, and with all the traveling involved, she met many women who owned their own companies. In her conversations with these women, Glover discovered a gap existed in their industry, which led to HerHeadquarters.

This platform connects women entrepreneurs to different brand partnerships with other women-owned businesses nationwide. On the app, users post their collaboration opportunities and partnership inquiries. From there, users can interact with these postings and form a partnership based on both of their needs.

Glover credits a lot of her success to customer research. “The only thing worse than a failed product or business is no one wanting your product or service,” Glover says, “and not finding out until after you have invested thousands of dollars and time that you can’t get back.”

To combat this, Glover spent a total of 18 months in the process of research and development, trying to understand the problem these women faced in the business world before she launched HerHeadquarters. She wanted to know these women’s stories and struggles just as well as she knew her own. She says by learning from these women, she has adapted to any new challenges thrown her way.

COVID-19 is one of those very challenges. The pandemic had a surprising effect on HerHeadquarters. Since the end of 2020, the company has grown nearly 400%, Glover says. She believes this influx is because before 2020, women networked and found business opportunities by attending in-person events. However, when the pandemic struck, events moved virtual. Many women wondered how to keep building their businesses during the country’s shutdown.

Glover says she believes this struggle is what led women straight to HerHeadquarters. Despite the increase in online traffic, Glover says she still had difficulty adjusting to the new “normal” that came with the pandemic. She began to receive many emails from women who were backing out of events as infection rates soared, which left her at a loss.

To keep new users interested, Glover partnered with a multitude of women-owned businesses and held a three-day conference, allowing collaborators to have a chance to meet and share their wisdom. She says this event brought HerHeadquarters 200 new users.

"We give women access to what they need. So, we as a community, are full of women-owned businesses that can grow and rise together."

Glover says this event brought HerHeadquarters 200 new users.

Glover’s idea for HerHeadquarters leads to more empowerment for women. Photo by C4Photography.

The pandemic has allowed Glover and her team to soar to heights she never imagined possible. She has made it known that HerHeadquarters is more than just an app.

“We are a brand that supports women-owned businesses on and outside our app,” Glover says. “We jump at every opportunity to celebrate these businesses, even if they are not on HerHeadquarters.”

She further grew her business when she participated in the Women’s Entrepreneurship Day, an event designed to empower, celebrate and support women worldwide. HerHeadquarters gave away a $1,500 business grant to a woman-owned business of their choice.

For those businesses that did not receive the grant, Glover partnered with Forbes. Through this collaboration, participants had access to master classes, which are small, in-depth learning sessions taught by female business professionals. During that one-month time window, HerHeadquarters grew by nearly 800 users.

"We are a brand that supports women-owned businesses on and outside our app,” Glover says. “We jump at every opportunity to celebrate these businesses, even if they are not on HerHeadquarters.”

She acknowledges that access to brand partnerships is only one challenge women face in business. They also have trouble with accessing money, mentors and advisers. That’s why she goes out of her way to give women more than what her app delivers.

“We give women access to what they need,” Glover says. “So, we as a community, are full of women-owned businesses that can grow and rise together.”

Glover's HerHeadquarters app allows female entrepreneurs to connect with women-owned business across the nation. Photo submitted.

Carina Glover’s HerHeadquarters app allows female entrepreneurs to connect with women-owned business across the nation. Photo submitted.

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Beaulieu rises as a storyteller through filmmaking

By Rebecca Clark

For Nick Beaulieu, storytelling is the best part of writing. His interest in storytelling has led to a career as a filmmaker.

“I saw what was happening in the journalism industry, and I didn’t like the trends I was seeing as far as newspapers being consolidated and writers being let go,” Beaulieu says. “I thought a lot about what I liked about storytelling. I really liked writing feature pieces and in-depth investigative work. I liked work where the project takes a lot of time and is very dense, which I found in filmmaking.”

Beaulieu applied the skills he learned in journalism and writing to the documentary and filmmaking world.

His passion for storytelling has allowed Beaulieu to rise through the ranks of filmmaking. He began his journey as a writer for the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s newspaper The Gateway. continued on page 23

Beaulieu earned a Bachelor of Science degree in communication from UNO in 2015 with a major in journalism and media communication and a minor in marketing. He served as sports editor and editor-in-chief of The Gateway. He also participated in a filmmaking club.

To build his professional experience, Beaulieu worked as an intern at Film Streams and on the copy desk at the Omaha World-Herald. He was one of the first blog writers for the “Nebraska High School Hoops,” an Omaha World-Herald blog.

Following graduation, Beaulieu used his marketing skills working his way from associate account manager to senior account manager for Sojern, a digital marketing company for the travel industry.

In 2020, Beaulieu worked on “American Portrait,” a national storytelling project where people from all over the United States submit their stories of joy, sorrow, triumph, hardship and family traditions.

Beaulieu met a filmmaker on The D-Word, a social media site for filmmakers worldwide. Beaulieu says the filmmaker told him “American Portrait” was looking for Nebraska filmmakers. Beaulieu applied and connected with PBS and got the job.

“I thought it was very important to try to represent Nebraska authentically,” Beaulieu says.

He says misconceptions often exist about Nebraska—that’s why this project was so important.

For “American Portrait,” he picked five people and filmed three stories per person for his segments. The stories averaged 35 to 40 seconds long. One segment told the story of a woman known only as, Maria C, whose story was about two minutes. Beaulieu says it was interesting to see their secondary lives, like hobbies and aspirations.

“This story was a unifying creation,” Beaulieu says. “I thought it was very important for Nebraska to have a voice in that moment, and that voice to be true to what Omaha and Nebraska are really like. I wanted a diverse cast of people with different types of professions, different ages and different genders. That is what was important to me.”

Beaulieu’s motivation to take on this project stemmed from his connection to the Omaha community.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected Beaulieu like others in the field and forced him to conduct socially distanced and outdoor interviews.

Beaulieu plans to finish his own written and directed film this year. The project—five years in the making—began as part of an independent study he did at UNO.

“This film,” Beaulieu says, “has always been at the heart of my goals.”

Through the project, Beaulieu got the story of Maria C and the traditions she learned from her grandmother. Maria C’s grandmother, considered high-risk for COVID-19, could not meet in person. Maria C filmed her grandmother, and Beaulieu edited the video. He says the set-up worked out well.

One of the episodes, "I Rise," told the story of those committed to an antiracist future. In that episode, Beaulieu shot footage for Sen. Terrell McKinney, who represents District 11 in the Nebraska Unicameral. Beaulieu says McKinney ran last year on the idea that he could bring much-needed change to North Omaha.

“I Rise” is a very appropriate mantra to have for 2021 giving everything that 2020 threw at us, whether it was the racial justice movement, the election or the pandemic,” Beaulieu says. “I think ‘I Rise’ speaks to the ability to overcome all those obstacles and try to come out the other side stronger.”

“I thought it was very important to try to represent Nebraska authentically.”

Beaulieu rises above pandemic challenges to create documentaries. Photo submitted.

“I think ‘I Rise’ speaks to the ability to overcome all those obstacles and try to come out the other side stronger.”
Morris’ love of writing and service leads to career in military public affairs

By Taylor Arensberg

Jillian Morris says her passion for writing, which she developed as a journalism student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, has served her well as a civilian in military public affairs.

When Morris transferred to UNO after her freshman year at the University of Kansas, she never imagined she’d spend her entire career in military public affairs. But a summer job at Offutt Air Force Base opened the door to put her communication skills to work as a writer and editor for the base newspaper.

Today, Morris serves as deputy director of Congressional and Public Affairs at Military Sealift Command in Washington D.C. In addition to her Bachelor of Arts degree in communication from UNO in 2002, Morris holds a Master of Arts in management and leadership from Webster University and a certificate in government affairs from Georgetown University.

Morris, the 2013 School of Communication Alumni Achievement award winner, recalls her time at UNO fondly.

“I loved the smaller classes,” Morris says. “I loved that I could take a class and see my professor in the hallway semesters later and my professor would still know my name and know things about me.”

During her sophomore year at UNO, Morris met Karen Weber, a School of Communication lecturer and faculty adviser for the Public Relations Student Society of America. Morris decided to join PRSSA and soon assumed a leadership position on its Executive Board.

“Getting involved with PRSSA was by far the best thing I did in college. It’s where I made some of my great friends that I still keep in touch with today,” Morris says.

Morris says she appreciated all the encouragement she received from Weber, which helped her succeed in college and beyond.

“She is just the biggest supporter,” Morris says. “She spends her entire time cheering on her students and giving them opportunities to excel.”

After college, Morris says she thought she wanted to work in advertising, so she interviewed with different companies. While waiting to land a position, her job in communications at Offutt Air Force Base kept her busy writing, editing and revising stories.

“I really love to write,” Morris says. “Writing and editing are where I excelled in college so that’s what I really tried to focus on.”

She moved to San Antonio, Texas, in 2003, where she began her career as an Air Force civilian working in public affairs. She did community relations activities such as arranging tours, speaker requests and air shows. She also worked in the media relations department, where she dealt with reporters and conducted on-camera media interviews. Additionally, she worked in internal communications, where she wrote for the Base newspaper and wrote speeches.

“It was really an amazing introduction to Air Force public affairs,” Morris says.

Morris worked in Air Force public affairs for 15 years before she accepted a position with the Navy in Washington D.C. The pandemic forced Morris to work in a hybrid model where she spent about 25% of her time physically in the office and the remaining time working from home. While the move has eliminated some distractions and stress from the workplace, Morris says she missed going into the office and seeing the friendly faces of her co-workers.

“It took a little bit of getting used to, but I really do love it,” Morris says.

As a supervisor for a team of 13, Morris says limited face-to-face interactions have presented challenges. She has worked hard to overcome those challenges by making sure the line of communication remains open to keep the work flowing.

Morris does a lot of managing while her team executes the basic tasks. Her job is to make sure the team has the right resources, training, tools and support needed to be successful.

“If they come against challenges achieving the objective, then that’s where I step in,” Morris says. “We talk through it and figure out ways to overcome it. I like finding different ways to motivate people.”

While her main job is to supervise her team, her work goes a lot deeper.

“I always think my favorite part about doing public affairs is I get to tell the stories of the men and women who sacrifice and give up part of their lives to work in the Department of Defense in America,” Morris says. “I get to shine a light on the sacrifices that they make and the amazing things they are accomplishing every day.”

The pandemic has not altered the mission and the commitment to serve the military community. Morris says her team members and colleagues have faced challenges such as caring for sick family members navigating e-learning and maintaining productivity while working from home.

“I’ve always cared about my people, but I’m not just focused on what they’re doing in the workplace, I’m also focused on their mental wellbeing and health.”

While traveling as much, but we definitely try to travel and see our friends and family that we have in the area.”

Morris’ love of writing and service leads to career in military public affairs

Family Spotlight:

When she is not busy with work, Morris enjoys spending time with her family. Her husband, Mark Morris, is also an Air Force civilian and reserve. He travels once a month as a commander. Together, they have two children, Reagan, 9, and Tyler, 6.

“My life is quickly starting to revolve around their activities,” Morris says.

“Obviously, the Coronavirus has put a damper on all this,” Morris says, “so we haven’t been traveling as much, but we definitely try to travel and see our friends and family that we have in the area.”

“Getting involved with PRSSA was by far the best thing I did in college. It’s where I made some of my great friends that I still keep in touch with today.”

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While traveling as much, but we definitely try to travel and see our friends and family that we have in the area.”
Keegan Korf admits her career path that has zigzagged from public relations to education to technology and community advocacy may not be a road others would take.

But for Korf, each experience enriched her life and gave her a perspective to better serve her community.

Korf, who graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha with a bachelor’s degree in communication and a concentration in public relations and advertising, has worn the hat of educator, technologist, community builder and professional storyteller. She currently works at Emspace + Lovgren as a senior brand and communication strategist.

“It’s a lot of creative work for me and not of like the design nature necessarily,” Korf says. “I work strictly in client relations so that is just being the go-between the client and all of the people here on our team. Every day looks different, there are meetings on-site and off-site, coffees, conversations, events and just showing up to support clients, so it’s just every day is completely different, and that’s what I love about it.”

Korf says her current position is a career she had always hoped for. However, after she earned her degree in 2008, her work as an ad coordinator for a wedding magazine didn’t meet her expectations.

“When I first got into the industry right after graduating college, I didn’t have a chance to explore the broad range of what it looks like. I changed careers relatively quickly,” Korf says. “I was surprised to realize that not every area of communication work is something that I would want to do every day of my life. But I learned so much in the roles that I’ve been in the last decade that have helped to make me a strong communications professional.”

After a year at the magazine, she returned to school and earned her Master of Arts in secondary education. Korf taught high school English. However, when a technology support position for the school district opened, it sparked her interest in educational technology.

“I went on to work in the nonprofit sector, but I started in a role that had never existed before,” Korf says. “My role was to help support, create and implement pilot projects that would help solve transportation and mobility issues in the community using technology.”

While at Metro Smart Cities, she collaborated with Elizabeth Murphy, president of Emspace + Lovgren. This connection led to her current position. Korf says her job as senior brand and communication strategist is exactly what she wanted to do upon graduation from the School of Communication.

“I was a client of Emspace, and I just had so much fun working with this agency, Korf says. “I have mad respect for our president, and I just kept in touch with her over the years and she said, ‘I think you should come work for us.’”

Korf says her current position is a career she had always hoped for. However, after she earned her degree in 2008, her work as an ad coordinator for a wedding magazine didn’t meet her expectations.

With COVID-19, college graduates face a difficult time finding their dream job. Just like Korf, in the 2008 recession, it took a long time for her to find the perfect position. Korf says she is so grateful for her journey throughout the many paths of communication, and it blessed her with her position at Emspace + Lovgren.

“I think you should come work for us.””

During her varied career, Korf has navigated her way through the education, nonprofit and public relations sectors. This path has proved valuable for the work that she does today, but also provides a challenge. With every challenge, Korf says, comes great rewards.

“I have learned so much in the roles that I’ve been in the last decade that have helped make me a strong communications professional.”

Korf was named to Omaha Jaycee’s Ten Outstanding Young Omahans list for 2021.

Keegan Korf pursues her passion for community advocacy and PR at Emspace + Lovgren. Photo submitted.
A ceremony. However, Baez recalls the woman told her she shared When walking off the stage after her speech, a woman grabbed Baez audience, and soon the world.

Baez says she had no idea the effect her story of embracing failure and taking risks could have on the fellow graduate students and professors. Baez takes a breath to begin her 10-minute-long speech in front of her commencement speech at Bellevue University.

Baez thanks her plastic stars

By Delaney Henton

A plastic glow-in-the-dark star rests between Leia Baez’s thumb and pointer finger, as the stage lights burn heavily on her, and the applause starts to fade. It’s 2018, and Leia Baez has just begun her commencement speech at Bellevue University.

Baez takes a breath to begin her 10-minute-long speech in front of her fellow graduate students and professors. Baez says she had no idea the effect her story of embracing failure and taking risks could have on the audience, and soon the world.

When walking off the stage after her speech, a woman grabbed Baez by the arm and told her she almost didn’t come to the graduation ceremony. However, Baez recalls the woman told her she shared a similar story. Baez’s speech gave the woman hope and the determination to never give up.

“That was all I needed to know,” Baez says, “that sharing those hard things can have such a positive impact on people.”

The company Goalcast soon picked up Baez’s speech, where it went viral with more than 6.5 million views. This seminal event inspired Baez to write “A Star for Stella,” her story of hardship, courage, and perseverance.

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Although Baez admits she struggled in her personal life, she remained career-focused and motivated. This is one of the reasons she chose to go to graduate school. Her ambition began when she was a sophomore at Bellevue West high school and wanted to be on the yearbook staff.

Baez recalls her shock when she didn’t see her name on the staff list. She searched the list feverishly for her name, but she didn’t see it. Her stomach dropped. She thought, how could this be? She skimmed over the list, twice, then three times. Baez saw all her friends’ names on the list, but not hers. Baez couldn’t overcome her sadness to be left off the prestigious yearbook staff. Soon after, her journalism teacher pulled Baez aside for a conversation.

“You wrote an amazing essay, Leia,” Baez recalls her teacher’s words, which confused her more than ever. “I think you should be on the newspaper staff instead.”

Baez was disappointed not to join her friends on the yearbook staff but excited for this new opportunity. She quickly fell in love with the newspaper.

“Little did I know I was being redirected to my passion,” Baez says, “which ended up being journalism.”

She attended the University of Nebraska at Omaha with aspirations to become an attorney like her father. However, she found a passion for writing. At UNO, she knew she wanted to go into the journalism field, and immediately joined the school newspaper, The Gateway. Eventually, she became editor-in-chief.

“I found my passion through this closed-door opportunity,” Baez says, “You never know when you’re going to be redirected to something you absolutely love.”

Always looking for the next opportunity, Baez started working part-time at the Omaha World-Herald, punching in high school sports scores into the system, which got her foot in the door.

As Baez worked to finish her degree, she wrote feature stories part-time for the newspaper’s sports department. She loved sports writing but wanted a full-time reporter position upon graduation.

Eventually, persistence paid off and the newspaper hired Baez as a business reporter. Baez jumped at the opportunity despite no experience on the business beat.

While Baez’s professional career flourished, her personal life began to crumble. Baez recalls lying in bed in her childhood bedroom after hearing the worst news of her life. Her husband had filed for divorce and fought to take temporary custody of their daughter Stella.

Now in her 30s, Baez stared up at her ceiling and says she felt like a failure. Emotional and crying, she looked up at the ceiling and saw the glow-in-the-dark stars she had put up as a young girl. Baez stared up at them for a while, remembering how she would wish upon those plastic stars.

“I am going to be a professional ice skater;” and “I am going to write a book,” were a few of those wishes. Baez realized she still had dreams to fulfill. “It was a reminder that I could still be great and do great things,” Baez says. “I’ve made mistakes, but I am growing and learning every day.”

Baez thought of Stella and how she knew these plastic glow-in-the-dark stars were not only her sign to keep fighting for her daughter, but also a sign to believe in herself.

From that moment on, Baez picked herself up and changed her mindset. She decided to go to graduate school at Bellevue University amid her divorce. She turned her focus on something that would lead to empowerment and growth.

After her commencement video went viral, Baez knew she had a story to tell. One of her wishes on a plastic ceiling star was to write a book, so she got started. She sat down in September of 2020 and wrote the first chapter of her book. Unaware of how it would come about or get published, she had faith.

Three months later, Baez received a message from her old high school volleyball coach on Facebook. The coach told her she had a friend she wanted Baez to meet. The friend was an author who wanted to do an interview for her book. Baez said yes right away, and they set up a Zoom call.

At the end of the interview, Baez did what she called the “typical journalism skill” and told the author she wanted to write a book too but didn’t know how. The author led Baez to a program that helps writers write their books from start to finish, including getting them published.

Baez used the program throughout 2021 to write the book in her free time away from her day job as communications director for Douglas County. Baez, a journalist who always told other people’s stories, now has published her own memoir, “A Star for Stella.”

Baez says she continues to stay in that mindset by surrounding herself with positive “vibes.” She reads literature, follows inspirational leaders, downloads affirmation apps and gains strength from being around supportive people.

No matter how busy Baez is working or writing, she finds time to give back to her community. She holds board positions for several Omaha metro nonprofits, such as the Latino Center of the Midlands, Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Midlands, the Rose Theater, and The Gateway Publication Board. She is also an active member of PRSA Nebraska.

Baez also gives back to her community by donating some of the profits from her book to the Bethlehem House in Omaha, a nonprofit organization for pregnant women in crisis. Baez says she felt drawn to this organization because of her own crisis with her daughter. She wants to help and inspire other mothers. To date, Baez has donated over $2,000.

Baez says she hopes to inspire others through her message of hope and healing. Baez admits not many people want their skeletons to come out of the closet, but decided to “just throw them out!”

“We all have those professional personas that we want to keep,” Baez says. “I believe that I am being guided to do this kind of work, and honestly it scares me. But I know that at the end of the day I am helping someone else, and that is all that matters.”
Maiorca sheds a new light on excellence and inclusion at UNO

By Dana Cox

Throughout her teaching career, Cheryl Maiorca, Ph.D., says she's committed to helping students pursue their passions.

Maiorca joined the School of Communication in the fall of 2021, as a communication studies instructor. She says she was attracted to the position for the sole ability to grow within the community at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

"It was so in sync with how I liked to teach and interact with the community," she says.

Maiorca, an Alaskan, has traveled far and wide to fully expand her academic experience. She earned her doctoral degree at the University of Oklahoma in 2019. She holds a Master of Science in emergency management and Homeland Security from Arkansas Tech and earned her Bachelor of Arts in social and behavioral science from Linfield University.

While Maiorca juggles her responsibilities teaching courses such as Public Speaking Fundamentals, she also works on her academic research in political communication. She plans to launch a new study based on the 2018 Oklahoma teacher’s strike.

Maiorca enjoys her work as an instructor and researcher and looks forward to ways she can contribute to the School and the university.

"The important thing for me is listening," Maiorca says. "Based on the needs and the requests of the department, I can help the university continue with what they are wanting to do."

Maiorca says she is excited to collaborate with students and help them discover lifelong success in the coming academic year.

By enhancing the values the School of Communication already has in place and integrating her own values, Maiorca says she can make a difference at UNO.

"I think it is important to come in and listen, and see what is present and find where I can enhance what already exists."

Thompson overcomes challenges on road to doctorate degree

By Danny Balanos

Herb Thompson, Ph.D., advocates for diversity, equity and inclusion issues in the classroom, on campus and in the community. Photo submitted.

Herb Thompson, Ph.D., knows firsthand how to juggle his duties as an instructor and full-time student. But he didn't anticipate teaching and working toward his doctorate during a global pandemic.

Thompson has taught communication studies courses as a full-time instructor for the School of Communication as he pursued his doctoral studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Thompson says this is not very common because of the demands of a doctoral program, but he didn't anticipate teaching and working toward his doctorate during a global pandemic.

Thompson has taught communication studies courses as a full-time instructor for the School of Communication as he pursued his doctoral studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

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Liking others, COVID-19 limited his ability to meet on campus and connect with students. Thompson, the father of a 10-year-old daughter, says he wanted to make sure his family remained safe. He took precautions to avoid the virus by staying at home. Thompson had to teach and work on his doctorate degree remotely. Juggling the roles of father, teacher and student proved challenging.

But the sacrifices, time and effort paid off when Thompson walked across the stage on Aug. 13, 2021, to receive his Ph.D. and saw his family in the crowd.

As he continues his teaching career, Thompson says he’s committed to helping UNO further develop a culture of inclusion. He currently serves as co-chair of CFAM’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee.

Thompson says he hopes to see more inclusivity sooner than later, and added UNO offers the climate for a culture of inclusion.
Megan Carroll says students and faculty are the heart and soul of campus life by creating a community of support at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Through her work as the School of Communication’s full-time academic adviser, Carroll supports students and faculty with her guidance. Carroll says the School’s advisers help to create a community where students feel like they have somebody who is there to cheer them on every step of the way.

“The best part is seeing them realize that they can be successful at school,” Carroll says.

Her work involves meeting with students each semester to help plan their course of study. She also reaches out to students throughout the semester to help them choose the major and career path that’s the best fit for them.

Carroll, a graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, earned her master’s degree from Kansas State University. Based on advice from her own adviser, Carroll says she discovered she enjoyed helping students figure out their college goals.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Carroll says she remained passionate and hopeful about her work, despite the challenges. She missed the in-person interaction in her one-on-one advising sessions, but she made the best of her Zoom meetings with students.

“While there is still a lack of connections in person,” she says. “I have seen students and faculty connect more, which I think is a positive sign.”

Carroll says she’s at her best when others surround her. That’s why the pandemic brought the need for perseverance and self-reflection.

“My cup normally fills from seeing others succeed,” Carroll says.

Thies serves ‘C-family’ as administrative assistant and adviser

Michelle Thies supports the School of Communication, students and staff through a variety of different roles.

Thies says the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on how she completed all these jobs.

“Working remotely was a challenge,” Thies says. “I came in once a week for a year, starting June 2020, to handle mail and anything else around here that seemed like it needed to be taken care of.”

Though faced with new challenges, Thies says she adapted to Zoom meetings and virtual advising. During the pandemic, Thies also served on the search committee that hired the School’s director, Heather Hundley, Ph.D.

Thies says her favorite part of her job is that she enjoys working with the faculty, staff and students.

“They’re a great group of people, and I just enjoy coordinating and doing different things,” Thies says. “We feel like we are a family. You know, CFAM, we say we are a C-Family. I feel comfortable enough to go to anybody in the college, from the dean all the way down because they are just really wonderful to work for.”
Marcus says photography gives voice to people

By Tanner Thorngren

As a young boy, Howard K. Marcus recalls looking in a closet for a board game when he stumbled upon a camera. He asked his mother if he could play with it, and she replied, "just don’t break it."

That act of curiosity led to Marcus’ newfound passion: photography.

Today, Marcus shares his talent as a photography instructor for the School of Communication at his alma mater, the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Marcus says photography has evolved, which allows people from all walks of life to explore photography through different platforms.

“I think people are taking a closer look,” Marcus says. “Although there are photographers documenting the overall state of the human condition, they are turning more inward documenting their own lives.”

Marcus says photography gives a voice to people and allowed them to find beauty amidst the chaos. For example, photography has captured both tragedy and triumph throughout the pandemic.

“Photography should be a part of it,” Marcus says. “We have this tremendous opportunity to make even greater use of the tools at hand to improve society.”

Marcus shares a story with his photography students each year about the challenges he faced when shooting for a client. The company reached out to Marcus for an outdoor group photoshoot. On the day of the photoshoot, it rained, causing Marcus to relocate inside. The indoor lighting was not bright enough, so Marcus had to take the photo on a scissor lift that swayed back and forth.

While he overcame the challenges that day and took a satisfactory photo for the company, Marcus says photographers can’t assume everything will go well.

“When the going gets tough in photography, that is when preparedness kicks in,” Marcus says, “I was fighting every kind of photographic condition you do not want to be in.”

Marcus credits his training, preparedness and problem-solving to overcoming obstacles. He also says having an open mind and expecting all types of scenarios can turn a failure into success.

Marcus says the pandemic brings more opportunities for storytelling through photography.

“Photography should be a part of it,” Marcus says. “We have this tremendous opportunity to make even greater use of the tools at hand to improve society.”

Capturing it all: Whye’s nature photography view in Nebraska

By Tanner Thorngren

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. But Mike Whye sees that beauty through the lens of nature photography. Whye, a freelance writer/photographer, teaches students about photojournalism at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Whey got his start in photography as a teenager when he took his father’s camera.

“I would use my dad’s camera just to take pictures of things, and then he got me a little type of a Kodak Brownie, which is a little simpler than his 35 millimeters at the time,” Whye says. “I just started shooting with that and learned how to process film.”

From his father’s camera to his own, Whye started his career in photography but didn’t start out in nature photos. Whye photographed anything and everything to build his knowledge of operating a camera.

“I just did anything and took pictures out of my bedroom window during my junior high years,” Whye says. “I just kept at it.”

Whye began to explore nature photography during his early college years by going to Fontenelle Forest in Bellevue.

“arly on, I was a travel photographer, shooting with that and learned how to process film.”

2020 proved a difficult year for Whye, not just due to the pandemic, but also to his personal health. His surgery forced Whye to focus on his recovery.

“I just kept at it.”

“My heart, I’m just Midwest, and I have enjoyed getting out showing people things in Iowa and Nebraska,” Whye says. “They just don’t know. They think we’re all flatland. I like to show people that the Midwest is more than flyover territory.”

Whye’s book, “Nebraska Simply Beautiful,” shows the state’s diverse beauty through photos of the cascading Snake Falls or the Chimney Rock landmark.

“In my heart, I’m just Midwest, and I have enjoyed getting out showing people things in Iowa and Nebraska,” Whye says. “They just don’t know. They think we’re all flatland. I like to show people that the Midwest is more than flyover territory.”

2020 proved a difficult year for Whye, not just due to the pandemic, but also to his personal health. His surgery forced Whye to focus on his recovery.

“I couldn’t do things and wasn’t allowed to drive for six weeks. It took time to slowly get out and rebuild my strength,” Whye says. “I wasn’t really too worried about getting out to do nature photography, especially what I call the long-haul stuff like going into the Sand Hills, going down to the Ozarks or Lake Superior. Those things for me took a lot longer.”

After his recovery, Whye continued taking nature photography during the pandemic. He traveled across Nebraska to find new ways to portray the state’s natural beauty.

“I’ve done less in the past year and a half than I’ve done before,” Whye says. “The travel industry is down, and a lot of travel industry is landscape photography showing people what’s out there, but I still go out.”

Howard Marcus shares his love of photography with students. Photo submitted.

Mike Whye (right) enjoys sharing the natural beauty of Nebraska and other locations in the Midwest. Photo by Sergio De Coste.
Awards & Scholarships

2022-2023 School of Communication Scholarship Recipients

Sarah Babe  Hugh P. and Juliette L. Cowdin Communication Scholarship
Geiler Damian  Marcus Family Scholarship
Geiler Damian  Omaha Press Club Paul N. Williams Scholarship
Pauline Dulang  Nebraska Broadcaster’s Association Scholarship
Liam Fenwick  Omaha Press Club Mark Gaultier Intern Award
Delaney Henton  Sue Francke Memorial Scholarship
Delaney Henton  Virginia McIntire Scholarship
Tristen Menichetti  Virginia McIntire Scholarship
Wyatt Moravec  Virginia McIntire Scholarship
Kathryn O’Connor  Omaha Press Club Susan Eustice Scholarship
Kathryn O’Connor  PRSA Nebraska Scholarship
Mya Robinson  Virginia McIntire Scholarship
Hannah Rodricks  Kim Jones Passion Scholarship
Lexy Schulte  Omaha Press Club John Davis Scholarship
Derek Shadle  Omaha Press Club Floyd Kalber Scholarship
Riley Smith  Omaha Press Club Panko-Roberts Scholarship
Jacob Thimjon  Omaha Press Club Zorinsky Graduate Scholarship
MaverickPR  Omaha Press Club John Savage Visual Communications Fellowship

Bellinghausen carves her own path in passion for sports journalism

By Sara Meadows

Bellinghausen worked her way up from a reporter for MavRadio to general manager, she enjoys interviewing athletes and fans, providing color commentary for games and sideline reporting.

Bellinghausen’s hard work did not go unnoticed. MavRadio faculty adviser and lecturer Jodeane Brownlee nominated her for the award.

"Ana Bellinghausen epitomizes the Maverick spirit. She is genuinely one of the hardest working, most competent students I’ve had the pleasure of working with,” Brownlee wrote in her recommendation.

When Bellinghausen began covering sports at UNO, she says most of the reporters were male. She and her friend and fellow student Avarie Howard decided that needed to change.

"I started the Women in Media Club for women to feel like they have a place and a voice,” Bellinghausen says.

The club became a sanctioned student organization in 2020 during the peak of the pandemic.

"I didn’t want to feel like I was wasting any time on improving myself and improving those around me,” Bellinghausen says, “and what better way to do it than to start a club and make a difference right on campus?"

Bellinghausen continued to build her professional experience before graduation by working for the Omaha Sports Commission, BIG EAST Digital Network, Nebraska Public Media and USA Curling. She currently serves as the digital director for Hurrdat Sports.

"I like to describe it as if there is a sporting event in Omaha, I’m most likely at it and I’m most likely working,” Bellinghausen says, "whether that’s behind the scenes or in front of a camera."

Bellinghausen leaves her mark on campus through her involvement and passion for sports media. Photo submitted.

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Sudbeck shares her love of communication with public speaking students

By Jordan Speckmann

As an undergraduate student, Morgan Sudbeck earned praise for her public speaking ability. Today, she uses these skills as a graduate teaching assistant for the public speaking courses at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Her excellent academic work toward her Master of Arts degree at UNO has earned her the School of Communication’s Outstanding Graduate Student award.

Roma Subramanian, Ph.D., nominated Sudbeck for the award for her work ethic and passion for her research.

“I’m not only impressed by Morgan’s work ethic, but her keen understanding of herself and her goals as well as her ability to advocate for herself. Wherever her career takes her, I’m confident that she will be a leader that others will look up to,” Subramanian wrote in her letter of recommendation.

In addition to pursuing her master’s degree, Sudbeck is working to get her certification in human resource training and development. Her academic interests include communication, international studies and health communication.

“My excellent academic work toward my Master of Arts degree at UNO has earned me the School of Communication’s Outstanding Graduate Student award. I am proud to be recognized for my dedication to both learning and teaching. My goal is to continue my studies because I understand that there are people who believe in my potential.”

Vu’s dedication to service allows him to shine in new role

By Sara Meadows

Minh Vu carries the proud legacy of his grandparents, who served as human rights activists in their home country of Vietnam. His parents also dedicate themselves to social equity. So, it’s no coincidence that Vu carries on the tradition.

Vu’s commitment to academic excellence led to his selection as the Outstanding Student in Communication Studies.

Vu was nominated for the award by Barb Pickering, Ph.D., professor and assistant director of the School of Communication, for his insight and contributions in class.

“I’ve been working with him on his practicum project. Minh went above and beyond the work required for this course credit and is in the process of completing a paper that is based on interviews he conducted with international students who work in the Community Engagement Center,” Pickering wrote in her letter of recommendation.

Sudbeck’s dedication to service allowed him to shine in new role

By Jordan Speckmann

Sudbeck, who earned her undergraduate degree at Wayne State College, says her courses in communication sparked an interest to further her studies.

“I took classes, and then ultimately, fell in love. I think what really instilled my drive for communication was being able to attend some national conferences,” Sudbeck says. “So, I’m really excited to see that the things I fell in love with communication and my undergraduate, translate and carry over into my graduate program at UNO.”

Her love for learning and student involvement led her to pursue graduate teaching. She started as a graduate teaching assistant during the pandemic, which created difficulty in teaching courses online. Sudbeck says she loves her graduate teaching position because she can share her love for communication with others. She also appreciates the honor of being named the Outstanding Graduate Student.

“I was a little shocked, but at the same time, pretty humbled because I like to leave places better than I found them,” Sudbeck says. “I’m really involved when it comes to a student, I’m also a graduate teaching assistant, so I take a lot of the things that I learned as a student and apply them to my classes.”

Lambert’s natural teaching ability brings success to graduate assistant role

By Jordan Speckmann

From a small town to the big city, Katelyn Lambert, the School of Communication’s 2022 Outstanding Graduate Assistant pursues her dreams in communication.

Lambert, originally from western Nebraska, attended Chadron State College for her undergraduate degree. In May 2020, she earned a degree in communication with an emphasis in PR and advertising.

Coming from Chadron State, Lambert says she benefited from a well-rounded outlook in communications. In turn, this prepared her for the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s graduate program.

Lambert planned to work in the communications field after graduation, but COVID-19 limited her prospects.

“I started applying for jobs but that was right when the pandemic was starting, so nobody was hiring,” Lambert says. “If anything, everybody was, unfortunately, getting laid off.”

Going to graduate school was a future goal for Lambert, so she reached out to her mentor at Chadron State and learned about the Master of Arts in Communication at UNO.

After talking to Adam Tyma, Ph.D. and graduate chair, Lambert applied for graduate school and a position to be a graduate assistant. She accepted the remote position teaching Intro to Journalism and Media Communication. Lambert also serves as the graduate student representative for the School’s graduate faculty.

“Given that her first year as a graduate student and assistant was during the pandemic, and she still pulled it off and still produced excellent graduate-level writing,” Tyma says. “I am thrilled that she earned it; she does amazing work.”

Andrea Weare, Ph.D., nominated Lambert for the Outstanding Graduate Student award. Lambert’s hard work and natural teaching ability pushed her to win this award.

“She accepted the remote position teaching Intro to Journalism and Media Communication. Lambert also serves as the graduate student representative for the School’s graduate faculty.

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Andrea Weare, Ph.D., nominated Lambert for the Outstanding Graduate Student award. Lambert’s hard work and natural teaching ability pushed her to win this award.

“Kate is a natural teacher. One of her best characteristics as a teacher is that Kate can get students talking. Notably, she gets female students talking who statistically speak less in university classrooms compared to their male peers,” Weare wrote in her recommendation.

Through her graduate teaching work, Lambert has realized that she wants to pursue a career in teaching. She plans to graduate with her master’s degree in August 2022 and begin work on her doctorate.

“I truly was so thrilled and honored to get the award,” Lambert says. “I am just grateful that other people saw the value in me and saw that the work that I was doing was worthy of the award.”
Internship provides community and flexibility for Muñoz

By Lexy Schulte

If she could travel anywhere, Diana Muñoz says she would love to go back to Hawaii.

Thanks to her internship through the Multicultural Advertising Internship program, she will be able to travel and work remotely. She says she already plans to take trips to Miami and Puerto Rico.

“I just think it’d be so cool to wake up in the morning and look out on the beach, or just go to the beach and pull my laptop out and work,” Muñoz says.

While she was a student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Muñoz applied to the MAIP program. The program connects multicultural students to internships across the country. Students who are accepted into the program can pick preferences for cities and interests, and MAIP matches them with the best fit for them.

Muñoz put Minneapolis, Chicago, Texas and Florida for her location interests, and MAIP matches them with the best fit for them.

Part of the application allowed students to indicate they were open to remote work. Muñoz says she completes most of her work from South Sioux City, where she moved after graduation.

“I’m excited to see if I even like remote working,” Muñoz says. “Because it was something I was interested in.

While she works full-time, Muñoz says she also takes a class through MAIP. She completes weekly tests and quizzes and works with other students in the program.

“We were put into groups with others, we call them ‘MAIPers,’” and we put together a creative brief and we present at the end of the summer,” Muñoz says.

The experiences Muñoz had on UNO’s campus allowed her to explore the advertising industry.

Muñoz learned about analytics and social media content while working in UNO’s Social Media Lab with Jeremy Lipschultz, Ph.D. and Peter Kiewit distinguished professor. She says she was able to be creative with these skills as PRSSA’s vice president of social media.

“It just came naturally to me that I loved advertising,” Muñoz says. “And I get to be creative and come up with concepts that lead to an end result.”

Women in Media Club allows female students to find community on campus

By Lexy Schulte

For Avarie Howard and Ana Bellinghausen being the only female reporters in MavRadio proved intimidating.

This fact became the driving force that led Howard and Bellinghausen, along with their friend Alexa Blase, to create the Women in Media club at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in the spring of 2020.

“The hockey team wanted us to come in and do interviews at the top of the innings,” Blase says. “It was encouraging to hear as a woman in sports that they want us to come in and do interviews at the top of the innings.”

Before Blase joined the broadcast team, she was a member of the UNO athletic department’s student section and had the opportunity to cover UNO athletic events, Blase says.

During the club’s inaugural year, several female sports broadcasters such as Laura Rutledge, Mina Kimes and Kris Budden spoke at meetings.

This year, members gained hands-on experience by traveling to cover UNO athletic events, Blase says.

“One of my personal favorite things was going to Arkansas for baseball,” Blase says. “We did some interviews and got to cover the game. It was just an unreal experience.”

The athletic department hired Bellinghausen, Blake and Howard to cover home hockey games.

“The hockey team wanted us to come in and help with a few things,” Howard says. “It was really because of our involvement in the club.”

The Women in Media club strives to break the stigma many women face in the media industry, especially in sports media.

Howard says she’s struggled with trying to prove herself in a professional setting.

“I’ve caught myself doing this a lot, where I’ll be doing my job, like being on the field at a baseball game and feel guilty for being there,” Howard says. “But I know if it was a male in the industry talking to people before the game, that would be seen as completely normal.”

While all three founding members graduated in May, Howard says they are excited to see the change they helped make at UNO continue.

“I came here for soccer, and I didn’t really know what it was going to entail,” Howard says. “But I was able to create something that’s meaningful to what I want to do and leave it at this campus, to see it flourish and grow.”

Blase says the UNO athletic community has welcomed them with open arms.

“Some of the players on the baseball team ask us why we don’t do more in-game interviews,” Blase says. “It was encouraging to hear as a woman in sports that they want us to come in and do interviews at the top of the innings.”

“Thanks to her internship through the Multicultural Advertising Internship program, she will be able to travel and work remotely,” Muñoz says.

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MaverickPR gives students ‘real world’ experiences outside the classroom

By Miranda McCord

For the past 14 years, MaverickPR has served as a learning laboratory for students interested in gaining skills and experience beyond the classroom.

MaverickPR operates as the University of Nebraska at Omaha PRSSA’s nationally affiliated, student-run public relations firm. The full-service agency offers students hands-on experience working with a variety of campus and community clients.

Led by Karen Weber, faculty advisor and lecturer, and Rebecca Kisicki, student director, MaverickPR operates year-round as a full-service student firm and served 17 clients during the 2021-2022 academic year, including 12 nonprofit organizations and five businesses. Students complete a variety of tactics for clients such as branding, copywriting, graphic design, media outreach, photography, social media, video and web content.

One of the most noteworthy projects featured a series of videos for the 2021 “Read for the Record” campaign. Metro Omaha Raise Me To Read, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting early childhood literacy, hired MaverickPR to film several community leaders reading the 2021 Read for the Record book, “Amy Wu and the Patchwork Dragon,” by Kat Zhang. Among the readers were Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert and Council Bluffs Mayor Matt Walsh.

The team also created a Spanish version that featured Roger Garcia, Douglas County commissioner and his wife Yanira, a UNO alumna. One of MaverickPR’s new clients, Millford Real Estate, hired the firm to create content for its new arts and culture magazine, which debuted in May. The team wrote a series of feature stories that showcased Omaha’s Little Italy.

“When I joined MaverickPR, I knew I would have opportunities to write,” says Kathryn O’Connor, MaverickPR assistant director. “I was expecting to work on social media copy, communications planning and if I was lucky enough, some feature writing. Thankfully, it happened to be the same semester we took on Milford, a client that focused on feature writing which just so happens to be my passion.”

O’Connor wrote features on Omaha artist Jeremy Caniglia and Cafe Postale.

“At someone who longs for a future in writing, seeing my name, printed in a magazine, was surreal,” O’Connor says. “I loved every second of it. I can’t wait to see the next edition.”

During the spring semester, MaverickPR helped the UNO School of the Arts rebrand its recruiting materials. The project highlighted the firm’s graphic designers and photographers.

One of the firm’s longest-standing clients, the Genius of Warren Buffett executive MBA course, returned after a two-year absence due to the pandemic.

In the spring, the three-day course attracts lifelong learners from across the globe, who come to Omaha for the Berkshire Hathaway annual shareholder meeting.

MaverickPR members also assisted with event logistics for the Berkshire System Summit and the Value Investor Conference.

Social media lab connects students with rural communities

By Diana Muñoz

The School of Communication encourages students to participate in community engagement. One way students gain experience is by working with Maverick Social Media.

Maverick Social Media has worked directly with the University of Nebraska at Omaha Social Media Lab to connect with rural communities that need assistance with social media strategy and engagement.

Under the direction of Jeremy Lipschutz, Ph.D., students have worked with eight rural communities including Valentine, Seward County, Ravenna, Pierce County, Nebraska City, David City, Ashland and Stanton.

Students created presentations and workbooks that provide analysis of social media needs and strategies on how to enhance their online presence.

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Many of these communities have taken the students’ material and used it to their advantage.

For example, Seward County began to elevate its Instagram presence after students conducted a strong S.W.O.T. (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis.

The team found little to no engagement and encouraged the community members in Seward County to post multiple times a week to elevate impressions.

The students advised the community members to partner up with local businesses, which would then work as influencers for the county.

The team advised Seward County, along with many other rural communities, to use multiple tools available online such as Google Analytics and Facebook Advertising.

Another project involves a collaboration with Greta McPherson, senior executive coordinator of exceptional rural grant opportunity services at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, on a new website.

This resource is currently being developed to help all communities in Nebraska better grasp how to use social media platforms efficiently and effectively. This website will include examples of best practices from each community and provide a helpful resource for communities that seek to improve their presence online.

The Gateway connects students to professional opportunities

By Lexy Schulte

Jordan McAlpine has been a hockey fan since he was a little kid.

The former sports editor for The Gateway, the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s student-run newspaper, McAlpine also served as the beat writer for hockey. He currently serves as a sports writer for the Omaha World-Herald.

“It was kind of a match made in heaven,” McAlpine says. “Hockey is UNO’s main sport, so it worked out from that angle.”

The Gateway has provided McAlpine with networking opportunities. His role as the hockey beat writer has opened doors to freelance opportunities such as the Omaha World-Herald, the National Collegiate Hockey Conference and College Hockey News.

“There is no one else in the world who gets to do what I do,” McAlpine says. “It’s cliché, but it helped me put me on the map.”

McAlpine says The Gateway allowed him to make connections with other students. However, during the pandemic, the staff had to find ways to connect from afar. COVID-19 protocols forced staff meetings and interviews online.

This past year, the staff finally began to settle into the new normal by meeting in the office as COVID-19 protocols loosened.

“A lot of the interviews had to be via Zoom just because a lot of businesses don’t want to meet in person,” says Sara Meadows, The Gateway editor-in-chief. “So, it was a struggle to find time to do that and work around their schedules.”

Meadows began as a contributor, then moved to news editor, before becoming editor-in-chief.

“It was inspiring that I was able to move up the ladder so quickly,” Meadows says. “I’ve gained a lot of professional skills, especially when it comes to editing.”

Both Meadows and McAlpine enjoy connecting with their fellow students on staff.

“The newspaper is just like a sports team,” McAlpine says. “Everyone works together to put it together.”

McAlpine says he also enjoyed interacting with UNO athletes and coaches in-person again.

“It’s really been good for sports,” McAlpine says. “We are back in-person and talking with coaches and players building relationships, along with everything else that got lost in the past year and a half.”
A new era for MavForensics

By Riley Smith

MavForensics kept its competitive edge, despite welcoming a crew of new students and placing in the top 15 at the American Forensics Association National Speech Tournament (AFA – NST). MavForensics, the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s competitive forensics association, maintained its standing in the national scene.

“The eight-member team competed in 35 events. Senior Addison Parr qualified two events to quarterfinals and advanced in advanced interpretation to semifinals. The national tournament results were successful, given only one student had competed in an in-person national tournament, says Traelon Medero Graham, assistant director. “I couldn’t be prouder of what our team of eight did,” he says. “After going to nationals, they now have this better understanding of collegiate forensics. They have already started grinding to put up new topics and apply what they learned.”

Goodrich says each student who went to nationals qualified for finals at the state tournament. “With Nebraska being the most competitive state in the country for forensics,” Goodrich says. “We’re the only state with four schools in the top 20, each student finaling one event is extremely impressive.”

COVID-19 restrictions limited competition this season to three in-person tournaments. “Three different times we tried to travel, but the tournament was canceled less than 10 days before, and twice, they switched to a virtual format,” Goodrich says. “They learned how to compete in three different competitive formats and showed incredible adaptability and flexibility.”

PRSSA offers lifelong friendships and builds a professional network

By Tanner Thorngren

For 20 years, PRSSA built a reputation as one of the most active student organizations on campus. The pandemic shut down most activities, but the chapter persevered and converted to virtual events.

“We get to raise money for a local nonprofit, and that is kind of my thing.”

That’s why Miranda McCord, PRSSA president, looked forward to resuming chapter services projects such as Santa Paws.

The chapter held its annual donation drive for Hoofs United for Animals, a no-kill shelter and rescue, in December at the pet-friendly Bookworm. Pet owners paid $25 for their fur babies to be photographed with Santa Clause.

“We get to raise money for a local nonprofit, and that is my kind of thing,” McCord says. “An added bonus was that I got to see a lot of dogs sit on Dr. Chris Allen’s lap.”

Students earn accolades and share stories through MavRadio

By Lexy Schulte

A na Bellinghausen credits MavRadio for the opportunities that led to where she is today in her career.

MavRadio, the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s student-run radio station, gives students a platform as storytellers, Bellinghausen says. “MavRadio has been huge for my career,” Bellinghausen says. “It’s been an outlet I can use to have a voice and have a platform.”

MavRadio, the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s competitive forensics association, maintained its standing in the national scene.

“This year’s team partnered with Live On Nebraska, the state’s organ procurement agency, to create the “One Choice, Renews Lives” campaign.

Part of the campaign featured a panel of organ and tissue recipients and a caregiver who shared their stories. Using a butterfly theme, the team also set up informational tables at the student center where students could color in butterfly prints or make butterfly crafts.

PRSSA also provides the opportunity for students to connect with fellow peers and grow lifelong friendships. McCord and Rebecca Kisicki are prime examples of friends who met through the organization. McCord serves as chapter president and Kisicki is vice president of finance and Maverick PR firm director.

“PRSSA has been a home for me in the School of Communication,” McCord says. “I met a lot of great people and made a lot of really close friendships that will last me in my professional career.”

Ava Bellinghausen and Alexa Blase pose while calling an Omaha baseball game at Tal-Anderson Field. Photo submitted
Ad pros debate the best and worst Super Bowl ads

By Eva Barklund

Featuring everything from speedy sloths to mind-reading devices, the 2022 Super Bowl advertisements offered much to analyze and debate.

The “Best and Worst Super Bowl Ads” event carried on the tradition of inviting local experts to critique Super Bowl ads and to pick their favorite of eight commercials. The event, sponsored by the School of Communication, welcomed four experts from the American Federation of Advertising Nebraska chapter.

Panelists included Erin Clark, art director at KidGlov; Dave Dizsafar, creative director and partner at Eleven Twenty-three; David Moore, owner and creative director at Objective Strategic Marketing; and Lauren Schinter, head of Business Development at Bailey Lauerman.

Student leaders, Alexa Blase, Avarie Howard and Rebecca Kisicki also shared their thoughts.

The event featured a collaboration of the School’s student organizations, Ad Club, MaverickPR, MavRadio, UNO PiSSA and Women in Media. Traditionally, students hold the event at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. This year, the spike in the omicron variant forced the event on Zoom.

The first two ads in the bracket included the “Zeus and Hera” BMW ad and the NFL’s two-minute-long commercial titled “Bring Down the House.” While praised for its creativity, the panelists criticized “Bring Down the House” for being too long. Featuring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Salma Hayek, “Zeus and Hera” received mixed reactions for the use of celebrities. However, the commercial earned praise for how it conveyed its message.

The next matchup was between Verizon’s “Gordy Cable” and Frito Lay’s “Push It.” The use of Jim Carey in “Goodbye Cable” drew some reactions for the use of celebrities. However, the commercial earned praise for how it conveyed its message.

The next match-up was between Verizon’s “Goodbye Cable” and South Omaha grad Buddy Hunter, who helped former UNO football coach Sandy Buda with his book titled, “The Riverboat Gambler.” I then finished my autobiography titled, “The Inkster,” which chronicles the journey I took to reach my ultimate professional goal: A 20-year career at the Omaha World-Herald. All three books can be found on Amazon, using my name as one of the key words.

Amazon’s “Mind Reader” and Toyota’s “The Joneses” also faced off. Questions arose about the effectiveness of the “Mind Reader” commercial depending on how the panelists felt about Alexa. However, they agreed the use of Colin Jost and Scarlett Johansson was well-received. The panelists concurred that “The Joneses” lacked creativity and storytelling, which advanced “Mind Reader” to the next bracket.

The final match-up featured Uber Eats’ “Uber Don’t Eats” and Nissan’s “Presenting: Thrill Driver.” Utilizing Eugene Levy, “Presenting: Thrill Driver” excited Schitt’s Creek fans, but the panelists found the overall commercial unimpressive. In comparison, they advanced “Uber Don’t Eats” for its cleverness, hilarity and clarity in message.

In the semifinals, “Zeus and Hera” defeated “Push It” to advance to the final. “Uber Don’t Eats” beat “Mind Reader” to challenge “Zeus and Hera” in the final round.

“Iber Don’t Eats” defeated “Zeus and Hera” and endured a challenge from Coinbase, whose ad featured nothing but a QR code.

“Uber Eats is my favorite spot from the Super Bowl this year. It mentions the product throughout, it sells, it’s absolutely clear about what they’re doing,” Moore says. “While I don’t think you needed the celebrities, it didn’t hurt. Absolutely the best piece of advertising in the Super Bowl. It’s fun to watch, it’s engaging. I’d watch it over and over and they keep selling the product. That’s what you get for $5 or $6 million of media time.”

77 John Martin Fey (BS) lives in Plattsmouth and is retired. He writes: Just after completing my book on former Boston Red Sox player and South Omaha grad Buddy Hunter, I helped former UNO football coach Sandy Buda with his book titled, “The Riverboat Gambler.” I then finished my autobiography titled, “The Inkster,” which chronicles the journey I took to reach my ultimate professional goal: A 20-year career at the Omaha World-Herald. All three books can be found on Amazon, using my name as one of the key words.

81 Jacque Montag (BS) lives in Omaha and works at Nebraska Total Care. She writes: Well, it’s hard to believe 40 years have gone by. I joke my degree was obsolete at graduation (1981 was the year cable TV came to Omaha), but that degree has served me well as I have periodically remade myself. Take pride in the school’s founding, history, and role in growing Omaha as a good place to live.

92 Kent Walton (BA) lives in Papillion and works at Mutual of Omaha as a Creative Supervisor.

15 Kaleigh Molgaard (BS) lives in Omaha and works at Titan Medical. She writes: When 2020 started, I don’t think anyone really knew what we all had in store for us. The biggest accomplishment for me was being able to get fully vaccinated. I cried because I felt it was slowly but surely ending and I was doing my part to be around my loved ones again. The biggest triumph I achieved was surviving COVID. I would consider myself lucky because I have an autoimmune disease and I was a lot sicker than I thought I would be. I would also like to consider myself to be fortunate because I am in a healthcare staffing industry where I was able to continuously work and help with finding healthcare professionals to go work in COVID units around the country.

17 Jaime Melton (MA) lives in Omaha and works at Valmont. She writes: at the start of the pandemic I was training employees all over the world on efficient project management processes. Part of this training was instilling a mindset of adapting to change. Although I am not training people like I was in 2020, I am now managing multiple projects on a mechanical engineering team. I’m hopeful to see these changes continue into the future.

19 Marissa Woolard (BS) lives in Las Vegas and writes: Post-pandemic life in Las Vegas is one for the books. I finally got a job within my field, then lost that job due to COVID-19 and funding issues. I was unemployed for a few months, but I soon got a job doing retail management, which was something I was used to but the work environment was not up to par. I lost that job in February of 2021 and found myself unemployed again. I found myself in May working with the Culinary Academy of Las Vegas, which is the largest nonprofit in Nevada. “Pain nourishes courage. You can’t be brave if you’ve only had wonderful things happen to you.”

I know everyone has experienced pain during the pandemic in some way and I want every student to know that your pain right now, being tired, working multiple jobs, the rejection emails from employers; It is worth it and one day you’ll be thankful for the pain.

For providing me with a great education, UNO!
The School of Communication provides a student-centered, dynamic environment designed to elevate, empower and engage students to become skilled, ethical citizens and professionals who can excel in diverse local and global communities.