Imagine U Family Series: Charlotte’s Web
Adapted by Joseph Robinette
From the book by E. B. White
DIRECTED BY MARY POOLE
May 2–11
Hal and Martha Hyer Wallis Theater

The Waa-Mu Show: Double Feature at Hollywood and Vine
May 2–11
Cahn Auditorium

Trouble in Mind
by Alice Childress
DIRECTED BY RON OJ PARSON
May 16–25
Josephine Louis Theater

Northwestern University Commencement
June 20, 9:30 a.m.
Ryan Field

School of Communication Convocations
June 21, 1 and 5:30 p.m.
Pick-Staiger Concert Hall

Johnny Mercer Foundation
Songwriters Project Concert
June 28, time TBA
Josephine Louis Theater

National Theatre Live: King Lear
June 17, 7 p.m.
Josephine Louis Theater

National Theatre Live: A Small Family Business
July 22, 7 p.m.
Ethel M. Barber Theater

National Theatre Live: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time
August 5, 7 p.m.
Ethel M. Barber Theater

The Laramie Project
by Moises Kaufman and the members of the Tectonic Theatre Project
DIRECTED BY RIVES COLLINS
October 24–November 2
Ethel M. Barber Theater

Little Women
Music by Jason Howland
Lyrics by Mindi Dickstein
Book by Allan Knee
Based on the novel by Louisa May Alcott
DIRECTED BY DOMINIC MISSIMI
November 7–23
Josephine Louis Theater

For more information or tickets for these and other school events, see www.communication.northwestern.edu

On the cover: Kate Baldwin (C97) and Brian d’Arcy James (C90) in New York’s Public Theatre production of the musical Giant, directed by Michael Greif (C81). See more details on page 12.

(Photo by Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux)

Seth Meyers (C96) left Saturday Night Live in February to take the reins of NBC’s Late Night. He inherited the show from former host (and fellow SNL alumnus) Jimmy Fallon, who moved up to host NBC’s Tonight Show, replacing Jay Leno. Of his 12-plus years at SNL, Meyers told the Associated Press, “Other than the fact that people don’t stay there forever, there was no downside. I had never gotten bored with it. You always creatively get refreshed by the new casts. But this came up and all of a sudden you realize you’re the resident gray hair at SNL and it makes sense to move on.”
On March 14 Northwestern University kicked off a $3.75 billion fundraising campaign with a day of festivities in Evanston and Chicago. This celebration of Northwestern, its ambitions, and its community will continue through the next year with events across the United States and in select cities abroad.

I am excited to see the campaign begin in earnest, since we have been preparing for it for some time. The biggest step was developing the University’s new strategic plan, We Will. The plan commits the University to make significant new advances in research and creative activities, strategies for teaching and learning, building a strong and diverse community, and expanding impact around the globe.

This issue of *Dialogue*, like the previous four issues, was directly stimulated by the new plan. Northwestern’s commitment to advance scholarship and creative work will focus on new initiatives in 10 areas: writing and oral expression; media; international studies; global health; biomedical science; performing arts; design; markets, structure, and public policy; energy and sustainability; and nanotechnology. We are devoting 10 issues of *Dialogue* to these topic areas.

The current issue focuses on the performing arts and the contributions our school has made to Northwestern’s highly visible presence in the arts and entertainment. It showcases a variety of programs and initiatives that, taken together, have helped to make this school the most exciting creative community in higher education.

The new capital campaign will make it possible for us to realize our dreams for the future of performing arts at Northwestern. Three major projects will come to fruition in the next three years: construction of the new Music and Communication Building, which will provide badly needed office space for faculty and staff in the Departments of Theatre and Performance Studies; renovation of the Theatre and Interpretation Center, soon to be renamed the Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts in recognition of several major gifts by Rocky (C’75) and Marilyn Wirtz (see page 28); and creation of an endowment to fund programming (including student-organized productions and research activities) in the Wirtz Center. These projects are all critical if we are to continue supporting the extraordinary creativity and productivity of our faculty and students in the arts.

As the campaign rolls across the country and around the world, I hope to be at all the major kick-off events. I would love to see and talk with as many of our friends and alumni as possible and will be organizing get-togethers wherever I go to create opportunities to connect. So keep a lookout for mail from the school—and please seize the opportunity to participate in writing the future of Northwestern!

Barbara J. O’Keefe
Dean, School of Communication
Start a dialogue: dialogue@northwestern.edu
In 2011 Northwestern University's strategic plan set forth a platform of 10 strengths that will lift the University to even higher heights. This issue of Dialogue is the fifth in a series sharing the ways our School of Communication community contributes to Northwestern’s future.

Even in the face of financial pressures that discourage artistic innovation elsewhere, we recognize the importance to civil society of performances...
that raise penetrating questions and celebrate our humanity. We encourage exploration of new modes of expression and a broadening of their audiences.
Academy Award–winning actress Jennifer Lawrence got into hot water last year for calling acting “stupid.” It wasn’t the first time a leading lady has taken a potshot at the profession—Katharine Hepburn called it “the perfect idiot’s” job. But one look at Northwestern’s curriculum quickly puts that notion to rest. Devised theatre—or theatre created collaboratively among its players—has been sweeping the country at theaters from the Public in New York to Steppenwolf in Chicago to the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. It’s also alive and thriving on the Northwestern campus.

“The term ‘devised theater’ can be befuddling to a lot of people,” said assistant professor of theatre Michael Rohd (C89), the founding artistic director of Oregon’s Sojourn Theatre. “It’s really just a catchall for talking about work that is generated collaboratively that doesn’t start with a script or specific text but rather was built by a group of people working through a process together.”

A good example was Rohd’s 2013 campus production How to End Poverty in 90 Minutes (with 199 people you may or may not know). He and a cast of sixteen undergraduates and eight designers studied poverty for a year and together created a show that was part spectacle, part lesson, and part interactive workshop.

“Leadership, authorship, agency—these are the things we’re trying to instill in the young artists who come through
the program,” said Rohd, who leads the school’s devising and adaptation module in tandem with visiting assistant professor David Catlin (C88), a founding ensemble member of Chicago’s Lookingglass Theatre, and Paul Edwards (C72, GC73), a 2007–10 Charles Deering McCormick Professor of Teaching Excellence in performance studies and a three-time Joseph Jefferson Award winner.

Edwards focuses on adaptation, noting that “the coursework I do is principally directed toward translating novels and short stories to the stage.” His recent Chicago directing projects include his adaptations of The Haunting of Hill House and Peyton Place at City Lit Theater and A Study in Scarlet, the first of the Sherlock Holmes novels, at the Athenaeum.

Catlin, who directed The Little Prince at Lookingglass this winter, recently taught a class where he workshoped an adaptation of Moby Dick with students. The end result, described by Edwards as “a gigantic undertaking,” is running on campus this spring as a mainstage production.

More often, though, students are tackling adaptation projects of their own. “We really approach it from the standpoint of world premieres,” said Edwards. “The work they’re creating has never been seen before, which is not to say these stories have never been adapted, but they’re doing brand-new, original work. It’s very exciting.”

E. Patrick Johnson, the Carlos Montezuma Professor of Performance Studies and African American Studies, puts his own particular spin on the adaptation process. The author of Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South has adapted his own book for the stage and stars in the one-man production, portraying narrators who range in age from 21 to 93. Pouring Tea: Black Gay Men of the South Tell Their Tales has toured the country to strong reviews—and telling those stories has given him ideas “that have really fed my coursework here. I love teaching,” he said, “and I encourage my students to be active participants in their own learning, rather than passive consumers. I think they learn by reading and by doing.”

Storytelling is at the heart of the work of Rives Collins, associate professor of theatre, who leads the theatre for young audiences module. “Someone once asked Albert Einstein, how do you teach imagination?” said Collins. “And he told them, ‘I can give you three answers. Fairy tales, fairy tales, and more fairy tales.’ A professional storyteller, Collins works with people of all ages, from kindergarteners to seniors—and so do his students. One current endeavor involves gathering and preserving the stories of Holocaust survivors. “The generation of students we have now is the last who will be able to hear these stories told live by survivors,” he said. “Had Anne Frank survived, she’d be in her 80s now.”

Storytelling is trending right now, with programs like the Moth, Storycorps, and This American Life; but as Collins explained, it has been around for millennia—and predates theatre itself. “My job, like everyone else’s here, is to empower our students to locate their own stories and find new and imaginative ways of bringing them to life.”
Stealing the show in music theatre

In School of Communication classroom buildings, the halls are literally alive with the sound of music, inspired by the school’s Music Theatre Program. The program has grown exponentially in recent years—and the latest expansion started with a show.

Long dubbed the “greatest college show in America,” the Waa-Mu Show—a student-run production that originated in the late 1920s—was a longstanding campus fixture when world-renowned director and choreographer David Bell, the Donald G. Robertson Director of Music Theatre, became the Music Theatre Program head in 2010. In addition to Waa-Mu, the program offered two other significant initiatives (though these had been created for students, not by them): the Johnny Mercer Songwriters Project, an annual summer master class for emerging songwriters, and the American Music Theatre Project, a partnership between the School of Communication and some of America’s top musical theatre artists.

Surveying what was already in place when he arrived, Bell saw a potential triple crown. The next step, he said, was to “connect the dots, bring these amazing extracurricular resources into the classroom.” With the Waa-Mu Show as a cornerstone, Bell devised a curriculum that teaches students how to write a musical. “We start with an empty page and over the course of the winter and spring we emerge with a full-fledged, professional-caliber musical,” he said. “That’s unheard of, as far as I know. There is no other program like it in the United States.” This year’s Waa-Mu show, Double Feature at Hollywood and Vine, reimagines Shakespeare’s comedy Twelfth Night in 1930s Hollywood.

Lyric writing, book writing, orchestration, staging, vocal performance, music theatre dance—all of these and more have been worked into the theatre department’s course catalog. For music director Ryan Nelson, who is also the resident music director at the Marriott Theatre in Lincolnshire, this spirit of invention is invaluable. “A lot of kids come in thinking, Oh, we’re going to do South Pacific, and that’ll be great. And yes, it will,” he said. “There’s plenty to gain from that experience. But doing new work is where you really learn.” He added that students are involved in every aspect of a production, not just performing. “We try to only use student musicians, student arrangers, and student orchestrators. We feel that it is important to provide the variety of musical experiences that our students will encounter in the professional world.”

Nelson works alongside senior lecturer Melissa Foster and lecturer Kelli Morgan McHugh, both ace vocal performers, who coach students on their singing and projection technique. And lecturer Jeff Hancock, a dancer and choreographer (see page 20), gets them ready to dance wherever casting or their career aspirations end up taking them. Hancock also leads the music theatre choreography module, an extended, structured study in how to create dance. He noted that “a lot of what we’re talking about right now is collaboration”—which he considers crucial in terms of both choreography and dance itself.

“Collaboration with something: space, time, music, composer, props, yourself. It’s so exciting to see these students start to
gain agency with their work and make their own decisions.”

Recent School of Communication mainstage productions have included such classic musicals as Cabaret, The Pajama Game, and Rent, as well as The Verona Project, an indie-rock-folk musical by associate professor of theatre Amanda Dehnert, which the Huffington Post called “a brilliant new twist on Shakespeare” (it was loosely adapted from The Two Gentlemen of Verona). An award-winning director (see page 14), Dehnert teaches several music theatre classes, including Song Performance and Principles of Auditioning.

“Our faculty is one of the greatest collections of artists working in the theatre today. Period,” said Bell. “And that’s on all levels. I’m not just talking about the superstars we have. There’s a sense that everyone here not only gets joy out of doing their work but also gets joy from sharing it. And that applies to the students as well. So you feel like you’re on a train that’s moving in the right direction always. Sometimes you just have to hang on and ride it.”
Dance
All the right moves

The School of Communication’s dance program, albeit one of the more intimate in the country, is like a fuse box: small in structure, huge in reach. And electric. Founded by dance professor Susan Lee, the program has built its curriculum around contemporary modern dance, ballet, and tap. Traditional? Yes. But with dance changing as quickly as it does—especially right now—Lee has been quick on her feet to keep the program moving.

Expanding the program’s jazz offerings, Lee introduced the Northwestern community to Billy Siegenfeld, a 2002–05 Charles Deering McCormick Professor of Teaching Excellence. Founder of the Jump Rhythm Jazz Project, he devised its technique in reaction to his own performing experience. “I had been very seriously injured after my first dozen years of dancing in New York City,” Siegenfeld explained. “I couldn’t figure out why. It was like a textbook example of a codependent relationship. I loved dancing and it was hurting me.”

In response he delved into research on systems of movement reeducation and developed jump rhythm technique, which avoids the uplifted postures of ballet or ballet-based training and instead focuses on how the body stands and moves in a relaxed or survival state. “I named it ‘standing down straight,’” he said, “to suggest its relationship to gravity’s downward pull. The goal of jump rhythm is to turn the body and voice into an emotion-driven, rhythm-making instrument—which is how my inspirations, the great African American blues and jazz artists, approached performing.” Siegenfeld notes that while traditional dance disciplines form the program’s meat and potatoes, classes like Jump Rhythm Technique provide the spice.
Other new flavors are cropping up in the curriculum as well. Flamenco and salsa classes have been introduced by senior lecturer Joel Valentin-Martinez, a 15-year veteran dancer with the internationally acclaimed Garth Fagan Dance troupe, whose primary focus is modern dance. “I teach movement,” he said. “We sweat. But I also have students research and write about contemporary choreographers.” The ensuing class discussions “give me a great opportunity to show students just how many ways there are of coming into dance.”

Earlier this year Valentin-Martinez choreographed Brazos y Abrazos (Arms and Embraces), which was performed at Northwestern’s Ballroom Theater to honor the millions of Mexicans who participated in the Bracero program—an emergency farm and railroad initiative launched by the United States and Mexico during World War II. The production accompanied a traveling exhibition organized by the Smithsonian.

Similar dovetails characterize the work of associate professor Ramon Rivera-Servera, who directs the graduate program within the department of performance studies and who researches dance as a cultural institution. “We tend to think of doctoral programs as being all about research and writing,” he said, “but the first milestone our students have to satisfy is not a research paper. It’s a recital.” This focus on performance, he said, gives students “an extra level of awareness” that brings depth to their academic work.

Rivera-Servera said that he and his colleagues aspire to the same integration of scholarship and artistic practice in their own work. “Here at Northwestern we are very focused on making important historical discoveries and theoretical claims about dance and performance,” he said, “as well as groundbreaking contributions to art making. We are invested in theorizing through the artwork, and, of course, we’re also trying to communicate to a broad readership and audience. I guess you could say we’re trying to approach culture from the ground up.”
Northwestern’s acting talent shines bright

Northwestern’s first Hollywood golden age began after World War II, when acting students of Northwestern faculty legends Alvina Krause (C28, GC33) and Claudia Webster Robinson began to find professional roles. Tony Randall (C41) and Charlton Heston (C45) emerged from the US Army ready for the New York stage, transitioning quickly to television and film. Randall achieved particular fame on TV, winning an Emmy Award for *The Odd Couple* in 1975. Heston’s best-known film roles were in *The Ten Commandments* and *Ben-Hur*, for which he earned an Academy Award in 1959. Patricia Neal (C47, H94) won a Tony Award for her first Broadway role and in 1963 won an Academy Award for *Hud*.

Following close behind was a long line of Northwestern talents who took their starring roles in Waa-Mu and other campus productions straight to Tinseltown. They included Cloris Leachman (C48), Charlotte Rae (C48), Paul Lynde (C48), and Claude Akins (C49), then McLean Stevenson (C52), Robert Conrad, Robert Reed (C54), Garry Marshall (J56), Jerry Orbach (C56), Warren Beatty (C59), Paula Prentiss (C59), Richard Benjamin (C60), Tony Roberts (C61), Ann-Margret (C63), and Peter Strauss (C69).

The University may be experiencing another golden age. The *Hollywood Reporter*’s recent listings of the world’s top drama schools and the nation’s top film schools ranked Northwestern 9th for drama—the only nonconservatory program to crack the top 10—and 13th for film. Northwestern’s constellation of stars on screen and stage is as bright as ever. Get acquainted with some of the Wildcats working the boards and brightening the billboards in today’s entertainment industry.

Northwestern stars were bright on Emmy night in September (from left): Julia Louis-Dreyfus (C83), Stephen Colbert (C86), and Anna Gunn (C90) all triumphed.
Television

Julia Louis-Dreyfus (C83) surpassed Lucille Ball last fall as the most Emmy-nominated comedic actress with her 14th nod, leading to her fourth win—this time for her work on HBO’s Veep.

Stephen Colbert (C86) won two 2013 Emmy Awards for The Colbert Report—including the long-coveted award for outstanding variety series, ending the decade-long reign of The Daily Show with Jon Stewart in that category.

Cloris Leachman (C48) stars in Fox’s Raising Hope and played a voice role in The Croods.

Megan Mullally (C81) is a busy screen, stage, and voice actor. The former Will & Grace star plays recurring roles in Fox’s Bob’s Burgers and NBC’s Parks and Recreation.

Marg Helgenberger (C82) took a starring role on CBS’s Intelligence this fall after nearly 12 years on CBS’s CSI: Crime Scene Investigation.

Denis O’Hare (C84) finished a four-year run on The Good Wife in 2013, during which he was also in the cast of HBO’s True Blood.
David Schwimmer (C88) returns to TV as the lead in the ABC pilot *Irreversible.* The former *Friends* star is the show’s producer.

Anna Gunn (C90) won her first Emmy Award last year for her work as the much-reviled Skylar White in AMC’s *Breaking Bad.*

Jeri Ryan (C90) starred in FX’s *Helix* two years in the medical drama *Body of Proof* and eight seasons on *Two and a Half Men.*

Kimberly Williams-Paisley (C93) was seen in a 20-episode arc on ABC’s hit *Nashville* finishing nine seasons of *According to Jim.*

Seth Meyers (C96) changed desks in 2014, moving down the hall from *Saturday Night Live Weekend Update’s* news desk to lead NBC’s *Late Night with Seth Meyers.*

Kate Baldwin (C97) starred in the musical adaptation of Edna Ferber’s *Giant* with Bryan d’Arcy James (C90), and both received Drama Desk Award nominations. The show was directed by Michael Greif (C81), who directed the original 1996 production of *Rent* as well as Broadway’s *Next to Normal* and *Grey Gardens,* garnering three Tony nominations for best direction of a musical.

Tony Roberts (C61) performed this winter in a limited engagement of *Smiling, the Boy Fell Dead,* with lyrics by Sheldon Harnick (BSM49). Roberts starred in 2009’s Tony-nominated revival of *The Royal Family* with Ana Gasteyer (C89)—who stars in ABC’s *Suburgatory,* plays a recurring role on *The Good Wife,* and was seen in three film roles in 2013 alone.

Fred Applegate (C77) stars in *The Last Ship,* a new musical with a score by Sting and book by Tony-winning writer John Logan (C83). The show gets a Broadway run this fall.

Gregg Edelman (C80), a four-time Tony-nominated stage actor, starred in the new musical *Secondhand Lions* last year and the previous year appeared on Broadway in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood.*

Heather Headley (C97), a Grammy and Tony Award–winning singer-actress, starred in London in a musical adaptation of *The Bodyguard* and in 2012 released her album *Only One in the World.*

Richard Kind (C78), a familiar face from TV’s *Spin City* and *Mad About You,* received a 2013 Tony Award nomination for his role in *The Big Knife.*

Alex Nee (C13) is appearing in the national tour of the musical *Once* and enjoyed a star turn in Green Day’s *American Idiot* while still a senior at Northwestern.

**Film**

Zach Braff (C97) took to Kickstarter to finance *Wish I Was Here* (pictured above), the follow-up to his award-winning 2004 cult hit *Garden State.* The new film premiered at Sundance this year and was sold.
Stars in the classroom
Northwestern's acting faculty teach by example, enriching Chicago's thriving theatre community.

Associate professor Rives Collins and playwright Tom Arvetis (C96) visited Chicago middle school classrooms last year to tell students about the myth of Prometheus and to ask them about the struggles and triumphs in their own lives. The result was Spark, a play written by Arvetis and directed by Collins, premiering at Adventure Stage Chicago in May.

Lecturer Aaron Todd Douglas (above) appeared in the Goodman Theatre’s Measure for Measure last spring and directed Lynn Nottage’s Pulitzer Prize–winning play Ruined for Eclipse Theatre Company this year.

Lecturer Shawn Douglass is an artistic associate with Chicago’s Remy Bumppo Theatre Company. He directed Three Views of the Same Object at Milwaukee’s Next Act Theatre this spring.

Recent television roles for associate professor Henry Godinez—in The Chicago Code, Boss, and Chicago Fire—have kept him close to home, which is ideal, since that’s where Godinez leads the Goodman Theatre’s Latino Theatre Festival. He directed Water by the Spoonful at Chicago’s Court Theatre this spring.

Associate professor Cindy Gold appeared on Chicago Fire this fall with Alex Weisman (C10) and performed in the Survivor Mitzvah Project, a fund-raiser for elderly Holocaust survivors. She also workshopped the new play In the Garden, which will premiere this spring at Lookingglass Theatre with fellow faculty member Jessica Thebus (GC91, GC97) as director and a cast that includes Andrew White (C87).

Senior lecturer Dawn Mora received a Northwestern University Center for Interdisciplinary Research in the Arts grant to collect the work of dancer and choreographer Ernie Flatts on DVD. Known for his work on The Carol Burnett Show, Flatts was remembered at a gala tribute that Mora cohosted this winter in Arizona.

Senior lecturer Mary Poole directs this season’s Imagine U family theatre series production of Charlotte’s Web, adapted by Joseph Robinette from the beloved book by E. B. White.

Senior lecturer Gail Shapiro gave a presentation on presence and confidence building at a Chicago Collaboration for Women career development and leadership retreat. In addition to her teaching Shapiro coaches presentation, media, and acting.

to Focus Features. Meanwhile, Braff made his Broadway debut this year as the lead in Bullets Over Broadway.

Kathryn Hahn (C95) has a recurring role on Parks and Recreation as well as HBO’s Girls and starred in the films The Secret Life of Walter Mitty and We’re the Millers.

Zach Gilford (C04), best known for his work in NBC’s Friday Night Lights, took to the big screen with the horror film Devil’s Due.

Lily Rabe (C04) has a role in both The Hunger Games: Mockingjay films and has been a series regular in American Horror Story for three seasons. She’s filming Pawn Sacrifice, a film about chess champion Bobby Fischer.

Mamie Gummer (C05) played the title role in the CW’s Emily Owens M.D., was seen in a six-episode arc on CBS’s The Good Wife, and starred in the 2013 film The Bodyguard.

Spring 2014 Dialogue
Directing the careers of women artists

Fifty years into Tony Award history, the votes finally presented a statuette to a woman director. That was in 1998, the historic year when women won both directing awards: Julie Taymor for best musical (The Lion King) and Garry Hynes for best play (The Beauty Queen of Leenane). The roster of Tony-winning women directors is still an elite club, but the odds of encountering one of that group’s members is better at Northwestern than almost anywhere else: two teach in the School of Communication.

But the school is not just the home to 2002 directing Tony winner Mary Zimmerman (C82, GC85, GC94), the Jaharis Family Professor of Performance Studies, and 2008 directing Tony winner Anna D. Shapiro, the Marjorie Hoffman Hagan, Class of 1934, Chair in Theatre. It’s home base to a number of busy professional women directors and an incubator for the directors of tomorrow.

Is Northwestern a good place for women directors to get their start? “My whole existence is predicated on this question,” said Jessica Thebus (GC91, GC97), who teaches in the school’s MFA in directing program. “I think that we support all our students at Northwestern equally, and so to say that we are especially supportive of women artists feels disingenuous,” said Amanda Dehnert, an accomplished director who teaches music theatre.

“However, I do believe that the best way to create a supportive environment for underrepresented individuals in any field is to build a place where there are teachers and mentors on whom the individuals can model parts of themselves. By having such a strong faculty of women who are directors, we create an environment where it is overtly OK—and encouraged—that women should direct.”

Jessica Fisch (GC14), a third-year student in the directing program, agreed that the school’s role models made the difference for her in choosing Northwestern. “This program offers a rare opportunity to study with working professional female directors who are not only gifted practitioners but devoted educators,” she said. “The balance I have seen these women show in maintaining careers, families, and passion inspires me every day to dive head first into what is primarily a male-dominated career.”

The real leading ladies of Northwestern are staging productions across the country. Top: Anna D. Shapiro with a frequent collaborator, fellow Tony winner and design faculty member Todd Rosenthal. Above: Amanda Dehnert (right) leads student musicians in a rehearsal for her 2012 main-stage production of The Verona Project.

Just a few of the up-and-coming women directors who’ve launched their careers from Northwestern’s mentor-rich environment include Natsu Onoda Power (C96, GC99, GC05), who teaches at Georgetown University and devised the video-art-performance piece Astro Boy and the
God of Comics for the Studio Theatre in Washington, DC; Robin Witt (GC06), a University of North Carolina at Charlotte faculty member who has twice been nominated for Chicago’s Joseph Jefferson Award for directing, most recently last year for Griffin Theatre’s Flare Path; and Joanie Schultz (GC07), who is “making a name for herself all over town,” according to Robert Falls, artistic director at Chicago’s Goodman Theatre, where Schultz directed Venus in Fur this spring. She also staged Victory Gardens’ The Whale, named one of the best plays of 2013 by Time Out Chicago.

Their mentors remain just as busy: Zimmerman’s latest projects are new stagings of her production of Lucia di Lammermoor at La Scala and her adaptation of The White Snake at the Goodman Theatre. This year in Chicago, Thebus directed Buzzer for the Goodman and In the Garden for Lookingglass Theatre. Shapiro’s production of John Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men opened at Broadway’s Longacre Theatre in April. And Dehnert’s staging of Into the Woods opens in June at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where she advocated for up-and-coming director Hannah Greene (C12) as her associate director.

“I believe we are a few generations away from gender-balanced leadership in the American theatre,” said Dehnert. “What we can do is continue to create environments and opportunities where women can thrive. Northwestern does that for me, and for my students.”
Designing the world of the stage

The lights rise on a stage. The set suggests a place, a time, or an abstract and timeless here and now. An actor or perhaps a full troupe enters, and the costumes and textures suggest even more. The lighting directs attention, creating both illumination and shadows. Before a single line of dialogue is spoken, the story has started.

Actually, the story started months earlier, when scenic, costume, and lighting designers began collaborating to set the stage for theatrical magic. The School of Communication’s MFA program in design sets the stage as well, preparing its students for careers in the art of theatre design.

“All good design begins with a thorough analysis of the source material of the project—the script, the score and libretto, or the scenario,” said assistant professor Marcus Doshi, an internationally successful lighting designer whose latest project is King Lear for Brooklyn’s Theatre for a New Audience. “One really has to know the characters, the circumstances, the ideas, the narrative language—in short, the story—before one can begin to tell it. Designers, like all makers of theatre, are storytellers. So we need to know the story we are trying to tell before we can begin to create our language.”

Associate professor and costume designer Ana Kuzmanic’s language is visual. “After reading the text of a play or script, I start by recording my first impressions on the mood, colors, and rhythm of the piece,” she said. “These intuitive sketches are something I keep coming back to throughout my design.
process, which further involves a thorough exploration of the play’s universe through inspirational imagery and historical research, through collaborative meetings and presentations of my ideas to the director and the design team, and crystallized through drawing and painting.”

Set design literally sets the tone for a production, said Todd Rosenthal, associate professor and a Tony Award-winning scenic designer. For that reason he approached his two latest projects quite differently. For Arena Stage in Washington, DC, he designed Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children*, which he said “does not respond well to strict realism.” Meanwhile, John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Dan Ostell’s lush designs for The White Snake, directed by Mary Zimmerman, will have new life at Chicago’s Goodman Theatre this year.*
Men—for Broadway’s Longacre Theatre, directed by collaborator Anna D. Shapiro—draws on Rosenthal’s research into Depression-era farms and factories to create a real world. “Brecht calls for a raw, unadorned space, but Steinbeck’s characters are immersed in the world. Our design is not altogether real—there are abstract components to the design—but it is fully fleshed out.”

As educators of the next generation of theatre designers, though, these artists take pains to teach students how to create their own approach. “I emphasize to my students that a theatrical designer must be able to draw inspiration from reality and translate it into theatrical language,” said Kuzmanic. “As theatre artists we create new worlds and should not attempt to imitate life. This means finding the reality of the piece and then deconstructing it by adding layers of emotion, intuition, and imagination.”

Students in Northwestern’s MFA program in design have the advantage of working with a renowned faculty. In addition to Rosenthal, the scenic design faculty includes Tony nominee Dan Ostling, who created the lush sets for The White Snake at Chicago’s Goodman Theatre and Lucia di Lammermoor at Milan’s La Scala, and Walt Spangler, who recently designed the Goodman’s A True History of the Johnstown Flood and Measure for Measure (the latter receiving a Joseph Jefferson Award nomination) and is designing next season’s Don Giovanni for Lyric Opera of Chicago. Professor and costume designer Linda Roethke recently designed The Geller Girls for Atlanta’s Alliance Theatre. Chairing the Department of Theatre is lighting designer Joseph Appelt, who has lit stages at the Goodman, Chicago’s Victory Gardens Theatre, the Cleveland Playhouse, and others. “Every member of our MFA faculty is working at the highest level in the industry,” said Rosenthal. “We bring a lot of real-world experience to the classroom.”

Another advantage for design students is the collaboration with the school’s MFA program in directing. As Kuzmanic explained, the shared curriculum between the two degree programs mirrors the professional model of designing for theatre. “The collaborative approach to classroom instruction,” said Doshi—“with students exploring all aspects of design, as well as with directing students together in class mentored by faculty from all disciplines—makes Northwestern not only a good place to learn this art form, but the best.”

Linda Roethke’s costume sketches came to life at Atlanta’s Alliance Theatre in its world premiere of The Geller Girls, featuring (at right) Courtenay Collins and Mark Cabus.

Ana Kuzmanic’s divine drawings for Mozart’s Don Giovanni will take shape for Lyric Opera of Chicago’s 60th anniversary season.
Intimacy, a new play by Thomas Bradshaw (MFA, Brooklyn College), premiered at New York’s New Group Theatre in January. He was also one of four playwrights participating in “The New Black”—a conversation, moderated by senior lecturer Peter Erickson, about writing in the shadow of one of America’s greatest playwrights, August Wilson.

Long Way Go Down, a play by Zayd Dohrn (MFA, New York University), was remounted at the Theatre on the Lake last summer as part of its Best of 2013 Off-Loop Theatre Chicago Summer Series. His play Outside People was published by Samuel French in the fall. In August, Dohrn participated in the 2013 Dramatists Guild Annual Conference in Chicago, appearing on the panel “Playwriting’s Young Guns.” He also received the School of Communication’s 2013 Clarence Simon Award for Outstanding Teaching and Mentoring.

Peter Erickson (PhD, University of California, Santa Cruz) has published a trio of essays about Othello in Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation, Shakespeare and Immigration, and Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art. In February, Erickson was the keynote speaker at the Early Modern Colloquium, the University of Michigan’s annual graduate student conference.

Elizabeth Gerber (PhD, Stanford University) was listed as one of Crain’s “40 Under 40” for 2013. She also received the IEEE Computer Society’s 2014 Computer Science and Engineering Undergraduate Teaching Award.

The Beautiful Dark, a play by Erik Gernand (MFA, Northwestern University), was produced at Chicago’s Redtwist Theatre and at New Jersey’s Premiere Stages, where it won the top award at the company’s 2013 Play Festival. Gernand’s short play Locker Room was part of Manhattan’s Red Shirt Rooftop Reading Series last year.

Luna Gale, a new play by Rebecca Gilman (MFA, University of Iowa), premiered at Chicago’s Goodman Theatre in January. The previous month, her screenplay adaptation of her play Blue Surge was given a reading at the Peter Jay Sharp Theatre at New York’s Lincoln Center.

Eszter Hargittai (PhD, Princeton University) was the keynote speaker at the 2013 Coalition for Networked Information’s member meeting last December. Based in the nation’s capital, CNI promotes the use of digital information technology to advance scholarship and education.

Fourplay, a feature film by Kyle Henry (MFA, University of Texas at Austin), finished its festival tour last June as the Houston QFest centerpiece film. He recently finished production on The Half-Life of War, a short documentary about forgotten war memorials, and edited the PBS documentary Before You Know It, which will be broadcast this summer and was nominated for the 2013 Austin Film Critics Association’s Film Award last fall.

E. Patrick Johnson (PhD, Louisiana State University) will receive an Otto René Castillo Award in May for his contributions to the ongoing development of political theatre.

Chuck Kleinhaus (PhD, Indiana University), associate professor emeritus, is coeditor of the online journal Jump Cut.
Molly Losh (PhD, University of California, Berkeley) hosted a Project SEARCH Collaborates for Autism intern in her lab this year. PSCA helps provide internships to high school seniors on the autism spectrum. The partnership with Losh was made possible through New York Collaborates for Autism as well as a grant from Comedy Central's Night of Too Many Stars and the Train Our Teens Initiative.

Hamid Naficy (PhD, University of California, Los Angeles) gave a talk on Iranian postrevolution cinema at Australia's University of New South Wales last August as part of its 2013 School of the Arts & Media seminar series. He also gave the talk “Mediatic Public Diplomacy: Iranian State, Iranian People, and the West” in November at Columbia University and a presentation on Iranian cinema in collaboration with Columbia and New York University.

Detective Partner Villain Hero, a play by Brett Neveu (BA, University of Iowa), was produced at Chicago's Strawdog Theatre Company late last year.

Saturday Morning Mystery, a film by Spencer Parsons (MFA, University of Texas at Austin), premiered at the 2012 Los Angeles Film Festival and was named best feature at the 2012 Minneapolis Underground Film Festival. This year the movie is being distributed digitally and on DVD and television in German-language territories by Los Banditos Films.

Miriam Petty (PhD, Emory University) was a recipient of a 2013–14 Public Voices Thought Leadership Fellowship, sponsored by Northwestern's Office of the Provost in partnership with the OpEd Project. The fellowship provides a select group of scholars with the necessary resources to dramatically increase their visibility and influence as thought leaders and teachers.

Performing Queer Latinidad: Dance, Sexuality, Politics by Ramón Rivera-Servera (PhD, University of Texas at Austin) has been honored in each of its key fields. In dance studies Rivera-Servera received the Congress on Research in Dance's 2013 Outstanding Publication Award as well as a 2012 Special Citation from the Society of Dance History Scholars' de la Torre Bueno Prize Committee. He also received the 2013 Lambda Literary Foundation Book Award in LGBT studies and the Latin American Studies Association's 2013 Latino Studies Book Award in Latin studies.

Ozge Samanci (PhD, Georgia Institute of Technology) exhibited her interactive installation Sneaky Time last June at the International Symposium on Electronic Arts in Sydney, Australia, and in November at Advances in Computer Entertainment in the Netherlands. Samanci’s essay “Embodied Site-Specific Animation” appeared in Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, and her “Sneaky Time: Interactive Quartz Clock” was accepted for publication at the Netherlands’ ACE Conference.

Jason Tait Sanchez (PhD, Kent State University) was selected as a participant in the 2013 Broadening the Representation of Academic Investigators in Neuroscience (BRAINS) symposium, held last January in Bainbridge Island, Washington.

Radio/television/film lecturer Melika Bass created the solo exhibition Slider Chamber at Chicago’s Iceberg Projects late last year. The site-specific immersive video and sound installation explored sensory perception, the abstracted road movie, and the nocturnal cinematic landscape. Bass was featured in NewCity’s “Film 50: Chicago’s Screen Gems 2013.”
Three new faculty books explore issues of race and art

Five years ago, through the generosity of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Northwestern University Press established its “Global Encounters” initiative. Among its goals were three book projects centered around theatrical performance, and all three were published this past December.

Solo/Black/Woman—coedited by E. Patrick Johnson, the Carlos Montezuma Professor of Performance Studies and African American Studies, and Ramón Rivera-Servera, associate professor of performance studies—features seven solo performances by emerging and established artists. The collection is “to our knowledge, the only book of its kind to contain a script, essay, and interview with an artist, as well as a DVD with clips from the show,” said Johnson. “It will be an invaluable teaching tool.”

Rivera-Servera also coedited The Goodman Theatre’s Festival Latino: Six Plays with Henry Godinez, associate professor of theatre. The book’s muse was the Goodman’s biennial Latino Theatre Festival, which Godinez directs; he also plans workshops and community forums around the featured plays. “I’m hoping the book will help advance awareness of the beautiful and important work being done in the Latino theatre field,” said Godinez.

The equally vital creative work of Chicago’s African American performing artists is the subject of Black Theatre Is Black Life: An Oral History of Chicago Theater and Dance, 1970–2010 by Harvey Young, associate professor of theatre, performance studies, African American studies, and radio/television/film, and Queen Meccasia Zabriskie, assistant professor of sociology at the New College of Florida. Young hopes that this collection of interviews will offer a “strong alternative narrative” to the reputation of Chicago’s black neighborhoods as places of crime and violence.

The essay “Dead Metaphors/Undead Allegories” by Jeffrey Sconce (PhD, University of Wisconsin–Madison) was published in the edited volume Screening the Undead: Vampires and Zombies in Film and Television (Tauris).

The essay “Explorations in Cultureson” by Jacob Smith (PhD, Indiana University) was recently published in The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media. Smith’s “Hell on Ice,” an essay about Orson Welles’s Mercury Theatre broadcast of The War of the Worlds, was published online in Sounding Out.

Blossoms and Blood: Postmodern Media Culture and the Films of Paul Thomas Anderson by Jason Sperb (PhD, Indiana University) was released in December by the University of Texas Press, which recently issued the paperback edition of Sperb’s previous book, Disney’s Most Notorious Film: Race, Convergence, and the Hidden Histories of Song of the South.

Table Talk, a play by Geoff Tarsen (BA, Binghamton University), was performed last May in Poughkeepsie, New York, as part of Half Moon Theatre’s 10 Minute Play Festival.

David Tolchinsky (MFA, University of Southern California) was a visiting artist at the Prague Film School, where he gave the talk “To the Edge and Beyond: The Midpoints of Coming of Age Movies.” He was also featured in NewCity’s “Film 50: Chicago’s Screen Gems 2013.”

Fast Talk, a documentary feature directed and produced by Debra Tolchinsky (MFA, School of the Art Institute of Chicago), was released on iTunes in October.

Joel Valentín-Martinez (MFA, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee) directed the sold-out fall production of The Inexplicable Pastrana at Chicago’s Raven Theatre.

Harvey Young (PhD, Cornell University) and Philip C. Kolin, distinguished professor in the College of Arts and Letters at the University of Southern Mississippi, have coauthored Suzan-Lori Parks in Person: Interviews and Commentaries (Routledge).

Mary Zimmerman (PhD, Northwestern University), who directed the New York Metropolitan Opera’s season opener Lucia di Lammermoor in 2007, brought the production to Milan’s Teatro Alla Scala in February with Pier Giorgio Morandi conducting. Dan Ostling (CG36) designed the sets; Mara Blumenfeld (C92) designed the costumes.
Class notes are selected from alumni submissions to Northwestern magazine at www.northwestern.edu/magazine, stories of alumni featured in the media as identified by the University’s Office of Alumni Relations and Development, and updates sent to Dialogue by mail or by email at dialogue@northwestern.edu.

**Alumni achievements**

**1960s**

**Dolores Freedman Hentschel (GC64)**, a vice president at Leadership Greater Hartford, was inducted into the organization’s International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in November. Only 200 people worldwide have been similarly recognized since the Hall of Fame was established in 1996 to honor influential scholars, practitioners, and policy makers in adult and continuing education.

**1970s**

**Jeff Ravitz (C72)** was named the Parnelli Lighting Designer of the Year in November in recognition of his design for Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band’s 2013 international tour. Ravitz was also honored with two regional Emmys last year for broadcasts originating in Detroit and San Diego.

**1980s**

**Barbara Dreyfus (C81)**, a former literary agent at United Talent Agency, was hired as head of motion pictures for Will Packer Productions. In January the new company released its first feature, *Ride Along*, which grossed more than $48 million in four days.

**Stacy Mandelberg (C81)** became the vice president of limited series and event programming at CBS in September. She acquires, develops, and oversees production of short-run scripted programming based on books, historical events, and original ideas.

**Linda Rimac Colberg (C75)** coedited *The Mount Diablo Guide*, a comprehensive overview of California’s Mount Diablo State Park. She is also the author of *Mount Diablo: The Extraordinary Life and Landscapes of a California Treasure.*

**Paul McComas (GC84)** and **Maya Kuper (C04)** are teaming up this year on a multi-city tour of *Unplugged.* The show is inspired by McComas’s 2002 novel of the same name. Singer-songwriter Kuper has collaborated with McComas on music to accompany the story, and the two perform songs and scenes from the book.

**1990s**

**Jennifer Gies (C90)** is the cofounder of Gigable.net, an online crowdsourcing platform for live music events, which launched last year. The site’s supporters make a live music show happen in a market where an artist would not otherwise be likely to play.

**David Strickland (C90)**, former administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, joined the law firm Venable LLP at the start of the year as a partner in its Washington, DC, office. *Grounded*, a play by **George Brant (C91)**, won the National New Play Network’s Smith Prize in 2012 and opened at New York’s Walkerspace Theater in January. The poetic monologue is told from the perspective of an American female pilot whose pregnancy leads to a reassignment managing drone strikes. The play’s first reading was directed by Brant’s wife, **Laura Kepley (C93)**, the artistic director of the Cleveland Playhouse.

**Since Africa**, a play by **Mia McCullough (C92)**, was produced by New York’s Red Fern Theatre Company in February. Her play *Not-Parent Teacher Conference* was presented at the Bechdel Fest at Chicago’s Broken Nose Theatre, and she recently completed work on a screenplay for InBloom Productions.

**Dean A. Carpenter (C83)** is a producer of the off-Broadway musical *Til Divorce Do Us Part*, which opened at the DR2 Theatre in February.

**1980s**

**Denis O’Hare (C84)** has coauthored *An Iliad*, a stage adaption of Homer’s epic poem. The play opened at the Broad Stage in Los Angeles in January with O’Hare in the lead role.

**Christopher Kubasik (C85)** was appointed to the board of directors of Maui Acquisition Corp., the parent corporation of the Safariland Group. He also chairs the company’s audit committee.

**Linda Meadow (C89)**, founder of *gurumommy.com* and author of *Do You Speak Shoe Lover?,* has written *City Baby L.A.*, has written *Do You Speak Shoe Lover? Style and Stories from Inside DSW,* which was published in October and made the *New York Times* business bestseller list.

**1990s**

**Difret**, a feature film produced by **Leelai Demoz (C90)**, premiered in January at the Sundance Film Festival, where it won the Audience Award in the world cinema dramatic competition.

**2010s**

**Jennifer Gies (C90)** is the cofounder of Gigable.net, an online crowdsourcing platform for live music events, which launched last year. The site’s supporters make a live music show happen in a market where an artist would not otherwise be likely to play.
Susan Applebaum (GC98), an adjunct professor of theatre at Loyola University Chicago and a former adapter, director, and teacher at Evanston’s Piven Theatre, has cowritten a book with Joyce Piven, the company’s cofounder. In the Studio with Joyce Piven: Theatre Games, Story Theatre, and Text Work for Actors describes the well-known theatre workshop’s actor-training methods and performance practices.

Inhuman, a new young-adult novel by Kat Falls (GC94), received a starred review from Kirkus and made the American Booksellers Association’s Winter Indie Next List. The first in a planned trilogy, the book takes place in the near future after a devastating biological disaster.

Melissa Harper (C97) was promoted to senior vice president of original programming at Starz last fall.

Erica Lynn Schwartz (C03) was named director of the licensing arm of Daryl Roth Productions in October.

Patty West (C03), a producer and member of the American Film Institute’s conservatory staff, was appointed director of AFI’s Directing Workshop for Women in November. The workshop is an intensive one-year training program where artists study with master filmmakers, make a short film, and develop a career path in screen directing.

2000s

Kristin Fuhs (C00) joined Woodbury University in September as assistant professor of communication studies.

Adam Waskowski (C00, L04), an attorney at Novac and Macey LLP, was promoted to partner in January.

James Sibley (GC02) was named executive director of marketing and communications at Waubonsee Community College in Sugar Grove, Illinois, in December.

Inhuman, a new young-adult novel by Kat Falls (GC94), received a starred review from Kirkus and made the American Booksellers Association’s Winter Indie Next List. The first in a planned trilogy, the book takes place in the near future after a devastating biological disaster.

2000s

Chad Hodge (C99) is the creator and executive producer of the Fox television series Wayward Pines, premiering in July and starring Matt Dillon, Terrence Howard, and Melissa Leo. His musical stage adaptation of Irving Berlin’s Holiday Inn will premiere at Connecticut’s Goodspeed Opera House in September.

Jeff Deutchman (C05) was named director of acquisitions for Paramount Home Media Distribution, a new division for launching independent films.

Ken J. Adachi (C06) wrote and directed the award-winning feature-length film Dead Dad, which screened at more than 20 festivals around the world and was officially released on iTunes and other video-on-demand platforms in February.

Jeremiah Balik (GC06) was appointed business development manager for the western region of Alpha Omega Wireless, based in Sacramento, California.

Brock Wilbur (C07) cowrote the screenplay for the award-winning comedy film Act Naturally, directed by J. P. Riley (SCSoA). He also wrote and costarred in Your Friends Close, a feature film directed by and costarring Jocelyn Kelvin (C07). A traveling stand-up comedian, Wilbur has also released two hourlong comedy specials, most recently Crime Travel, that are available on iTunes.

Kristin Chirico (GC08) is a staff writer for BuzzFeed in Los Angeles.

Jennifer Dobby (GC08) has accepted a three-year appointment as a visiting lecturer in playwriting and screenwriting at Wisconsin’s Carroll University.

Maria Finitzo (GC08) was awarded a MacArthur Foundation grant to help fund her documentary In the Game, which follows the ups and downs of an inner-city girls’ soccer team—revealing the obstacles facing low-income students in their quest for higher education. In December, Finitzo’s films Life Lessons and My Mother’s Idea were broadcast on WTTW, Chicago’s PBS affiliate.

FMI: How Carson McCullers Saved My Life, a play by Sarah Gubbins (GC08), was performed at Atlanta’s Alliance Theatre at the Woodruff in November.

Eoghan O’Donnell (GC08), a staff writer for the MTV series Teen Wolf, recently sold his spec sci-fi drama pilot The Messengers to the CW and CBS Studios. O’Donnell is also working on a supernatural drama television project for Sony.

Accordion People, a screenplay by America Palacios (GC08), was a finalist in the comedy category at the 2013 Austin Film Festival.

Sara Jean Accuardi (GC09) is the script curator for Script Tease, an improv series at the Brody Theater in Portland, Oregon.
Toby Herman (GC09) is the segment producer for the AMC series *Talking Dead*, which returned for its third season last fall. Herman has also served as a segment producer for *Talking Bad* and for the Creative Arts Emmys.

Caitlin Kunkel (GC09) has joined Pacific Northwest College of Art in Portland, Oregon, as assistant professor in liberal arts.

The Last of the Cedar County Bank Robberies, a play by Ashley Richard (GC09), was featured in the first annual Gary Garrison Playwriting Festival in August. Richard was recently appointed English department chair at the Bob Hope School in Port Arthur, Texas.

Shu Ling Yong (C09) was named a Diverse Voices in Docs Fellow for 2013. Sponsored by Kartemquin Films and the Community Film Workshop of Chicago, the fellowship is a professional development and mentorship program for emerging documentary filmmakers.

2010s

Meredith Friedman (GC10) was awarded the Downstage Left Playwright Residency for her play *The Firestorm*. At an annual presentation at New York’s Playwrights Horizons last fall, she presented an excerpt from work she wrote as a 2012–13 Dramatists Guild Fellow.

Sam Logan Khaleghi (GC10) directed and starred in the feature-length film *Approaching Midnight*, which received its world premiere in Detroit in August.

Michael McGee (C10) was the subject of a January *Chicago Tribune* article on how he and Neal Sales-Griffin (SESP09) cofounded the Starter League, a teaching center for building web applications. McGee was also listed as one of Crain’s “40 Under 40” for 2013.

Alvaro Saar Rios (GC10) wrote the libretto for the opera *Rapunzel*, which was premiered by the Houston Grand Opera’s Opera to Go! program in April.

Will Crouse (C11) and Michael Medford (C11) have founded the Poor Theatre in Chicago and serve as its coartistic directors. Crouse directed the company’s fall production, *Good Thing*, which featured Medford and Dillon Kelleher (SCS09) in leading roles.

Marsha Mukerjee (GC11) has been hired as a staff writer on FX’s *The Bridge*. She was also a Humanitas New Voices finalist and has been signed by the United Talent Agency.

Kendall Sherwood (GC11), a playwright and screenwriter, is working with the writers of TNT’s *Major Crimes*, a spin-off of the hit crime series *The Closer*.

Philister Sidigu (GC11) was named a Diverse Voices in Docs Fellow for 2013. Sponsored by Kartemquin Films and the Community Film Workshop of Chicago, the fellowship is a professional development and mentorship program for emerging documentary filmmakers.

Shining on Oscar night

If you watched the March 2 telecast of the 86th annual Academy Awards, you heard a lot about the work of gold-standard School of Communication alumni.

*American Hustle*, produced by Jonathan Gordon (C90), was nominated for best picture as well as all four major acting awards (best actor, best actress, best supporting actor, and best supporting actress)—as was his 2012 film *Silver Linings Playbook*. *American Hustle* was nominated for five additional Oscars and in January won the Golden Globe for best picture.

*Her*, with Natalie Farrey (C98) as executive producer, was nominated for four awards, including best picture.

*The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*, with Kenneth Kamins (C83) as executive producer, was nominated for two sound and visual awards; it features a cameo by Stephen Colbert (C86) and his family. Joshua Levinson (C89) serves as postproduction supervisor for the *Hobbit* trilogy.

Michael Knobloch (C92), as president of film music at Universal Pictures, runs the film-music enterprise that produced Pharrell Williams’s nominated song “Happy” from *Despicable Me 2*.

Denis O’Hare (C84) appeared in *Dallas Buyers Club*, which received six nominations, including best picture, and won three awards.
NUEA West continued its Short Film Night series with a screening last September at the DeMille Theater of Culver Studios. It featured work by Northwestern alumni Michael Crane (BSM90), John Ruby (WCAS00), Katie L. Hall (C04), Briggs Hatton (C05), Andrew Perez (C05), Megan Rosati (C05), Bob Turton (C05), Carlo Corbellini (McC06), Dillon Porter (C06), Jon Schmidt (C06), Pranidhi Varshney (C06), Jessica Lowe (C07), Madeline Merritt (C07), Kat Palardy (C08), Kat Yoder (C09), Chris Amos (C10), Rob Runyon (C10), Karolyn Szot (C10), Eric Wolf Kirchner (C11), Rachel Kopilow (C11), Travis LaBella (C11), Jac Reyno (C11), Rachel Pologe (C12), Karen Fisher (C13), and Nikki Michaels (J13). The event also featured the three films from NUEA’s 48 Hour Film Festival, representing work by Crane, Andy Wolf (C94), Isabella Way (BSM01), Taj Bates (J03), Alicia Cordova (C10), Danielle Calvert (C11), Makoa Kavabata (WCAS11), John Parton (C11), Nandita Seshadri (C11), Paul Foryt (McC12), Brendan Scannell (C13), Griffin Tato (KSM13), and others.

In the fall NUEA West hosted two events to support young alumni. Reality TV producer Jackie Laine (C08) and creative executive Malcolm Gray (C08) of Len Wiseman’s Sketch Films led a resume workshop. In November the annual Surviving LA Panel featured Cindy Chupack (J87), coexecutive producer of Modern Family; Jason Moore (C93), stage and film director; Robin Faerber (C94), vice president of programming at the Disney Channel; John Lehr (C88), executive producer and star of Hulu’s Quick Draw; actress Aimee Garcia (J00); and Josh Goldberg (C04), a literary and talent manager at Kaplan/Perrone.

In November the group hosted the panel “The Challenges and Benefits of Producing a Successful Short Film.” Panelists included actress and film producer Naomi Grossman (C97); AJ Tesler (C00), head of production for Jash and founder of ITVFest; and Alberto Roldan (C10), producer of The Opportunist, the only American production in the 2013 short film competition at Cannes. Grossman (pictured above) was also featured in October when NUEA West held another storytelling event, this one with the theme “fear.” The evening included stories by Kevin Martin King (C80), Joe Hauler (J98), Scott Speiser (C00), Jennifer Schuster (C02), Lindsay Gelfand (C04), Tamara Shayne Kagel (C04), Michael Kass (C04), Rati Gupta (WCAS06), Jessica Cluess (C07), Pauline Ekholm (C07), and Robby Karol (C07).

Neal Dandade (CG12) cowrote and starred in the Second City Network’s Chai Chat—The Sex Talk with My Indian Parents, which aired last year.

Andrew McLean (GC12) was appointed to vice president of corporate business and development at Maxwell Technologies in December.

JJ Phillips (C12) appeared in Chicago earlier this year in Leveling Up, part of Steppenwolf’s Theatre for Young Adults series.

Jen Spyra (GC12) completed a fellowship with The Onion last summer and was hired as a full-time staff writer.

The play Mary M.: Future Bible Babe by Erin Austin (GC13) was given a reading at Chicago’s American Theatre Company in March.

So, Now I’m a Zombie, written and directed by Allison Ho (C13), was screened at San Francisco’s Another Hole in the Head Film Festival in December.

Portraiture, directed by Judy Suh (C13), was screened at the United Film Festival in Chicago in November.

The National Communication Association’s Visual Communication Division presented its first annual dissertation award to Patrick Wade (GC13) for his “A Degree of Disillusion: News Media, Photojournalism, and Visual Narratives of the Vietnam War.”
Margaret Meese McCreary (C37) on February 2 at age 98 in Gerry, New York

Mary A. Fisher (C41) on November 21 at age 94 in Appleton, Wisconsin

Tova Quist Craig (C42) on September 21 at age 92 in Glenview, Illinois

Lenore Heifetz Binswanger (C44) on January 14 at age 90 in Memphis, Tennessee

Frances Repp (C44) on October 17 at age 90 in Las Cruces, New Mexico

Mary Ormsby Trenkle (GC44) on January 28 at age 95 in Kalamazoo, Michigan

Charlotte Ellen (C45) on September 21 at age 90 in Santa Barbara, California

Patten Maximoff (C45) on December 4 at age 89 in Los Altos, California

Carolyne Cremeens (C46) on September 10 at age 92 in Delevan, Illinois

Frances Lindstrom (C46) on November 4 in Norton Shores, Michigan

David Ralph (C47, GC48, GC53) on November 6 at age 91 in Lansing, Michigan

Atha Jane (“AJ”) Haywood (C48) on September 14 at age 86 in Stockton, California

Charles Thistlethwaite (C48) on September 19 at age 92 in San Luis Obispo, California

Madeline Sullivan Fox (C49) on November 22 at age 91 in Holland, Pennsylvania

Verna Ourieff (C49) on November 24 at age 89 in Los Angeles, California

Elaine L. Wishner (C49) on September 14 at age 84 in Wilmette, Illinois

Omar Paxson (GC50) on December 18 at age 90 in Los Angeles, California

Otto F. Bauer (C53, GC55, GC59) on October 5 at age 81 in Iowa City, Iowa

Harold A. Grant (C55) on January 15 at age 81 in Riverview, Florida

Robert Jenner (GC55) on October 13 at age 89 in Murphysboro, Illinois

Allen T. Smith (C56) on October 5 at age 80 in Alexandria, Virginia

Thomas James Vasos (C58) on October 5 at age 77 in Wilmington, North Carolina

Jill Moorshead Olson (C60) on January 15 at age 75 in Colorado Springs, Colorado

William G. Poulos (C61) on December 20 in Wheeling, Illinois

Ann Seeler (GC61) on August 19 at age 84 in Evanston, Illinois

Don Adams (C70) on December 25 at age 66 in Detroit, Michigan

James F. Mitchell (C81) on January 9 at age 54 in Wilmette, Illinois

Bryan Koehler (GC02) on November 23 at age 50 in Glencoe, Illinois

Lee Thornton (GC73), the first African American woman to cover the White House for a major news network, died on September 5 at age 71 in College Park, Maryland.

Thornton earned her PhD in the School of Communication’s Department of Radio/Television/Film and a year later joined CBS News in New York; eventually she moved to Washington, where she worked alongside Lesley Stahl and Ed Bradley. In 1977 she was named the network’s White House correspondent, a position she held for four years. Thornton later became the first African American host of NPR’s All Things Considered and produced Both Sides with Jesse Jackson for CNN. A gifted broadcaster with a beautiful voice and pitch-perfect journalistic instincts, Thornton went on to teach at Howard University and the University of Maryland, where in 2011 she was named “Outstanding Woman of the Year.” As a mentor to a new generation of reporters, anchors, producers, and writers, she was known for her thorough yet caring style of teaching and the kindness and encouragement she showed to her students.
Chicago Blackhawks chairman endows performing arts center

Major gift from trustee and alumnus Rocky Wirtz supports the performing arts at Northwestern

Chicago Blackhawks chairman William Rockwell “Rocky” Wirtz and his wife, Marilyn, have made a significant gift to the Northwestern University School of Communication, creating an endowment that will fund innovative student and faculty projects in Northwestern’s Theatre and Interpretation Center—and rename the building.

The center will be renamed the Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts, in honor of Rocky Wirtz’s grandmother, who graduated from Northwestern in 1924.

For more than three decades, the Theatre and Interpretation Center has helped fuel the success of Northwestern’s top-ranked programs in theatre, dance, music theatre, and performance studies. The center produces, manages, funds, and administers the School of Communication’s mainstage performances, presenting as many as 40 productions annually in the complex’s four performance venues and in the separate 1,000-seat Cahn Auditorium.

The Wirtz gift comes at a fortunate moment: in 2015 the center will be fully renovated, improving the accessibility and function of existing areas and creating new classroom, rehearsal, and performance spaces. Wirtz was also a generous donor to the University’s new Music and Communication Building. Slated to open in 2015 adjacent to the Wirtz Center, that building will house the theatre and performance studies departments on its fifth floor.

The renovation will allow faculty and students—currently constrained by limited physical space—to take on artistic challenges of a broader scope. Wirtz’s recent gift will also support the School of Communication’s high-profile collaborations with professional artists and regional theaters. These include the American Music Theatre Project, which brings together students and music theatre professionals to develop and premiere new musicals. In addition, the Wirtz endowment will provide resources for the School of Communication’s arts programs for Chicago-area children, including Imagine U and the Children’s Theatre Tour, and for its graduate programs in theatre directing and design.

“This significant gift builds on the extraordinary generosity of Rocky and Marilyn Wirtz, which has had a transformative impact on the School of Communication over the years,” said University President Morton Schapiro. “Rocky’s support has helped cultivate Northwestern’s unparalleled reputation in the performance arts.”

Above left: An American Music Theatre Project workshop
Left: Imagine U’s production of The Hundred Dresses
Since 2009 the Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Visiting Artist Program has brought some of the most talented and successful performing-arts professionals to campus to work with Northwestern students and faculty. The 2013 Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Visiting Artist was actor-director and 1988 School of Communication graduate David Schwimmer, who talked with students in a Q&A led by Tony Award–winning director Anna D. Shapiro, the Marjorie Hoffman Hagan, Class of 1934, Chair in Theatre.

“Over the past two decades, Rocky Wirtz has stepped up to continue the support of his grandmother Virginia when it was most needed,” said School of Communication Dean Barbara O’Keefe. “Combined with the new Music and Communication Building and the renovation of the Wirtz Center, the Wirtz endowment will provide the foundation for a new century of innovation in the arts at Northwestern.”

“Throughout her life, my grandmother was a champion for the arts and giving back,” said Rocky Wirtz, president of the Wirtz Corporation, one of the nation’s largest privately held and family-owned companies. “It’s an honor and privilege to carry on that legacy along with my wife, Marilyn, and our children and grandchildren, for many more generations.”

Wirtz is a member of the Northwestern University Board of Trustees and has served on the School of Communication’s National Advisory Board since 1986. He received a bachelor’s degree from the School of Communication in 1975 and made his first gift to Northwestern in 1976. Wirtz also is a member of the board of directors of the Chicago Blackhawks Charities.

The Wirtz gift is an inaugural donation to We Will: The Campaign for Northwestern, a University-wide fundraising initiative that includes a commitment to performance arts as an area where Northwestern will invest resources most heavily in the coming years.