Creative Communities

Success stories like ours arise from highly effective teamwork. From its inception, our school has benefited tremendously from the collaboration of our students, alumni, donors, faculty, and administration. Once created, these partnerships endure.

This year’s calendar celebrates collaborations past and present: events that sustained the school’s leadership in communication arts and sciences, projects that demonstrate our talent for teamwork, and groups of people from our shared history who made it all possible.

The cover of this year’s calendar features one team that has become an iconic example of the alliances our people make and that make our school, in turn, that much stronger. Lookingglass Theatre formed at Northwestern as a student group, moved downtown, and developed a process-driven, collaborative approach to creating new and adventurous work that has endured two decades. Last year Lookingglass celebrated its 20th anniversary season. In the anniversary photo above, the ensemble reenacts favorite characters from 20 years of past productions. Ensemble members include School of Communication faculty Mary Zimmerman (C82, GC85), Dan Ostling (GC96), and David Catlin (C88) and a number of other alumni, including David Schwimmer (C88), Laura Eason (C89), and David Kersnar (C88, GC08). We’re proud of the achievements of the company — at last count, 51 world premieres, 42 Jeff Awards and Citations, and now 20 years of creative collaboration — and of all the groups and individuals who have contributed to, and still continue to write, the story of our shared success.

Barbara O’Keefe, Dean

Give every year, make a difference every day.
T E A C H I N G T R A D I T I O N

The School of Communication began almost 150 years ago as a single course in elocution taught by a faculty of one, Scottish immigrant Robert McLean Cumnock, who would become the first dean of the school. Today the school has a faculty of 185 (and still growing), more than 1,600 students, and leading programs that cover the full spectrum of communication arts and sciences.

From the beginning, alumni, parents of students, and other generous friends have stepped forward to help the school grow and change. Cumnock himself secured the gift from Gustavus Swift that would build the school’s first home to memorialize Swift’s daughter, who died while a student at Northwestern. (Cumnock, in the hat, is pictured at top with a group of faculty and students in 1912 on the Annie May Swift Hall steps.)

Alumni and friends of the school continue to find ways to support our students, our faculty, and our programs by giving scholarships, funds for student activities, and, in increasing numbers, named professorships, which allow the school to honor senior faculty members and support their research and creative endeavors. Recent endowments have established the Jane Steiner Hoffman and Michael Hoffman Assistant Professorship in the Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, the April McClain and John Delaney Research Professorship, and the Ralph and Jean Sundin Professorship in Communication Science, held by Cynthia Thompson (above).

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One of the challenges of dance is to take familiar forms — the human body, established styles — and make them new. Danceworks, the dance program’s annual showcase, features a series of pieces that, even as they tell stories that resonate with what the audience knows, push the boundaries of what kinds of stories dance can tell and how movement is used to tell them.

In “Into the Blue” (top), dance lecturer Laura Wade choreographed human bodies into aircraft and flight itself using partnering and group lifts. In “Stories to Tell,” guest choreographer Annie Beserra (WCAS97) borrowed pieces of her own family’s history to start a conversation in dance about schizophrenia, family farms, and the meaning of home.

The program always highlights a wide array of styles as well as the intersections where they meet. “Modern dance, contemporary dance, often an ethnic dance form, tap, hip-hop, jazz, ballet — and as a result, the concert just vibrates,” said Susan Lee, professor of dance.

Our donors are great partners to our dance program and our faculty’s companies, so they can take great pride in this year’s milestones and achievements, including the 30th anniversary of the dance program, which we’ll celebrate with a special Danceworks performance and surprise guests. And dance professor Billy Siegenthal’s Jump Rhythm Jazz Project (whose associate creative director is adjunct dance lecturer Brandi Coleman, above) will be celebrating too. This year the project turns 20.
SUCCESS STORIES

Media and technologies change, methods of communication change, and yet the fundamentals of storytelling endure.

Our radio/television/film department teaches the history, theory, and production of media, from cinema to broadcast television (such as filming a production of Leonard Bernstein’s 1952 one-act opera Trouble in Tahiti, top) to alternative media to emerging technologies. Our faculty and alumni have always been leaders in bringing storytelling into the electronic — and now the digital — media age to inspire, persuade, and educate.

The department’s new master of fine arts program in writing for the screen and stage, for instance, arms our students with a set of core principles that prepare writers to imagine, collaborate, and demonstrate versatility. Writers who want to be playwrights and writers who want to be screenwriters find that they can do both, and more. They leave the program with a diverse portfolio, a network of fellow writers, and invaluable connections in the industry, since so many of our alumni are generous donors of their time as well as their financial resources.

In fact, each year we welcome a number of successful alumni back to campus to talk to students about their careers and lives. Recent visitors have included Catherine Huff Gottfred (GC73, GC79), a communication sciences and disorders alumna and the president of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association; Raymond Lee (C04), a radio/television/film alumnus who starred in the Broadway production of Mamma Mia!; and Erica Daniels (C91) (above), a performance studies alumna who is now the casting director of Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre.
SAME SONG AND DANCE

Although we can search the past and discover many traditions, perhaps none of them are quite as beloved as Waa-Mu.

The Waa-Mu Show is Northwestern University’s own original musical revue — written, performed, and presented by Northwestern students. Since its first production by the combined Women’s Athletic Association (WAA) and Men’s Union (MU) in 1929, Waa-Mu has become an institution for budding theatrical talent and a must-see for the broader Northwestern community, which is why the Associated Press called it “the greatest college show in America.”

Every year’s show has a new theme. At top, from left, theatre majors Madeline Duffy-Feins (C09), junior Andi Alhadeff, and sophomore Brian Bohr put a modern spin on Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland for 2009’s One for the Books. This year, the 78th Waa-Mu Show will take an irreverent look at history with It’s About Time.

What never changes is the encouragement the show receives from our alumni and friends, whose generous annual fund gifts support some of our most treasured traditions. Students who participate every year learn, among other things, to engage with the past. “The students treasure being a part of the Waa-Mu family,” said Dominic Missimi (above, at lower right with the 2008 Waa-Mu cast), professor emeritus in service of theatre, who is directing his 17th Waa-Mu this year. “The family is not just the people in the show, but the people who return year after year to be in the audience. The students love that sense of ongoing tradition and that they are now a part of it.”

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POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCES

June is the month when Northwestern looks forward. Students finish their classes and rush off to internships and summer jobs. Faculty members plan time for their research or creative projects. Graduating seniors take their much-anticipated walk across the Pick-Staiger stage and look forward to using all the knowledge and skills they've gained as they go out into the world.

Commencement is a tradition that hasn't changed much over time. Graduating students still don robes, mortarboards, and tassels; students receiving advanced degrees still wear hoods to signify their field of study. “Pomp and Circumstance” still rolls across Ryan Field.

Some traditions do change over time, though. Once, all students applying to graduate from what was then the School of Speech had to pass a “platform test” — a sort of stump speech performance judged by an interdisciplinary faculty panel. (The practice was time-consuming for everyone and was discontinued in most departments in 1951.) Methods of imparting knowledge change, too. Consider the bone prop, once used by School of Speech students to practice articulation (top).

Specific skills needed by our graduates change, but even as we shed what has become outdated and adopt new ideas, the basis of the training we provide, a solid liberal arts education, continues to prepare our students for the careers — and, more important, for the lives — they will have beyond our campuses.
TRADITION OF TRYOUTS

It's a theatre tradition that shows on the road to Broadway stop in Chicago for previews and a little fine-tuning before opening night on the Great White Way.

That's the model the American Music Theatre Project uses: new, adventurous works get a supportive environment at Northwestern — space, time, resources — in which to find their feet. And in the meantime, our students have the opportunity to be intimately engaged with the evolution of a new creative piece.

Take, for instance, AMTP's developmental production of Girls vs. Boys (top) last summer, a prelude to its April premiere at The House Theatre of Chicago. The show was developed in a class taught by the House artistic director, one of the script's writers. The “tryout” performance featured the talents of 16 of our undergraduate students, alumna Collette Pollard (GC08), and faculty members David Bell, Ana Kuzmanic, and Jen Collins. The project was supported by AMTP's donors and its first-ever grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

This year it's another exciting project: Not Wanted on the Voyage, a postmodern fable about the biblical flood. Students are working alongside the musical's writers to create a workshop performance in preparation for the premiere as part of the school's Summer Music Theatre Festival. AMTP got some help from Tony Award–winning actress Faith Prince (above with Brian Hall, one of the show's writers), who recorded a demo of the soundtrack to help promote the project. Also exciting: this production is supported by AMTP's second NEA grant.
LISTENING TO HISTORY

In 1936 a new kind of class appeared in the Northwestern University course catalog — radio. Classes in radio writing and production (at top, students in a radio class wait for their cue) were soon joined by courses in announcing, directing techniques, and program development as well as Northwestern University Playshop, where students of the 1940s and ‘50s wrote and performed radio scripts to air on Chicago stations.

Those scripts have received new life, thanks to Northwestern’s student-run radio station, WNUR 89.3 FM (above), and the student group Northwestern University Radio Drama (NURD). NURD members have researched the Playshop scripts, available in University Archives, to find examples worthy of adapting and putting back on the air. The scripts have given the students some unexpected lessons. “It’s fascinating to see how the writers treat sound in these shows,” said junior Daniel Carlyon, executive producer of NURD. “Not as something to layer over the performances, as is done in film and theatre today, but as another performer in its own right.”

WNUR broadcasts 168 hours of programming a week, including special broadcasts, such as last year’s live debate of Evanston mayoral candidates. The station has grown to reach a global audience, thanks to friends and alumni who have supported WNUR since it was just a weak 10-watt transmission that barely reached Chicago. Today the station streams online at www.wnur.org and can be heard by a potential audience of millions.
T R A D I T I O N S  M A D E  N E W

When the performers in the Theatre and Interpretation Center’s production of *Arsenic and Old Lace* took the stage last fall, they were honoring tradition: stage tradition, by presenting a beloved comedy, but also Northwestern theatre tradition, by bringing faculty, students, alumni, and community members to the same stage.

The production was directed by Tony Award–winning playwright and director and performance studies professor emeritus Frank Galati (C65, GC67, GC71) and starred theatre faculty members Mary Poole (C75, GC87) and Cindy Gold (top), Chicago professional actor John Mohrlein, Jeff Award winner Dennis Zacek (GC65, GC70), and a talented cast of students. The artistic staff included costume designer Virgil C. Johnson (GC67), professor emeritus of theatre; sound designer Josh Horvath, lecturer in theatre; set designer Collette Pollard (GC08); and lighting designer Sarah Hughey (GC09).

Drawing on talent from across the community was a hallmark of Northwestern’s earliest organized theatrical efforts, known as University Theatre. The first official University Theatre production was George S. Kaufman’s *The Butter and Egg Man*, staged in 1928. The show featured a student cast and crew and faculty directors.

It’s a learning experience that leaves everyone involved inspired and invigorated, said Henry Godinez (above), artistic director of the Theatre and Interpretation Center. “I suspect it is perhaps akin to the experience some students and faculty might share doing lab work in the sciences. Everyone involved found it to be a hugely successful and enriching experience, one that we certainly hope to continue.”

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OLD THINGS, NEW WAYS

The research and creative projects faculty members undertake outside the classroom — funded, in part, by our donors — often look forward: How do we design better hearing aids? How is social networking changing the way we communicate? What is the future of the failing newspaper industry? Or backward, like E. Patrick Johnson’s oral history on black gay men in the South and Mary Zimmerman’s fresh take on the ancient text The Arabian Nights (above) — which as staged at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre featured Pranidhi Varshney (C06) (center).

However, The Horror Show, curated in New York last summer by radio/television/film faculty members Debra and David Tolchinsky, looked not forward, not back, but deep within. What are we so afraid of?

Perhaps a haunted/haunting girl levitating, legless, over her doll’s carriage? Chicago artist Christopher Schneberger’s series of Frances Naylor images (at top, Frances with Pram, South Porch) struck a nerve with the audience.

Debra Tolchinsky predicted it. As she told the Village Voice, she found Schneberger’s photos “stunning, eerie, and off-putting. I saw them and had to have them in the show.”

“In particular, we were attracted to work about the figure you aren’t sure you saw, the sound you couldn’t have heard, the memory you must have invented,” the Tolchinskys wrote for the exhibit’s catalog. “We were attracted to work about paralyzing indecision and haunting regret, work that sees old things in new and disturbing ways.”

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Can looking forward change the past? It can certainly change what we thought we knew.

Take, for instance, the vital research that Cynthia Thompson, the Ralph and Jean Sundin Professor in Communication Science, and her lab team do with stroke victims who suffer language impairment. Highly detailed brain scans show that low blood flow (the light blue patches at top) may affect not just areas of the brain damaged in the stroke but other areas as well. That knowledge adds new dimension to the study of stroke recovery.

Our researchers and artists can make their contributions to the world, thanks to funds that allow us to outfit our labs and classrooms with technological advances and industry-standard tools. Recently, funds from an anonymous donor made it possible for us to upgrade computers and software in the Theatre and Interpretation Center’s design lab, where students learn to create elaborate virtual stages and lighting designs. The same donor helped us make more than $30,000 in classroom upgrades, including the installation of a high-definition screen in a prototype classroom.

Another recent gift, from the Herrington-Fitch Family Foundation, will fund a dedicated high-definition station for our radio/television/film department. Such a station will allow students to edit films for festival submission — like the students whose films are produced each year by Studio 22, Northwestern’s student-run not-for-profit film production company. Alex Schwarm (CO9) (above, directing actress Meaghen Quinn) made his film *As Ever, Stan* through Studio 22 last year and then saw it pick up a cinematography award nomination on the festival circuit.
BEGINNINGS, AGAIN

If you peer into deep history or into the hazy future, you’ll find that some things, timeless things, remain the same: the school’s dedication to students, alumni, and faculty; the crisp air off the lake on a fall day; the sunset glow of the facade of Annie May Swift Hall — our home, our Eden, and the place that reminds us of our beginnings.

In 2008 we completed a restoration of Annie May Swift Hall to take the 1895 building with us into the future. Working within its historic structure, we restored and modernized, creating new office space for our radio/television/film and performance studies departments and renovating the auditorium.

It was from this space in Annie May Swift Hall that we dedicated a black box theater to the late Alvina Krause (above), the legendary Northwestern acting and interpretation teacher whose methods remain the basis of our acting curriculum. The Alvina Krause Studio and an endowment in her name to support productions there were made possible by gifts in her honor, including a lead gift from Krause students Richard Benjamin (C60) and Paula Prentiss Benjamin (C59).

Tony Award winner Frank Galati, another Krause student and professor emeritus of performance studies, spoke at the studio’s dedication. He called it a fitting space because of its flexibility for a range of performance forms. “She encouraged the study of art, history, philosophy, music, religion, languages, astronomy and the sciences, literature and literary criticism,” he said. “Her own study was wide-ranging and eclectic.”

Give every year, make a difference every day.
You make a difference for us.
Every day.

Our faculty, students, and alumni continue to spark innovation on stage, in the laboratory, on camera, at the podium, and in clinics.

Your generous support enables us to develop groundbreaking approaches to the study of communication.

You make an impact. Thank you for your gift.

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