DESIGN FOR HEALTH AND HUMAN WELFARE
Packing so many School of Communication alumni and faculty into one production is borderline indecent—as was the case with Pulitzer Prize winner Paula Vogel’s Indecent last fall at Chicago’s Victory Gardens Theater. The production featured actors Matt Deitchman (C12), Noah LaPook (C18), Catherine LeFrere (C08), Andrew White (C87), and theatre professor Cindy Gold as well as costume design by Mara Blumenfeld (C92). These Northwestern-affiliated artists assembled for an October 11 postshow talkback attended by students. “I felt so bad for the people in the cast who didn’t go to Northwestern,” joked LeFrere, given that five of the nine actors had University connections. “I think they felt like outsiders.” White, a founding ensemble member of Lookingglass Theatre Company, told the audience that his Northwestern theatrical training prepared him for so much more than simply practicing the art of acting. “We’re encouraged to be actors, writers, designers—and we all wear those hats,” he said. “That cultivation of a try-anything approach is a common thread for all Northwestern graduates.”

Nominated for a 2017 Tony Award, Indecent tells the story of the controversial 1923 Broadway debut of Jewish writer Sholem Asch’s only play, God of Vengeance. That work centers on a lesbian romance—taboo at the time—and contemporary audiences reacted with both delight and contempt. Pictured with (from left) theatre professor Rives Collins are Indecent actors Catherine LeFrere, Cindy Gold, and Noah LaPook.
Design and innovation are currently among the hottest topics in higher education—every university seems to be adding new programs to teach design thinking and new “maker” spaces to encourage innovation. This is a welcome development for the communication arts and sciences, which from their inception have been disciplines where design thinking is central, where creative work is the goal, and where innovation is everywhere.

The rising tide of interest in design has inspired School of Communication faculty to develop new courses, modules, and graduate curricula, and those programs have attracted new kinds of students. In the past 15 years we have added professional doctorates in audiology and speech-language pathology; master's degrees in health communication, leadership for creative enterprises, and sound arts and industries; and MFA degrees in writing for screen and stage, documentary media, and (just this year) acting. For undergraduates we now offer modules in playwriting, screenwriting, theatre design, sound design, game design, strategic communication, health communication, and digital media.

As we have increasingly focused on preparing students to create and launch new solutions, interest in designing communication systems and practices has grown in every department of the school. And this, in turn, has resulted in an explosion of new ideas about how to improve the lives of individuals and communities. In this issue of Dialogue we provide a broad survey of the diversity of projects through which our faculty and students are using communication design to make direct and immediate improvements in human development, health, and well-being.

When I studied rhetorical theory as an undergraduate, I was taken by Donald Bryant's definition of rhetoric as “adjusting ideas to people, and people to ideas.” It was a simple and extremely elegant expression of the core design impulse that pervades the study of communication. The work you will read about in this issue is a testament to the rich intellectual resources to be found in the communication arts and sciences, where institutions as old as democracy and as new as social media demand that we develop ever more sophisticated and integrated theories and methods for understanding how communication works—and sometimes doesn’t—in human affairs. I am both comforted and inspired to see the solutions that our faculty and students are developing as they not only study this century’s latest modes of communication but go on to create new ones.

Barbara J. O'Keefe
Dean, School of Communication
Start a dialogue: dialogue@northwestern.edu
DESIGN
FOR HEALTH AND
HUMAN WELFARE
School of Communication faculty are pioneering research in the field of design, particularly how it can be leveraged to promote human health, welfare, and dignity across the lifespan. Our researchers, artists, and clinicians are leading a movement to use design—through human-computer interaction, early childhood interventions, art, and advocacy—for the betterment of society. The following faculty and their work are just a sampling of the school’s groundbreaking design-based initiatives.
DESIGN FOR HEARING-HEALTH SERVICES: TACKLING THE AUDIOGRAM

For the last 70 years, patients seeking hearing-health services from an audiologist have likely left their appointments staring at the same document: the audiogram. For professionals, this single piece of paper is an assessment and diagnostic tool that maps a patient’s hearing loss. To the patient, though, it can seem mystifying.

“We found that the audiogram is too complex to be comprehended by the majority of users and, even if it could be comprehended, doesn’t contain the information that ordinary people want when they come out of a hearing exam,” says Bruce Lambert, professor and director of the School of Communication’s Center for Communication and Health. “We’re trying to improve the design so the ordinary person can make sense of it.”

Having spent his professional life studying health literacy and the quality and safety of care, Lambert teamed up to redesign the audiogram with audiologist and professor Sumit Dhar, chair of the Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders.

“I never thought about whether or not it was easy to understand until I tried to explain it to Bruce,” says Dhar. “It was just not easy. We realized that this was creating a disparity in healthcare.”

In addressing the significant discrepancies in health access and outcomes along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines, Lambert believes one of the biggest underlying factors may be differences in health literacy. Dhar and Lambert convened focus groups of patients, who confirmed the researchers’ suspicions that the audiogram stymied even the most health-literate consumers. Focus groups of audiologists revealed frustrations but still an underlying appreciation for a document of its type.

With a Delaney Family Fund for Research and Communication grant, Dhar and Lambert have been working with students and professionals to design a new audiogram that will use intuitive measurements and understandable values in describing hearing loss. The new design will answer questions that patients find most critical: how did this happen, will it get worse, will a hearing aid help, etc. Dhar hopes to have the final design selected and finalized this year.

Dhar notes that because many patients make adjustments to accommodate hearing changes—turning up the volume on devices, using closed captioning, or avoiding certain social situations—hearing health isn’t always their top priority. Lambert adds that hearing services aren’t typically covered by most insurance plans and operate outside a healthcare setting, presenting patients with further problems.

“There’s been lots of scientific research in hearing health, lots of clinical work, but not a lot of health services research—in terms of organizing the delivery of care and then optimizing the safety, quality, efficiency, and effectiveness.” says Lambert. “We intend to change that.”

BRIDGING THE WORD GAP: HELPING CHILDREN’S LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Assistant professor Elizabeth Norton once taught at a high school for students with dyslexia. It was in this job that she decided she wanted to do more: to recognize and treat learning disorders long before the teenage years.

“When I told the principal I wanted to leave teaching to pursue a doctorate, he said, ‘Ms. Norton, put us out of business,’” she recalls. “We should have found all these kids and helped them so much earlier.”

Having earned her PhD, Norton now leads the Language, Education, and Reading Neuroscience (LEARN) Laboratory in the communication sciences and disorders department—where she uses brain science and behavioral measures to understand how children process language and reading, with a special emphasis on learning disorders.

Researchers have long recognized a significant “word gap” between children growing up in low-socioeconomic-status homes versus their wealthier peers, though the number of words remains up for debate. To help address that problem, in fall 2015 department chair Sumit Dhar tapped Norton to assist an alumni-led nonprofit in researching and testing a free mobile phone app, Beginning with Babble. Designed to give parents gentle, developmentally appropriate nudges about how and when to talk to their young kids, the app was created by Katie Gottfred (GC73, GC79)—who in 1986 founded Language Empowers All People to improve language and literacy among Chicago youth—and LEAP executive director Nina Smith (C07, GC10).
Beginning with Babble might prompt a parent to point out fingers and toes during a 12-month-old’s bath time or to discuss favorite ice cream flavors while at the grocery store with a toddler. The key, say the researchers, is both the quantity and the quality of the reminders. “Some families don’t realize how important it is to build that foundation of language even before kids can talk,” says Norton. “The notion that they must not need language because they can’t yet talk is untrue; the language environment really matters.”

With a grant from the Delaney Family Fund for Research and Communication, Norton stepped in to assist LEAP as both brain trust and as the principal investigator on a pilot randomized trial to see if the app “moves the needle on language.” Norton and her lab created a comparison app that gave participating parents frequent reminders to talk to their child but without Beginning with Babble’s content coaching. “The parents told us they hate the reminder-only app,” Norton laughs. This was an early indicator that the content of the messaging is integral to its success.

Norton and her team devoted three 20-to-30-minute sessions to observing each of 75 families—some in person and some via video chat, with some families using Beginning with Babble and some using the comparison app. A software program helped Norton measure the children’s utterances, the complexity of language, turn-taking between parent and child, and more. Preliminary data show that interventions work—and that the quality of hints is helpful. “We’re hanging our hat on the difference between quantity and quality versus just quantity,” says Norton. “The quality is a lot more likely to show up in the content of what a child says.”

DESIGNING MOBILE LABS TO ADDRESS RESEARCH BIAS

Like most researchers, communication sciences and disorders assistant professor Adriana Weisleder needs to work in a controlled environment. She studies language development in young children, using monitors, specialized software, and eye-tracking devices to measure spoken-language comprehension in babies and toddlers. Children look at a screen while hearing sentences (for example, “See the blue ball?”), and their eye movements reveal their comprehension process. Babies, of course, are easily distracted, so as head of the Child Language Laboratory, Weisleder designed the space accordingly—a darkened room, thick theater-like curtains, and special sound attenuation to keep outside noise from getting in. “There’s nothing interesting for the kids to look at except the screen,” she says. “It also ensures that every infant goes through the same thing—it’s a controlled study.”

But Weisleder recognizes that achieving control in her lab means giving up ecological validity, because the resulting studies are often based on a very narrow subset of the population—those who have easy access to the University and can afford to take time off work to participate. “To understand the fundamentals of how language works, we have to study a broader, more representative population sample,” she says. “What we’re trying to do in part is to bring the lab to families out in the community rather than having them come to us.” Because Weisleder specializes in studying dual-language learners, she especially needs to access populations of bilingual speakers, another factor necessitating greater research mobility.

Weisleder is now building a mobile lab, a pared-down version of her Evanston space that she can bring to pediatrics facilities, hospitals, preschool programs, and more across Chicago. The portable booth, draped and lined in foam, will accommodate a small child on a parent’s lap, providing a quiet, dark environment to facilitate controlled research. “We want to validate that testing kids with this portable eye tracker in the middle of a pediatric clinic waiting room or a Head Start hallway gives us the same level and rigor of results as testing in a university lab,” she says. “This means we will be adjusting and testing the design as we go. The first step in proving its feasibility and validity will be to get measures of kids and their language acquisition that we can really use clinically.”
MENTAL HEALTH APPS: TECHNOLOGY FOR SELF-MANAGEMENT

Approximately one in five US adults—roughly 44 million Americans—experience mental illness in a given year, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Yet in the past year only 41 percent of that population received services for a mental condition. The reasons keeping them from seeking treatment include stigma, cost, and limited awareness of the illness and treatment options.

Communication studies professor Madhu Reddy, associate dean for graduate education and a faculty member in the school’s Center for Communication and Health, is working to provide better support for mental health assessment and management. He has partnered with researchers from the Center for Behavioral Intervention Technologies (CBITS), led by the Feinberg School of Medicine’s David D. Mohr, to develop and implement technology-enabled services (TES) to address issues of depression and anxiety. The research uses Intellicare, a suite of 12 mobile apps developed by CBITS that work in concert to address such common causes of depression as anxiety, sleep problems, and obsessive thinking. The apps are part of a nationwide study funded by the National Institutes of Health.

“Were doing a series of studies to evaluate user needs,” says Reddy, who leads the TES design activities, “and also to explore and best design these tools and services to engage users and to ensure they get the type of support they need.”

CAN BOTS HELP? UNDERSTANDING HOW TO DESIGN AI AND AUTOMATION TO ASSIST JOURNALISM

Communication studies professor Nick Diakopoulos grew up in a family of newspaper reporters, so he knows well the rigors and demands of an often undervalued profession. Now, as a preeminent researcher on journalism’s use of algorithms, artificial intelligence, and bots, he also knows how complicated a sell they can be to reporters and the news-consuming public.

“Can we get beyond the idea that news bots are evil because of some bad actors and actually think about bots as tools that journalists can use productively to accomplish certain tasks?” he posits. “How do you design bots to be useful to journalists and informative to the public?”

Diakopoulos and his students have designed studies that test algorithmic and bot use in journalism—an audit of Google news queries and source frequencies as well as a specially built bot that curates Twitter comments and measures interactions with human counterparts.

“The news media have tended to focus on the negatives of automation,” says Diakopoulos, citing bad-faith uses and possible job losses, “but it’s interesting to have a counter-narrative about people who want to do positive things with the technology. Automation can be misused, but it is not inherently bad.”

He reassures journalists that they should not fear being replaced by automation. If anything, jobs will be created as more programmers and data specialists are needed to manage the technology.

“If you think about all the tasks a reporter has to do over the course of the day, maybe there are some that can be automated or outsourced to AI,” he says, noting possible robocalls for box scores or earnings reports or their use in social media audience engagement. “But there’s not a bot out there that can do an adversarial interview, or gain rapport with a source, or understand an emotional reaction. Information gathering is highly dependent on social skill.”

Diakopoulos will soon publish the book Automating the News: How Algorithms Are Rewriting the Media, which fleshes out how technology has affected journalism and what responsibility the industry has in adopting it. It will be incumbent on the news media to design a future where the technology is used responsibly.

“How do you hybridize people with algorithms and automated systems?” he asks. “We’re trying to find a way to put people and technology together to make them complementary.”
Reddy says some of the apps use principles of cognitive behavioral therapy to give users the kind of relief they might get during a psychiatrist visit but in a much more accessible form. The Daily Feats app, for example, helps users recognize and track achievements; Slumber Time manages healthy sleep habits; iCope provides inspirational messages and encouraging words; and Worry Knot helps reduce concerns through personal, guided worry management techniques.

“It’s not just about building the apps but understanding the context of use and the design principles that are working, then implementing these technologies in a way that’s sustainable.”

“How effective is technology in supporting mental health?” Reddy asks. “People get better, people improve.” In a study of 99 Intellicare users, Mohr’s team found substantial reduction in the symptoms of depression and anxiety.

The Intellicare apps aren't meant to replace in-person therapies but are a means of assisting with day-to-day challenges. This is helping researchers take the next step in designing useful interventions that are used regularly—the foundation of research that will continue to explore how apps can help manage mental health.

“It’s not just about building the apps but understanding the context of use and the design principles that are working, then implementing these technologies in a way that’s sustainable,” says Reddy. “It’s how we effectively leverage this research to ensure that health systems know they can support patients by utilizing these tools.”

---

**DESIGNING RESPONSIBLE PLATFORMS: ADDRESSING THE WAGE GAP**

Liz Gerber knows design. An associate professor in the McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science and the School of Communication’s Department of Communication Studies, Gerber specializes in qualitative research of design strategies, innovation management, and organizational behavior. She launched Design for America, a national idea incubator for solving problems for social good, and the annual summer Design Sprint, which pairs Northwestern students with high schoolers to use design in tackling institutional problems.

Gerber understands better than most how to identify successful design-centered interventions and the institutions most in need of them. Those institutions, she recently discovered, include online labor marketplaces, which continue to evince a gender pay gap. With communication studies associate professor Brent Hecht and two doctoral candidates, Gerber published a study in November that analyzed nearly 50,000 worker profiles on the popular gig platform Upwork. This research found that female freelancers set hourly billing rates that were only 74 percent of their male counterparts’ median rates—a frustrating continuation of national pay-gap trends that the egalitarianism of the internet had been expected to eliminate.

“We suspect that societal norms are at play, that women tend to undervalue their worth,” says Gerber. “But there’s a question of the website’s design element—do they decide to address this issue? Do they decide to right the wrong and actually show this data to women, or does this have to come from an outside entity? Who exposes the discrepancy and mistreatment, and who has the power to fix it?”

One main thrust of Gerber’s work is studying online creative communities, and she’s seen anecdotal evidence of the online pay gap pop up many times over. When she and her team decided to formally take on Upwork, they discovered wage gaps consistent with trends in more traditional labor markets. The results were disturbing for multiple reasons: women were indeed settling for less, they tended to work more hours to make up for lost wages, and the platform was doing little or nothing to notify women of the pay discrepancy.

“Upwork might defend itself by saying that it’s connecting people who wouldn’t normally be connected,” says Gerber, noting that this same defense has gotten social platforms like Facebook and Twitter in hot water for failing to intervene in nefarious political schemes. “But we really have to think about the future of work design, what the government’s policy is regarding fair pay, and what role the employers play in this. They should be involved and telling women they can charge more.”

She adds, “It’s systemic—and a problem that involves the ethics of design.”
Communication studies professor Michelle Shumate researches what she calls collective impact—how interorganizational networks collaborate to have more lasting, effective results on social issues, sustainable development, and healthy communities. Her work has earned her a prestigious CAREER Award from the National Science Foundation, among other honors, and repeated placement in leading journals.

Last fall brought her to the Netherlands’ Tilburg University, where she worked with the Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu (RIVM), the Dutch health and environment ministry. Her research focused on the ongoing interorganizational response to a national meningococcal W outbreak, an example of a “complex incidence”—a crisis or emerging risk garnering a lot of public attention.

“The traditional way of understanding risk communication for agencies is a single-organization public-information model—one where RIVM needs to send out the right information to the right people so they can mitigate the risks and do what they can to address the response,” she explains. “In complex issues with high public attention, there’s often controversy over the nature of the problem and controversy over what the solution ought to be.”

And this requires a more strategic response. RIVM introduced a plan to first administer a specially formulated vaccine to 14-year-olds, conducting a traditional communication campaign but also using key influencers to tell the story. The antivaccination movement began a countercampaign. And in the midst of this, local doctors were fielding questions from concerned parents and kids.

“We were mapping out the communication networks pre-event, event, and postevent,” says Shumate. “Who were the players, who talked to whom, and how did that communication unfold over time?”

Strategies being deployed now would never have been considered 20 years ago, she says, and are still largely experimental, since most research in this area of communication relies on the single-organization public-information model. Still, Shumate believes that mapping out successful responses to major crises will help public health agencies design more effective communication systems.

“The Netherlands is a really good place to do this research; they do collaborative public management better than we do in the US,” she says. “The idea that there’s no single agency leading things and that they have to collaborate and work with others to solve problems is not a new idea there.”

To call attention to discrimination against older people, Anne Marie Piper and her research participants take a statement like “I wouldn’t hire anyone who’s old” and replace “old” with a certain race or gender. What this demonstrates is that while racism and sexism are viewed as unacceptable, many see nothing wrong with ageism. As Piper’s work proves, ageism also pervades technology design, and this bias is built into online tools.

“A lot of research and technologies today equate getting older with being frail and needing simplified interfaces and large-buttoned devices,” says Piper, associate professor of communication studies and a leading researcher in supporting social interaction and communication needs for people with disabilities across the lifespan. “Rather than approaching aging as decline and deficit, we are thinking about what it means to be active and engaged online and then designing for late-in-life development.”

Piper and her students designed a voice-based blogging system as a way for blind or low-vision older adults to interact with each other online. Users phone into a system and use spoken language or keypad inputs to add blog posts, listen to messages, and make comments. What researchers witnessed among participants was the creation of a community around common experience, shared accessibility and disability resources, and social threads (in this study’s case, the Chicago Cubs—who were in the World Series when the system debuted).
Additional systems designed by Piper and her team address online engagement and content creation among older adults with dementia and other cognitive impairments.

“We are designing online systems to support the full experience of growing older,” she says. “What do systems need to be like to support lifelong online engagement in the context of cognitive or visual impairment?” The lack of digital outreach to older adults reflects society’s general ambivalence toward aging and ageism—yet advanced age is something we all hope to achieve, and we should want these systems in place for our future.

In addressing the bias issue, Piper teamed up with colleague Darren Gergle, professor of communication studies, to study age-related bias in sentiment analysis tools—the systems often used by companies or campaigns to gauge the emotions in user-generated content (for example, users’ comments on a company’s social media post announcing a new product).

Gergle, Piper, and their students found a significant age bias built into these analysis tools, in that comments containing keywords connected to old age or aging were considered more negative. In opinion polling on Medicare, Social Security, and other issues of older age, says Gergle, “you might get a false sense of overly negative attitudes. This bias can be even more problematic from a system design and development standpoint, where the outputs are often used in downstream technologies that then function in a way that unintentionally embeds or relies upon those biases.”

His prescription for system developers: first become aware of the issue, then understand the implications for other technologies. “If those implications are problematic, how do we fix or change it to effect a less biased outcome?”

Through Piper’s designs and Gergle’s study, which won a best paper award at the 2018 Human Factors in Computing Systems conference, they are answering that question.
THE HEALTHY BRAIN: DIAGNOSING CONCUSSIONS MORE ACCURATELY

Playing sports is good for your health. Yet concussions have become one of the most worrisome risks associated with a variety of sports, from youth soccer to the National Football League. New insights into how the brain processes sound could help better diagnose and treat concussions.

Neurobiology and otolaryngology professor Nina Kraus, the Hugh Knowles Chair in the communication sciences and disorders department, is researching how the brain responds to sound and how that brain activity might lead to better outcomes for concussed athletes.

“We sometimes forget how rich and powerful sound is, because sound is invisible; visual objects are made up of readily apparent texture, color, size, and shape, but sound has ingredients like pitch, timing, and timbre,” she says. “Making sense of sound is one of the hardest jobs we ask our brains to do, because sound ingredients move in time, requiring the brain to make computations on the order of fractions of milliseconds. So if you get hit in the head, this very delicate machinery can be disrupted.”

Through a grant from the National Institutes of Health and a partnership with Northwestern Athletics, Kraus and co-investigator Tory Lindley, associate athletics director, are examining 500 athletes over a five-year period as they compete in a wide range of sports. Using scalp electrodes, Kraus and colleagues in her Brainvolts lab measure brain activity as participants hear sounds delivered through ear buds. The resulting FFR (frequency following response) reveals how good a job the brain is doing processing sound, varying systematically with elapsed time postconcussion and attendant symptoms and showing recovery as symptoms resolve.

Sound processing in the brain provides an index of brain health that one day can inform trainers and physicians how to design appropriate therapies for athletes. Conducting these studies in a leading research university with Big Ten athletics gives Kraus an unprecedented opportunity to make groundbreaking discoveries.

“We’re in the perfect position to ask questions and get some answers about athlete health,” she says. “Consistent with the notion that playing sports is one of the best things we can do for our health, we are beginning to learn how Northwestern athletes, compared with nonathletes, have especially high-functioning brains.”

DESIGN FOR EFFECTIVE HEALTH COMMUNICATION

Communication studies assistant professors Nathan Walter and Courtney Scherr research how healthcare consumers can access more reliable information, use their voices to demand care, and make healthier choices. Two of their research projects demonstrate that designing a personal narrative is a key to reaching audiences.

Scherr’s recent work centers on how parents of children with developmental delays might better access interventions earlier in the child’s life, ideally between ages 1 and 3. Although some parents might be in denial or lack the language to share their concerns with providers, she found that those who don’t pursue interventions might also have been coaxed by friends, family, educators, and even healthcare providers to “wait and see.” Waiting to see if problems self-correct could mean that the child ages out of certain interventions, and some interventions may be less effective when started at older ages.

Scherr and colleagues are creating a narrative video that could help parents become more informed advocates for their children. Designed as a personal narrative with testimony from parents, the video would focus on encouraging other parents to trust their instincts and not to fear having their children evaluated for developmental delays.

“Some people are worried that if they get the evaluation it will lead them down a particular road, and sometimes it does, but the evaluation could tell you your child is just fine,” she says. “In some cases it’s a minor delay, and early intervention services will help children catch up with their peers by the time they get to kindergarten. We want to normalize the experience through other parents’ narratives and provide parents
with language and empowerment to stand up for their children.”

Walter, too, has found the personal-narrative approach to be a helpful tool. His research uses it to design more effective public service announcements about the dangers of tobacco use. Earlier methods have been roundly dismissed as ineffective.

“If we think about the traditional public service announcement, it usually starts with something very scary: Tobacco can kill you. Drugs can kill you.” Noting that users are well aware their behavior is risky, he says, “We propose an alternative mechanism: reverse this. Instead of starting with fear, start with a self-affirming message.”

In one study, Walter composed a personal narrative about a college student using e-cigarettes and then distributed it to research subjects who vape. The story involved a roommate confronting the student about the dangers of e-cigarettes and the student receiving a prestigious scholarship. In half of the stories, the scholarship preceded the confrontation.

“When we manipulate the order of the events, we’re able to show that when the award comes before the threat, people are much more receptive to the risk information,” says Walter. “Those who were first exposed to the affirming event, then the threat, scored their personal risk much higher. They also had to say how likely they were to use e-cigarettes in the next three years, and we were able to show it would reduce the likelihood they’d use e-cigarettes.”

Walter was pleased to find that the positive effects persisted two weeks later and, when compared with a traditional PSA, were far more likely to make an impact. He hopes to design film versions of these narratives, which would be easier to share and might reach more people.

SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH A BILINGUAL BRAIN

Current estimates predict that the United States will become a majority-minority country around the year 2040, and the number of children speaking a language other than English at home is predictably on the rise: 12 million in 2016, a 2 percent jump from the previous decade, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

From a scientific perspective, bilingualism is a boon to brain health. But the addition of more languages into American households can have profound social and health implications, says Viorica Marian, the Ralph and Jean Sundin Endowed Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders.

“We know that the language you speak impacts decision-making, memory, perception, and almost every area of our life,” says Marian, who speaks six languages.

“There isn’t as much research trying to understand the mechanisms of how language changes our cognitive neuroprocesses.”

To explore this further, Marian and colleagues designed a questionnaire that provides a comprehensive assessment of respondents’ language experience across a lifetime, including when they became proficient, when they learned to read and write, and whether they have an accent. “There wasn’t an immediately available comprehensive tool that very quickly allowed us to index different linguistic experience measures when you try to understand how language works,” she says of the questionnaire, which has been used in hundreds of studies worldwide.

While this work focused on the human element—the language learner, the language user—she dove deeper to develop CLEARPOND (Cross-Linguistic Easy Access Resource for Phonological and Orthographic Neighborhood Densities), a database tool for focusing on the input aspects: language properties, word frequency, etc., in English, Spanish, French, Dutch, and German.

“It does such things as computing the likelihood of two letters occurring together or two sounds occurring together across two different languages,” she says. “In every language, some letters or sounds are more likely to happen together than others. For example, English is not likely to have four consecutive consonants, but Dutch is, with words like slechtstschrijvende and zachtstschreien having a whopping nine consecutive consonants!”

Marian posits that by comparing and contrasting language patterns, we might be able to understand how long it may take someone to become fluent in a new language or to predict how a person fluent in another language might process the world differently.

“In the United States, we tend to look at the world through a monolingual prism, which is often incomplete,” she says. “We can't really understand how the mind works, how the brain works, if we just have a monolingual approach.”

She adds, “Our brain can accommodate multiple languages, and understanding the capacity for this can help unravel the limits of human cognition.”
Exciting multidisciplinary programs and curricula are positioning School of Communication students at the forefront of design's next big wave. These undergraduates, graduate students, and recent alumni are among the many who are exploring design to promote health and human welfare in the communication arts and sciences.
EMPOWERING CHILDREN FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

In researching how children learn about reproductive health, Lisa Hurwitz (GC14, GC17) made an unsettling discovery: kids today are no more knowledgeable than they were 30 years ago, despite mountains of new information and unprecedented access to it.

“This research was very popular in the mid-1980s to ’90s, in part because of the AIDS epidemic as a public health concern, as well as high teenage pregnancy rates,” she says. “But since then, this area has become much less popular.”

Now a researcher at Lexia Learning, Hurwitz led a series of studies on children’s reproductive health knowledge while earning her doctorate in media, technology, and society and working in the Center on Media and Human Development with center director Ellen Wartella, the Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani Professor of Communication. Starting in 2014, they assembled focus groups with children ages 7 to 12 and learned that the quality and clarity of their reproductive knowledge was largely the same as that of kids from the 1980s—the “mom ate something and that’s why a baby grew in her belly” explanation was still invoked.

Hurwitz says that despite a wealth of information online, children rarely search for it, and the parent-child dialogue has not evolved much. This issue prompted the center to collaborate with radio/television/film associate professor and award-winning animator Eric Patrick and Feinberg School of Medicine professor Teresa Woodruff (now dean of the Graduate School) in creating A New You, That’s Who, a series of animated videos on topics in reproductive health. With each installment only a couple minutes long, the videos use the characters Olivia the Ovary and Timothy the Teste to cover such topics as menstruation, puberty, and anatomy, all to the tune of catchy music à la Schoolhouse Rock. The videos are part of Reprotopia (reprotopia.northwestern.edu/projects/new-you-that’s-who), a website offering reproductive health information.

The team—which included former lecturer Alexis Lauricella, now with the Erikson Institute—tested the videos with children, making adjustments and improvements along the way. They found that children who watched the videos and then took a related quiz answered 75 percent of the questions correctly, compared with 50 percent accuracy from a control group of children who did not see the videos.

“That’s an unusually large retention rate,” says Hurwitz, noting that educational videos typically have much less effect on learning outcomes. The videos also benefit parents by providing vocabulary and topic introduction for continuing conversations with their children.

FINDING BETTER WAYS TO HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Some of the most difficult conversations for patients and their families and doctors involve heartbreaking realities: infertility, childhood developmental delays, or even a cancer diagnosis.

Hannah Badal, a doctoral candidate in media, technology, and society (see page 17), is working with assistant professor Courtney Scherr to develop interventions for difficult health conversations and to design ways of communicating better about the most difficult health topics.

“Much of the research program attempts to address existing health inequities by developing interventions to reduce disparities in health issues such as genetic testing, cancer care and treatment, and developmental delays in children,” says Badal, who is part of the Health Communication Interaction Design lab. “The goal is to be able to test and evaluate our interventions in healthcare and community settings so that ultimately they can be integrated into everyday practice.” A particular challenge for Badal and fellow students is exploring how to have difficult discussions around such newer
Health communication graduate wins pilot study

Yi-an Yang, a 2015 graduate of the master of science program in health communication, created Amah Health to provide healthcare organizations with assessment tools and bilingual interventions that use evidence-based behavior science to identify and engage multicultural patients, especially those less proficient in English.

“My family struggled with managing my grandma’s diabetes and fitting Western medicine into her lifestyle and health beliefs,” says Yang, who named her company after the Taiwanese word for grandmother. “That’s why I am dedicated to proactively assessing health behaviors of diverse populations to improve patient experiences and outcomes for more families.”

The idea and its execution have been successful; in December, Amah Health placed second in the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois Health Equity Innovation Challenge, a nationwide effort to find creative solutions to problems facing those with social, cultural, and economic barriers to healthcare. As one of the top three entries, Amah Health will split a $30,000 award and receive a pilot study.

“The health communication program helped me establish a global view of the intricately woven and yet fragmented US healthcare system,” says Yang. “Because of my education at Northwestern, I am able to see how a solution fits into the bigger picture of pursuing the triple aim—enhancing patient experience, improving population health, and reducing costs.”

As a student, Yang worked closely with Daniel O’Keefe, the Owen L. Coon Professor of Argumentation and Debate and an expert in persuasion theories.

“For a health communication researcher, the most rewarding thing is being able to see the outcomes of our work.”

—Hannah Badal

Yi-an Yang, a 2015 graduate of the master of science program in health communication, created Amah Health to provide healthcare organizations with assessment tools and bilingual interventions that use evidence-based behavior science to identify and engage multicultural patients, especially those less proficient in English.

“My family struggled with managing my grandma’s diabetes and fitting Western medicine into her lifestyle and health beliefs,” says Yang, who named her company after the Taiwanese word for grandmother. “That’s why I am dedicated to proactively assessing health behaviors of diverse populations to improve patient experiences and outcomes for more families.”

The idea and its execution have been successful; in December, Amah Health placed second in the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois Health Equity Innovation Challenge, a nationwide effort to find creative solutions to problems facing those with social, cultural, and economic barriers to healthcare. As one of the top three entries, Amah Health will split a $30,000 award and receive a pilot study.

“The health communication program helped me establish a global view of the intricately woven and yet fragmented US healthcare system,” says Yang. “Because of my education at Northwestern, I am able to see how a solution fits into the bigger picture of pursuing the triple aim—enhancing patient experience, improving population health, and reducing costs.”

As a student, Yang worked closely with Daniel O’Keefe, the Owen L. Coon Professor of Argumentation and Debate and an expert in persuasion theories.

Health communication graduate wins pilot study

Yi-an Yang, a 2015 graduate of the master of science program in health communication, created Amah Health to provide healthcare organizations with assessment tools and bilingual interventions that use evidence-based behavior science to identify and engage multicultural patients, especially those less proficient in English.

“My family struggled with managing my grandma’s diabetes and fitting Western medicine into her lifestyle and health beliefs,” says Yang, who named her company after the Taiwanese word for grandmother. “That’s why I am dedicated to proactively assessing health behaviors of diverse populations to improve patient experiences and outcomes for more families.”

The idea and its execution have been successful; in December, Amah Health placed second in the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois Health Equity Innovation Challenge, a nationwide effort to find creative solutions to problems facing those with social, cultural, and economic barriers to healthcare. As one of the top three entries, Amah Health will split a $30,000 award and receive a pilot study.

“The health communication program helped me establish a global view of the intricately woven and yet fragmented US healthcare system,” says Yang. “Because of my education at Northwestern, I am able to see how a solution fits into the bigger picture of pursuing the triple aim—enhancing patient experience, improving population health, and reducing costs.”

As a student, Yang worked closely with Daniel O’Keefe, the Owen L. Coon Professor of Argumentation and Debate and an expert in persuasion theories.

“For a health communication researcher, the most rewarding thing is being able to see the outcomes of our work.”

—Hannah Badal
A FILMMAKER’S RESPONSE TO STROKE

As a member of the MFA program in documentary media’s inaugural class, Jasmine Huff (GC16) was comfortable looking at the world through a lens. But in 2012, when her father had a stroke, she turned the lens toward her most personal subject yet: James Huff, a once-prolific artist who could no longer paint.

“After the stroke, he was left with permanent defects,” she says. “He couldn’t walk and couldn’t use his right hand.”

Huff began documenting her visits with her father back home in North Carolina as a way of trying to record all the time she could with him. “Especially in the early stages,” she says, “I didn’t know how long he was going to live.”

While another filmmaker might have chosen to delve into the medical aspects of her father’s condition, Huff designed her film around a single question she asked her father: “What do you want to teach me?” The result was Yesterday, Today, & Tomorrow, a documentary on her father’s legacy—from the time he created 10,000 paintings in one year to how he met Jasmine’s mother, a talented artist in her own right, who encouraged and challenged him to pursue art full-time.

“The hands-on experience of working with participants, collaborating with other researchers, and constantly solving problems is absolutely invaluable.” —Emily Harriott

“While making this film, I learned a lot about what the human spirit can do,” she says. “My father had to process his disability and had to live in a nursing home. But one of the most powerful things I learned was that this documentary made my father feel seen, and I didn’t see that coming. He was an extrovert, a painter and an observer, who suddenly couldn’t paint anymore or move in the way he wanted. He lived in a place where no one knew how good he was, how talented.”

Huff struggled with designing the documentary because she wanted to avoid making a simple health-issue-based work or an inspirational narrative about a disabled person rising to the challenges of his new reality. “I resisted that because he was able to tell so much of his own story, and that was an extra piece to it,” she says. “I’m currently in the process of going through my parents’ archives and fundraising for them. The film has given me more understanding of their purpose and how to share their process with the world.”

AN EARLY START ON A CAREER IN RESEARCH

Northwestern senior Emily Harriott has spent the last three years working as a research assistant in the Language, Education, and Reading Neuroscience (LEARN) Lab alongside assistant professor Elizabeth Norton. Harriott has focused on such projects as an app to help parents spur young children’s language development (see page 4) and assessing nuanced aspects of a traditional diagnostic prereading task designed to help predict reading ability.

“I have learned so, so much throughout my time in the LEARN Lab, and I can’t wait to learn more in the next few months before I graduate,” says Harriott. “The hands-on experience of working with participants, collaborating with other researchers, and constantly solving problems is absolutely invaluable. Because of my time in the lab, I feel comfortable doing everything from assessing parents’ language abilities to analyzing EEG data to calming exhausted toddlers to solving technological crises to writing code—and so much more.”

Harriott helped in the design process of an app that helps parents improve their children’s vocabulary and communication skills. She presented data on this project—specifically about the influence of parents’ language abilities on their children’s development after app use—at a conference in
Graduate programs focus on design for health

From helping doctors communicate better with their patients to creating systems for helping people with disabilities use interactive technology, the MS program in health communication and the doctoral program in media, technology, and society (MTS) are empowering students to leverage design to further human health and welfare.

“We have seen a growing number of our students and faculty focus on health communication with an emphasis on design and understanding how different communication systems can better support healthcare and engagement between care providers and patients,” says MTS program director Aaron Shaw (above), assistant professor of communication studies. “Our faculty and students build and evaluate technological systems that can work in those spaces.”

For instance, MTS students are working with assistant professor Anne Marie Piper (see page 8) in using interactive technology to help those with speech, language, or social disabilities as well as with assistant professor Courtney Scherr (see page 10) to develop interventions for difficult conversations between doctors and their patients. Scherr is also a faculty member in the health communication master’s program, directed by professor Bruce Lambert.

“The School of Communication has made a commitment to health communication as one of its major strategic initiatives,” Lambert says. “The Department of Communication Studies has experts in social media, social influence, networks, interaction design, and more. Many of these world-class faculty are setting the agenda for research.”

Shaw says the MTS doctoral program attracts students from a variety of backgrounds who pursue a broad range of careers. “It’s a wide gamut, and that’s the strength of the program,” he explains. “We have faculty and students who can work across this range of subjects, drawing on shared education in communication and media.”

“It’s incumbent on us to create knowledge with an aim of transforming institutions and transforming society.”

—Aaron Shaw

Lambert says the master’s program is focused on solving communication problems in healthcare, with the aim of improving patient health, improving the care experience, reducing cost, and—increasingly—restoring the joy and meaning of working in healthcare. Similarly, the doctoral program focuses on problems that students want to solve and goes well beyond writing scholarly articles in pursuing solutions. These shared objectives define both programs.

“As researchers and faculty and students, we have a responsibility to develop knowledge that can be useful beyond the creation of publications,” says Shaw. “It’s incumbent on us to create knowledge with an aim of transforming institutions and transforming society.”
Wisconsin last year. Her time in the LEARN Lab prompted her to rethink her postgraduation plans; she now wants to delve deeper into researching how better design of apps and other interventions can help children with language disorders.

“As a first-year student at Northwestern, I thought I wanted to be a speech-language pathologist,” she says. “While that still seems like a fantastic career and I certainly applaud those who choose that path, I believe that I want to be more involved in research. After taking a few years off school after graduation to work in a research lab and narrow my research interests, I hope to apply to graduate school and potentially obtain a clinical master’s degree and PhD. Right now I want to conduct research on child language disorders—particularly more effective diagnostic tools that can be used earlier and lead to more effective interventions.”

USING TEXT MESSAGING TO COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY

We’ve all been there. We send someone a text and then . . . crickets. We start to wonder: Is the person busy? Ignoring us? Did we do something wrong? Matthew Heston—a doctoral candidate in technology and social behavior, a joint program in computer science and communication studies—has researched how and why we

Alumna wins Mitchell Scholarship

Alison Mahoney (C14) can attest that designing accessible theatrical experiences as a Northwestern undergrad can translate to professional success and recognition. As a founding member of Seesaw Theatre (see next page), Mahoney leveraged her education to become cofounder and artistic director of New York City’s Bluelaces Theater Company, which offers immersive programming for audiences with developmental differences. She also serves as the manager of accessibility at Lincoln Center. These standout accomplishments earned her a prestigious Mitchell Scholarship, which will take her across the Atlantic for a year of graduate study.

As a participant in the School of Communication’s theatre for young audiences module, Mahoney worked with students of both neurotypical and atypical abilities in a drama class at Evanston’s Haven Middle School. “At the same time, I was on the education team of the student theatre group Purple Crayon Players, and we had these amazing hoodies that said ‘Theatre for young audiences is theatre for all audiences,’” she says. “I quickly realized, however, that not all the students I worked with at Haven Middle School would be able to access the work I was doing with Purple Crayon, so with some friends—who later went on to cofound Bluelaces with me—I pitched ‘Theatre Stands with Autism’ as a special event in Purple Crayon’s 2012–13 season.” That event evolved into a separate company, soon renamed Seesaw Theatre.

The Mitchell Scholarship is a competitive award that recognizes and fosters intellectual achievement, leadership, and a commitment to service. Awarded to up to 12 young academics annually and sponsored by the US-Ireland Alliance, the scholarship will fund Mahoney’s master’s degree in contemporary performance practice at Ulster University.
answer some messages faster than others, in an effort to understand how to design better communication systems.

“The joke I always tell is that my whole dissertation was motivated by trying to figure out why I kept getting ghosted by people I met through online dating,” he says. “More seriously, though, what drew me to this line of research was that it’s something almost everyone experiences now. The idea of being able to reach out to someone at basically any time and assume they’ll see your message nearly instantaneously is very new. On the other side, we all now have to deal with the consequences of being constantly available and form our own rules about how we want to deal with that.”

Understanding why a person might not respond right away can help avoid hurt feelings and in general improve our mental health. Heston found that the biggest predictor of response time is availability. Other researchers have explored generating an activity report after a person sends a text—estimating the response time based on how active the recipient has been. Apple has created a setting that enables callers to override the “Do Not Disturb” setting on another’s phone. These ideas verge on violation of privacy, but Heston understands how response time can be integral in certain scenarios.

“This could be really useful in emergency cases,” he said. Whether a text serves to protect the sender’s self-esteem or the recipient’s privacy or to convey an urgent health-related message, the message was designed to be answered. And now researchers like Heston are designing an appropriate response.

THEATRICAL DESIGN FOR DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFERENCES

Autism diagnosis rates are skyrocketing. In 2000, 1 in 150 children received that diagnosis, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. By 2014 the number had grown to 1 in 59 children. Responding to changing audience demographics, the School of Communication student group Seesaw Theatre designs special all-sensory shows for children with autism and other developmental differences.

“I’m a firm believer that while art cannot replace therapy, it’s really important to all humans,” says senior theatre major Rachel Seidenberg, Seesaw’s artistic director. “For me it’s really important we’re able to create a new standard for what we define as art and how we define that base audience. There’s not just one way to put on theatre or to experience an artistic avenue.”

Specially designed to accommodate differences in sensory tolerance, Seesaw’s shows rely on the input and expertise of students on its research team, which includes human communication sciences majors. For instance, children start in an assimilation room to become comfortable with the space, all props are designed for them to handle, and they are not expected to sit still. Instead, student “adventure guides” help children engage directly with the shows and let the audience lead the way.

“There’s always a balance of making sure the design is multisensory, and there are multiple ways to engage with different senses,” Seidenberg says of their ever-changing show approaches. “Some audience members may really love touch and some may really hate it. We just ensure that it’s safe to explore.”

Seidenberg says that in traditional school settings, children with developmental differences are learning practices for living in and navigating the real world; giving them an opportunity to navigate an enchanted forest or other imaginary environment allows them to engage life in a new way. In its work with local schools, Seesaw Theatre holds workshops and invites students to see shows for free.

“We want to give these kids agency,” she says, “and for me the coolest thing is seeing them discover they have that agency, right down to understanding that they have a choice of where to sit—or not to sit.”
FACILITIES FOR DESIGN
Custom-designed, cutting-edge facilities are expanding opportunities for faculty teaching and research.
Designed to connect
Bonnie Martin-Harris, the Alice Gabrielle Twight Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders and the school’s associate dean for academic affairs, is one of the world’s foremost researchers of dysphagia (swallowing disorders). She has not only developed a tool to standardize dysphagia diagnosis and treatment but has also spearheaded a global effort to share breakthroughs from research colleagues at regular gatherings. With the support of the dean, Martin-Harris designed a state-of-the-art lab in the Evanston campus’s Frances Searle Building, where she teaches students and remotely administers clinical support, advice, and diagnoses.

Martin-Harris has partnered with Chicago’s Northwestern Memorial Hospital to “see” patients and their videofluoroscopic swallowing studies (moving x-rays) using the TIMS Consultant, an interactive live-stream video broadcast system. This cross-campus collaboration was designed to mentor clinicians and educate graduate students, who now have the opportunity of observing live swallowing studies in consented patients without having to crowd into a hospital examination room.

“It is truly interactive—I can draw on images and say to look at this area or pay attention to this,” says Martin-Harris. “I don’t know of any other connection like that between Evanston and the hospital.”

“It is truly interactive—I can draw on images and say to look at this area or pay attention to this,” says Martin-Harris. “I don’t know of any other connection like that between Evanston and the hospital.”

Though little understood outside the research community, dysphagia affects about 1 in 25 American adults annually, by some conservative estimates. Dysphagia can lead to choking, breathing problems, and sometimes fatal infections. A common side effect of stroke and other neurodegenerative conditions, it is also seen in newborns and head and neck cancer patients both during and after curative treatments.

“There’s so much we’ve learned about swallowing and its control mechanisms centrally and peripherally,” says Martin-Harris, “and because of that, we are developing novel interventions that will specifically target the deficits.”
Designed to teach

The Northwestern University Center for Audiology, Speech, Language, and Learning (NUCASLL) opened in 2015 with a four-pronged mission: student development, high-quality service delivery to patients, research collaboration, and connection with the community. Four years later, both the clinical services and the expertly designed facilities that support them have expanded dramatically.

The space enables audiologists to design and build leading-edge hearing aids that patients and clinicians can test in the innovative, acoustically malleable “virtual sound room,” or ViSoR—the only one of its kind in the country. The Lambert Family Simulation Lab allows students to work with lifelike computerized mannequins to start identifying conditions they’ll see when they begin clinical training. And the entire NUCASLL facility is equipped with VALT, a HIPAA-compliant, web-based video monitoring and evaluation system used to advance the clinic’s teaching and patient-outcome missions.

“Students are able to record all evaluation and treatment sessions and review their clinical performance to help improve their ability to reflect on their strengths and growth areas as future healthcare providers,” says Denise Eisenhauer, director of speech, language, and learning services. “It also allows clinical faculty to help guide and develop their students through thoughtful review of videos.”

The system uses 38 cameras, placed in all areas where clinical services are administered. Each patient session is recorded through a web-based interface that the student can set up from a laptop using a secure network. After the session, the student and supervisor can review the videos to analyze both the patient's experience and the student's performance. Videos can then be archived for future educational use but are accessible only to NUCASLL faculty and students. This system is a huge improvement over the former protocol, which involved a seldom-used video camera and frequent, cumbersome footage deletion.

NUCASLL was the first clinic of its kind to begin using VALT this comprehensively.

“Our administrators demonstrate a deep understanding that NUCASLL is a unique arm of the School of Communication and therefore has unique needs more similar to a medical environment,” says Eisenhauer. “Because of their support and investment, we can continue to excel.”
When researching the dynamics of teams and leadership, communication studies professor Leslie DeChurch knows that space matters.

DeChurch and her Advancing Teams, Leaders, and Systems (ATLAS) Lab occupy an innovative modular area in the Frances Searle Building. It was thoughtfully conceived to further their work of using social science to guide designing new organizational systems and training next-generation leaders, but also with their current mission in mind: NASA-funded research projects that explore how teamwork and leadership can be leveraged to get humans to Mars.

“This space is one of a kind—it gives us a microscope to observe and understand modern teamwork,” she says. “It also gives us a workshop where we can prototype and test interventions.”

Consisting of a central work area surrounded by four smaller rooms and a conference room, the lab was designed using established principles of social science research. Yet it is outfitted with leading-edge technologies “that allow us to observe complex groups doing knowledge-intensive work,” says DeChurch. This includes a remote collaboration with astronauts on monthlong missions in the Human Experimentation Research Analog at Houston’s Johnson Space Center.

DeChurch’s doctoral candidates—largely from the media, technology, and society and technology and social behavior programs—dispatch research participants into the smaller rooms to do carefully calibrated tasks that are captured, coded, and triangulated to determine whom they pay attention to, what and how information is communicated, and more. The lab has given DeChurch and her students a deeper understanding of how leadership is evolving from a formal hierarchical relationship to a more informal structure.

“This laboratory is enabling us to discover the implicit rules and overt behaviors through which informal leadership relationships come about,” she says. “The school is the ideal place for us to do this work because it is an intellectual hub for research on organizing and technologies.”
Designed to integrate
The School of Communication’s master of science program in health communication operates in a facility designed to foster interdisciplinary collaboration among scholars and students as well as nearby healthcare stakeholders. The Center for Communication and Health, in Abbott Hall on Northwestern’s Chicago campus, opened in 2014 with a mission of using the tools of communication arts and sciences to advance healthcare quality and safety, improve patient health, and reduce the cost of care—all through educating students and conducting research.

There’s a reason this program is headquartered in Chicago: Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Feinberg School of Medicine, and its Department of Preventive Medicine are all located within blocks of Abbott Hall. “There’s been a closer integration of communication scientists and social scientists working more directly with healthcare professionals and healthcare delivery systems,” says professor Bruce Lambert, director of the center and the program. “I’m very interested in being directly connected with the healthcare delivery systems where we can impact the quality and delivery of healthcare in the most immediate way.”

“There’s been a closer integration of communication scientists and social scientists working more directly with healthcare professionals and healthcare delivery systems.”

—Bruce Lambert

With the School of Communication committed to a strategic expansion of health communication research, the center’s downtown location provides faculty with access to colleagues across the health professions, a larger and more representative patient population, and state-of-the-art medical facilities. This results in higher-quality work and a rapid dissemination of findings.

The bright, contemporary facility was created to maximize collaborative space, with meeting rooms, seating areas, and offices that foster communication between disciplines. The space’s design is meant to trigger innovative solutions to common healthcare problems—from improving dialogue among a patient’s many providers to reducing patient harm.
Fifty-year Rein

The year Irving Rein first taught his now-famous course Persuasive Images: Rhetoric of Contemporary Culture, the nation was engrossed in Woodstock, the first moon landing, and the first draft lottery for the Vietnam War. It was 1969.

Fifty years later, Rein is still teaching that same course—though the cultural touchstones, images, and mediums now used in persuasion couldn’t be more different. “Times have changed tremendously,” says Rein, who with two undergraduate assistants prepares extensively for each class with edited videos and visuals. “It’s a huge challenge because of that rate of change.”

Yet at age 81, Rein keeps up. Winter quarter 2019 marks the 50th anniversary of his joining the Northwestern faculty, and he has taught the class every one of those years (except the year he was on leave as the Van Zelst Research Chair in Communication, but even then he assisted with the course). Rein recalls a bit of a fracas when he started it; taking over a semantics class, he changed it to reflect what he thought his students urgently needed to learn. “People were saying, ‘Students should be taking Beowulf and Shakespeare. What’s going on at the University?’” Yet Rein had the support of the dean’s office as well as the legions of students who flocked to the course every year thereafter.

“The class is not a survey of trends or a look at the contemporary landscape of popular culture at any given moment but is rather a deep examination of how popular culture functions and its role in society,” says Jeremy Latcham (C03), a former Rein student and now an executive producer of such films as Marvel’s The Avengers, Guardians of the Galaxy, and Spider-Man: Homecoming. “With the rise of the internet and social media, the underlying principles that Professor Rein has been teaching for 50 years are as relevant and prescient as ever.”

Latcham adds that Rein’s grasp and interpretation of popular culture is rooted in a deep and complex understanding of the human condition—an understanding that Rein honed while working everywhere from car dealerships and his father’s Minneapolis meat market to consulting for NASA and Major League Baseball.

“Because of Irv, you are able to parse a situation and look at it, dare I say, cynically—he taught us to not look at the words but at what’s underlying the words,” says Emmy-nominated actor Richard Kind (C78), another former student. “And he entertains. He has things to impart to younger generations entering the world.”

From left: Brett Neveu with Michael Shannon, director of Neveu’s Jeff-winning Traitor; David Bell (holding award) with (far left) Southern Gothic assistant director Eli Newell (C18) and (from far right) theatre faculty members Roger Ellis, Masi Asare, and John Haas

Television producer Jeff Pinkner (C87), known for such series as Fringe, Lost, and Alias, credits Rein with changing the way he looks at the world. “His unique genius is identifying the intersection between all modes of communication, psychology, and emotion,” Pinkner says. “And like a magician who reveals the secret of the trick, he pulls back the veil to explore how that intersection can be exploited to manipulate our experiences. But more than that, he has the rarest of gifts—he makes deep learning, the kind that permanently expands your field of vision, not only thrilling but fun.”

Jane S. Hoffman (C86), a University trustee and the founder and president of the Presidential Forum on Renewable Energy, called Rein’s ideas and research “timeless, meaningful, and devastatingly important.” She adds that “he infuses deep thought with wit and charm, leaving a lasting impression. So many students call Irv their favorite professor, and for good reason. I have used ‘Irv-isms’ throughout my professional life, from journalism to politics.”

Rein says he’s always happy to teach the class, despite its challenges. In fact, he continues to look forward to it. “It’s exciting,” he says. “It’s not really about its being the 50th; it’s simply the opportunity to be doing this work.”
'Cats and Scots

Last August the School of Communication’s innovative American Music Theatre Project partnered for the second consecutive year with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland to write and perform two original one-act musicals that debuted at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The thematically linked musicals *Legacy: A Mother’s Song* and *Legacy: The Book of Names* featured casts and collaborators affiliated with both schools.

“AMTP offers our students an extraordinary experience of dealing with new work,” AMTP director David Bell told Northwestern Now. “Not only do they experience working on a world premiere musical, but they are also having a cultural experience with students of other backgrounds that will change their lives.”

Nearly a dozen undergraduate performers took part in the international partnership. This opportunity helps fulfill AMTP’s mission to develop and present new music theatre works by emerging writers.

Jeff Award winners

School of Communication faculty and alumni were well represented in October at the annual Joseph Jefferson Awards honoring excellence in Chicago-area Equity theatre. Winners included radio/television/film senior lecturer Brett Neveu for best new adaptation (A Red Orchid Theatre’s *Traitor*, which also won for best production of a midsize play); professor and Donald G. Robinson Director of Music Theatre David Bell for best director of a large play (Windy City Playhouse’s *Southern Gothic*); Lili-Anne Brown (C95) for best director of a midsize musical and Michael Mahler (C04) for best music direction (American Blues Theater’s *Buddy—The Buddy Holly Story*); and Kate Fry (C93) for best solo performance (Court Theatre’s *The Belle of Amherst*). Presented at Drury Lane Theatre in Oakbrook Terrace, the awards were cohosted by University trustee Barbara Gaines (C68).
Seaside meets lakeside at innovative conference

Nearly 800 experts from 15 countries gathered on Northwestern’s Evanston campus July 12–14 for the largest-yet conference on dysphagia (swallowing disorders). Known as the Charleston Swallowing Conference because of its original location, the event is the field’s premier arena for raising awareness of this pervasive but misunderstood condition and sharing the latest research and treatment breakthroughs.

“Originally, as researchers, we tended to hang with one another and hear one another’s science, but not everyone publishes their literature in one place,” says Bonnie Martin-Harris, associate dean for academic affairs and the Alice Gabrielle Twight Professor in the Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. “I was always passionate about giving clinicians the access they need to make new discoveries and the specialty knowledge necessary to effectively treat the patient population and optimize outcomes.”

Swallowing disorders aren’t well understood outside these specialized medical communities, yet they affect a disproportionately large swath of the American population—roughly 1 in 25 adults per year, according to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. But those numbers don’t include children and in any case are believed to be an underestimate.

Dysphagia is a common side effect of stroke, Parkinson’s disease, and ALS but is also seen in newborns and in head and neck cancer patients during and after curative treatments. Persistently a subject of debate among medical professionals, it can lead to a range of health complications. These and other factors prompted Martin-Harris to spearhead the conference and make it a tradition.

Now considered one of the foremost researchers in the field, Martin-Harris says the conference occurs only when there’s big, ready-for-prime-time news to be shared. The 2018 gathering, “Innovation to Implementation in Dysphagia Practice: It’s All About the Patient,” included presentations on the latest in brain research and anatomy as well as discussions about cutting-edge handheld or wearable diagnostic technology and devices.

Theatre and drama PhD program celebrates 30 years

When Tracy Davis, the Ethel M. Barber Professor in the Performing Arts, began teaching at Northwestern in 1991, the interdisciplinary PhD program in theatre and drama was in its nascent stage. As a result, she has a unique attachment to its legacy: “I know just about everyone who has come out of that program,” says Davis, a former IPTD director.

Last fall Davis was able to reconnect with most of the program’s alumni—and to facilitate connections between them and current students—for IPTD’s 30-year celebration and all-class reunion. “We really wanted our current students to know our alumni and vice versa, because our alumni are doing all kinds of terrific things, they’re successful in many arenas,” she says. “And in this era of having diverse placement outcomes, we want to celebrate that we’ve been doing this a long time—also because 30 years is a large span, and the alumni don’t necessarily know each other either.”

Over its three decades, IPTD has awarded PhDs to more than 50 students, a small but robust cohort of academics, advocates, and artists who have contributed work that Davis calls “field-changing.” Cultivating relationships within this community, she says, will only enhance the level of discourse. Because of IPTD alumni’s outsized influence in the field, Davis organized what she dubbed the Mentor Match-up Program, which pairs current doctoral candidates with alumni who guide their path into the professional world, helping them navigate job searches and program milestones.

Attended by 33 alumni and 23 current students, the celebration featured academic panels, professional development activities, poster presentations, and socializing.
MSC hits milestone
More than 200 School of Communication alumni, students, and faculty gathered at Evanston’s Hilton Orrington Hotel last September to honor the founders of the master of science in communication program, now in its 35th year. The reception feted communication studies professor and MSC cofounder Irving Rein, professor emeritus and MSC cofounder Paul Arntson, and professors Kathleen Galvin and Michael Roloff for their pioneering work in building the program.

Speaking at the ceremony, Dean Barbara O’Keefe called the program’s founding “a groundbreaking experiment in creating a new kind of curriculum for communication studies, one that connected directly to industry and showed how useful our field could be to working professionals. It was the first of its kind.”

Over its more than three decades, the program has graduated 33 classes, growing and evolving to reflect changing needs. O’Keefe noted that it has inspired the creation of other School of Communication graduate programs, including the master of science in health communication and master of science in leadership for creative enterprises.

“My participation in this program made me a better scholar,” said Roloff. “It also made me expand my areas of expertise. Students asked me questions that I didn’t have answers for, and so I was reading things I’d never read before and incorporating them in the classroom.”

“We’re here to honor this amazing program and the four teachers who have served it so well for so many years,” said Randall Iden, the program’s new faculty director. “We’re so proud of all that they’ve accomplished.”

Academy Award connections at NU-Q
Northwestern University in Qatar faculty member Marco Williams (top) has been elected to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, best known for awarding the film world’s Oscars. A professor of communication at NU-Q and of radio/television/film at the University’s home campus in Evanston, Williams has been named to the academy’s documentary branch.

Commenting on his election, Williams said, “I hope to enhance the diversity of the types of films considered [for the Academy Awards] as well as the types of makers who create these important works.” High-profile honors for his documentary films have included a Guggenheim Fellowship, a George Foster Peabody Award, and a Columbia-DuPont Award.

School of Communication alumnus and Oscar-nominated producer Jordan Horowitz (bottom) spoke at NU-Q’s annual convocation last September, advising the incoming class to forget about their expectations and focus on process. Numbering more than 100, NU-Q’s class of 2022 is the largest in the school’s history.

Horowitz pointed to his early career’s unsuccessful films, all of which failed to meet his expectations. As his career developed, he revised his methods and eventually saw success with the movie La La Land.

“Instead of forcing things to be a certain way for reasons outside the film itself, we were patient, we listened to what the movie wanted, to what the movie needed, we gave it the space and time and care it deserved,” he told the audience. “Instead of defining our success by the results, by what we expected people to think of the movie, we found our success in the process.”
David Bell (MA, University of Virginia) wrote the book and Dolly Parton composed the music for *A Smoky Mountain Christmas Carol*, an East Tennessee–based adaptation of the Charles Dickens classic, which premiered in a November staged reading at the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Joshua Chambers-Letson (PhD, New York University) is the author of *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life*, published by NYU Press last fall. The book explores how minoritarian artists such as Nina Simone, Jorge Ignacio Cortiñas, and Dash V mobilized performance to “produce freedom and sustain life in the face of subordination, exploitation, and annihilation.”

Leora Cherney (PhD, Northwestern) was awarded 2018 Honors of the Academy, the highest honor conferred by the Academy of Neurologic Communication Disorders and Sciences. The distinction recognizes members who have made outstanding contributions to research, teaching, treatment, and/or service in neurologic communication disorders. Cherney holds a dual appointment in the School of Communication and the Feinberg School of Medicine.

Aymar Jean Christian (PhD, University of Pennsylvania) was named one of “25 New Faces of Indie Film” by Filmmaker magazine. His distribution platform OTV | Open Television won a Streamy Award for best indie series for the second consecutive year, this time for *The T*, created by Bea Cordelia and Daniel Kyri. Christian was also listed as one of NewCity’s annual “Film 50 Chicago: Screen Gems,” along with School of Communication faculty Stephen Cone, Kyle Henry, Spencer Parsons, David Simpson, J.P. Sniadecki, and Ines Sommer; alumni Maria Finitzo and Joe Chappelle; and student Naema Torres.

Shana Cooper (MFA, Yale School of Drama) is directing *Julius Caesar* for a March opening at New York’s Theatre for a New Audience. The production debuted at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

Tracy Davis (PhD, University of Warwick) was a featured presenter on a panel honoring her doctoral adviser, the late Michael Booth, at Italy’s “City, Space, and Spectacle in 19th-Century Performance” conference, hosted at the University of Warwick’s Venetian villa. Her fellow panelists were Stanford University assistant professor Aileen Robinson (GC16) and Manchester University professor emeritus David Mayer (GC61).

Chaz Evans (MFA, University of Illinois at Chicago) received a MacArthur International Connections Fund grant to create the virtual reality project *Citizen Journalism VR* with collaborators at Chicago’s Video Game Art Gallery, which he cofounded. The game places the VR user in a public demonstration requiring critical choices about what pictures to take with a cellphone. The user is then able to review the photos after the witnessed event. The
Daniel Moser (PhD, Northwestern) will design and lead communication workshops for the International Research Experience for Students program in Korea for the next three summers. Recently funded by the National Science Foundation, the program is a collaboration between partner institutions in the US (Northwestern, University of Florida, and Louisiana State University) and Korea (Seoul National University, KAIST, and Ehwa Woman’s University). In November, Moser led a specialized workshop, “Delivering Compelling..."
Aaron Shaw (PhD, University of California, Berkeley) completed a prestigious fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences last fall at Stanford University. Shaw’s work focused on developing new research on open organizations and collaboration in online communities. Past fellows have included 26 Nobel Prize laureates, 24 Pulitzer Prize winners, 51 MacArthur fellows, and 159 members of the National Academy of Sciences.

Billy Siegenfeld (MA, New York University) wrote, staged, and created the movement and vocal-rhythmic arrangements for the two-character play What Do You Want to Be When You Give Up? (subtitled A conversation about letting go with snatches of song, a bunch of rants, a few dances, and some impassioned appeals to both the moon and Jane Austen). The play will be performed this spring in New York City at the Actors’ Fund Mark O’Donnell Theater, this summer in London at Millennium Performing Arts, and next fall in Boston at Boston University. Siegenfeld performs in it with longtime Jump Rhythm collaborator Jordan Batta (Co4).

Dassia Posner (PhD, Tufts University) was honored for her book The Director’s Prism: E. T. A. Hoffmann and the Russian Theatrical Avant-Garde by the Prague Quadrennial, which included the book on its “longlist” of the world’s best performance design and scenography publications. The Prague Quadrennial is an 11-day performance festival held in the Czech capital every four years; this year’s event will take place June 6–16.

Ozge Samanci (PhD, Georgia Tech) was chosen for a March artist-in-residency program in the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Through the residency she will observe marine scientists’ research processes as inspiration for an interdisciplinary art piece. Her interactive art installation You Are the Ocean continues to travel the world; in September it was shown at the Digital Consciousness Exhibit, part of the BrainMind Summit at Stanford University. Drawings by Samanci were featured in the group show Wir Verrecken vor Lachen! at Berlin’s Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien. Last fall she gave the talk “Ego to Eco” at the Chicago Humanities Festival.

Facility focus

Presentations,” for the School of Communication’s MS program in leadership for creative enterprises. In May he was interviewed on a Graduate School podcast.

A Bosnian Bee

Sarajevo met Putnam County last fall when theatre lecturer Ryan T. Nelson, music director for the Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts, opened The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee at the Bosnian capital’s National Theater. Nelson was invited by Elizabeth Blumenthal (C92), the assistant cultural affairs officer for the US Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to help launch new arts programming. Putnam County was the first show produced as part of BiH Broadway, a musical theatre initiative in which young Bosnian actors work with American artists to perform a Broadway musical. Following its September 28 opening, the show embarked on a weeklong tour of Bosnian cities—Mostar, Bijeljina, Tuzla, Zenica, Jajce, and Banja Luka.

“Of the hundreds of musicals I’ve music directed, that opening night was one of my top five favorites,” Nelson recalls. “They really owned it.”

But that wasn’t always the case. At auditions last March, and at the beginning of a weeklong intensive training in June, Nelson found the actors unsure of their abilities and unaccustomed to the positive reinforcement he and director Aaron Thielen provided. “They got exponentially better because they were believing in themselves,” says Nelson.

While Bosnia is rich in the arts, the American musical tradition is not well known there. Blumenthal is trying to change that. At auditions last March, and at the beginning of a weeklong intensive training in June, Nelson found the actors unsure of their abilities and unaccustomed to the positive reinforcement he and director Aaron Thielen provided. “They got exponentially better because they were believing in themselves,” says Nelson.

While Bosnia is rich in the arts, the American musical tradition is not well known there. Blumenthal is trying to change that. At a theatre major as a Northwestern student, she brought the cast of the 75th annual Dolphin Show to Bosnia in spring 2017 to lead workshops and tour Little Shop of Horrors. Nelson expects these musical collaborations to continue.

He was joined in Bosnia last June by seniors Grace Bobber and Alex Rothfield, who assisted with the training, and in September by assistant professor Marcus Doshi, who designed the show’s lighting.
J.P. Sniadecki (PhD, Harvard University) was invited to be a fellow and artist in residence at the Wexner Center for the Arts to finish postproduction on his new feature film A Shape of Things to Come. He has been invited to be a Houston Museum of Fine Arts fellow this spring. All six of his feature films are now in the permanent collection of the film department at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, which most recently acquired El Mar la Mar (2018), Yumen (2013), People’s Park (2012), and Demolition (2008). He received a moving image preproduction grant from the LEF Foundation for an untitled work in progress that takes place in Cairo, Illinois.

Jeb Stuart (MA, Stanford University) is developing the four-part animated World War II drama The Liberator. Greenlighted by Netflix, the series is based on the book by Alex Kershaw.

David Tolchinsky (MFA, University of Southern California) directed his play An Attempt to Heal in the Contemporary World for an October production at New York City’s HB Studio Playwrights Theatre. A dark comedy about untestable modern illnesses, the 1957 film The Incredible Shrinking Man, and Freudian-insider-turned-cult-leader Wilhelm Reich, the play was visually designed by Dan Silverstein of the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art. Creature Companion, a film that Tolchinsky produced with Silverstein as a response to Reich, received its Chicago premiere in Zagreb, Croatia; the film was directed and coproduced by former radio/television/film faculty member Melika Bass. Tolchinsky continues to work on postproduction for his psychological thriller Cassandra, about the 1990s psychiatric memory-recovery movement.

Debra Tolchinsky (MFA, School of the Art Institute of Chicago) received a Kartemquin Partner Program Sage Fund Grant for her in-progress documentary True Memories and Other Falsehoods, which explores distorted memory in relation to police interrogation.

In Steadfast company

Last November, Chicago’s Lookingglass Theatre Company premiered a new adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen’s The Steadfast Tin Soldier by Mary Zimmerman (PhD, Northwestern), who also directed. The production featured associate professors Ana Kuzmanic as costume designer, Todd Rosenthal as scenic designer, and Amanda Dehnert as cocomposer as well as actor Christopher Donahue (C85), producing director Phil Smith (C88), choreographer Tracy Walsh (C89), and Wirtz Visiting Artist Tom Lee. The Chicago Tribune gave it four stars and called it “transformational.”
Class notes are selected from 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.

1970s

James Foskett (C77, GC78), an orthopedic surgeon, has joined the medical staff at Galesburg (Illinois) Cottage Hospital.

Marla S. Persky (C78)—CEO and president of WOMN LLC, a company dedicated to helping women succeed in the business of law—was appointed to the board of directors of Xeris Pharmaceuticals.

1980s

Kimberly Albrecht (GC80), 2018 Ms. Illinois Senior America, was named a top 10 finalist at the Ms. Senior America competition in October. The lyric coloratura soprano competed in talent, philosophy of life, private interview, and stage presence before live audiences during the three-day event at the Superstar Theatre in Atlantic City’s Resorts Casino Hotel.

Sam Fishkin (C82) appeared in and produced music for A&E’s documentary David Cassidy: The Last Session. The film featured songs recorded at Fishkin’s Chicago studio, MixKitchen, for Cassidy’s posthumous release Songs My Father Taught Me. Fishkin’s audio mixing credits include Head Games the Movie and other documentaries by Steve James, surround mixes for live concert DVDs by Styx and Nine Inch Nails, the last six seasons of CNBC’s series American Greed, and the soon-to-be-released romantic comedy Surprise Me!

Donald Johnson (C82, MSJ87) is a sports commentator on the Comcast Network’s High School Football Game of the Week and the cohost of Sports Corner on 98.3 FM in the Chicago area. He became interested in broadcasting while working as a DJ at WNUR and eventually pursued a master’s degree in journalism.

Patricia McMahon (C82) was promoted to senior vice president and chief claims officer at Everest Insurance.

Matt Carter (C83) was appointed CEO of Aryaka, a SD-WAN (software-defined networking in a wide-area network) and network services provider. Carter recently served as president and CEO of Inteliquent, a cloud-based unified communications company.

Jody Gerson (C83) was listed by the Financial Times as one of the music industry’s most powerful figures, was named one of 2018’s “100 Most Creative People in Business” by Fast Company, ranked eighth on Billboard’s 2018 “Power 100” list, and according to Variety is among the 500 most influential business leaders shaping the entertainment industry. As chief executive and chair of Universal Music Publishing, she is the first and only woman to lead a major music company.

Julia Louis-Dreyfus (C83, H07) was awarded the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in an October ceremony that aired in November on PBS. Paying tribute to her television comedy accomplishments, the event featured Stephen Colbert (C86, H16), Jerry Seinfeld, Tina Fey, Tony Hale, Keegan-Michael Key, Kumail Nanjiani, and Bryan Cranston as well as the PrioireDance company’s performance of the “Elaine Dance.” Louis-Dreyfus is the star and an executive producer of HBO’s Veep, which will air its final season this spring.

Julia Louis-Dreyfus accepting the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor
All Access series adaptation of George Pendle’s Strange Angel; National Geographic’s limited series The Hot Zone, based on the Richard Preston book and starring Julianna Margulies; and the forthcoming Fox drama The Passage, based on Justin Cronin’s postapocalyptic trilogy. In early 2019 he will commence production on Raised by Wolves, a flagship TNT sci-fi series and the first to be helmed by Ridley Scott; the series is a drama about androids raising human children in an outer space colony.

Lisa Ackerman (C87) was appointed senior vice president of customer success at STATS, a leader in sports data and intelligence.

Laverne McKinnon (C87) and producing partner Kay Cannon have signed a deal with Sony Pictures Television in which the studio will have the first-look rights to new comedies and dramas that McKinnon and Cannon create as K&L Productions. McKinnon is also a faculty member in Northwestern’s MS program in leadership for creative enterprises.

### NUEA news

In 2018 NUEA West held its latest round of Peer Groups, an opportunity to network, develop skills, and learn from experienced Northwestern alumni in the entertainment industry. This year’s 13 sessions included “Indie Publishing on a Shoestring Budget,” hosted by Christiana Miller; “Mind the Gaps: The New Frontier of ‘Hybrid Content,’” hosted by Nichole T. Roberts; “Actor Hive Mind,” hosted by Naomi Grossman; “The Studio Side,” hosted by Malcolm Gray; “The Art and Business of Comedy (with an Emphasis on Storytelling),” hosted by Nikki Levy; “Navigating the World of the Pitch,” hosted by John Lehr; and “Making Your Movie and Television Show,” hosted by Gita Pullapilly and Aron Gaudet.

NUEA West’s Welcome Alumni Fall Mixer on September 22 featured complimentary drinks and snacks. The group offered discount tickets to the Geffen Playhouse production of The Cake, directed by NUEA member Jennifer Chambers and featuring alumnus Roderick McLaughlin; following the show, performers gave a talkback for NUEA West members. In November, NUEA West held its latest installment of “Storytelling Series with Schemes: A Storytelling Event,” featuring alumni Naomi Grossman, Joe Hauler, Anne Hollister, Lisa Kaminir, J. P. Manoux, Johanna Middleton, Claire Partin, Emily Rifkin, and K. C. Schlossberg.

NUEA East has recently restructured its board and will provide updates this summer.

### 1990s

Bruce McCoy (C92) won an Emmy Award for outstanding reality competition show as co-executive producer of RuPaul’s Drag Race.

Ann Haugh (C93) was appointed president of the global markets division of AXIS Re, the reinsurance business segment of AXIS Capital Holdings.

Tyrha Lindsey-Warren (C94), a clinical assistant professor of marketing at Baylor University, produced her fourth international film festival in September.

Cincinnati’s five-day 2018 Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival—celebrating diversity, disability, and difference—presented 67 films (chosen from 150 submissions from around the world) and 10 special events and hosted Hollywood celebrities and executives. Since 2013 Lindsey-Warren has been producing film festivals for Bishop T. D. Jakes and his International Faith and Family Film Festival in Dallas. Her research on entertainment, advertising, movies, and “empowered storytelling” has been published in the Journal of Advertising Research, the Journal of Cultural Marketing Strategy, and the recent Palgrave McMillan UK book Entertainment Values: How Do We Assess Entertainment and Why Does It Matter?
Through the lens of disability

Talleri McRae (C02) is an educator, artist, scholar, and advocate who aims to raise awareness and create theatre art and learning opportunities for the disability community. Last year McRae and her artist partners launched National Disability Theatre to showcase the work of people with disabilities, both on stage and among the leadership team, through touring productions.

“National Disability Theatre is excited about how using a lens of disability culture—its access, its inclusion, its innovation, its unique humor—might change the way we all tell stories on stage, whether we have a disability or not,” says McRae, who has cerebral palsy. “When a production team includes artists with disabilities, they unlock a whole new storytelling vocabulary that can resonate in disabled and nondisabled communities alike.”

A turning point in McRae’s life and career came when she played Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird at Northwestern. After a performance, she overheard some middle school students discussing how McRae had expertly played Scout’s disability—but in fact it was the actor, not the character, who had a disability.

“Before that moment, I had never considered how disability identity might intersect with storytelling on stage,” she says. “The theatre industry has so much work to do in the realm of responsible representation of disabled roles, but National Disability Theatre is also committed to casting actors with disabilities in nondisabled roles, roles like Scout Finch and so many more.”

McRae’s fellow co-executive director is Mickey Rowe, an actor best known for his appearance in The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time at Indiana Repertory Company and Syracuse Stage, where he became the first actor with autism to play an autistic character. They plan to announce details of National Disability Theatre’s first production later this year.

Heather Moosnick (C94) is now the senior vice president of content partnerships at Hulu, where she leads its content and network acquisition team. Moosnick was previously head of global business development, strategy, and content partner management for YouTube TV and Google Fiber. She is also the cofounder of Women in Digital Media.

Ian Greenblatt (C95) joined J.D. Power to lead its technology, media, and telecommunications practice. He formerly ran his own boutique consulting practice and served as a vice president at ARRIS.

Rob Cornell (C96) is now the director of product innovation at First Choice Health.

Jerlian Greene (C96, KSM08) was promoted to chief communications and public affairs officer at Yum Brands. Greene has been with the company for seven years and has led Yum’s communications since 2016.

Adam Hiebeler (C96) is a screenwriter whose first feature, The Killing Season (starring Indian film actress Nayanthara), was produced in the UK last year.

Nicole Hudson (C96), St. Louis’s deputy mayor for racial equity and priority initiatives, has been appointed assistant vice chancellor for the newly created Academy for Diversity and Inclusion at Washington University in St. Louis.

Nadine George-Graves (GC98) was named professor of theatre and professor of dance at Ohio State University. She was previously a professor at the University of California, San Diego.

Ralph Maurer (C98) heads Oxbridge Academy, a private college prep high school in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Rebecca (Hermes) Windsor (C98) was named director of the Warner Bros. Television Workshop, the premier writing and directing program for professionals looking to start or further their careers in television.

Kevin Boyd (GC99) was appointed vice president and chief information officer for the University of Chicago, where for the last six years he has served as executive director and chief information officer for the Booth School of Business.

Nat Kreamer (C99) was named chief executive officer of Advanced Energy Economy—a national association of businesses making energy secure, clean, and affordable—and the AEE Institute.

Frank Dworak (C00, PSL04) joined the law firm of Sheppard Mullin as a partner in its tax, employee benefits, and trusts and estates practice group in Orange County, California.

John Hopkins (C01) was appointed assistant professor in the art history department and the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University. Previously Hopkins was an assistant professor at Rice University.

Annie Hughes (C01) was named director of the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Penn State Harrisburg. Previously she was a brand manager of disruptive innovation at the Hershey Company.

Ivan Chen (C04), an attorney and entrepreneur, was appointed to the board of directors of PURE Bioscience, a developer of proprietary antimicrobial products. Chen is the cofounder of gan-bei, a technology startup in consumer and social media.

Zach Strief (C06), who retired in March 2018 from the New Orleans Saints, was named the team’s new radio play-by-play announcer.

Robin Witt (GC06), an ensemble member of Chicago’s Steep Theatre, directed Pomona last summer. The production closed the company’s 18th season.
Counseling for success

In November, Brian Coleman (C08)—counseling department chair at Chicago’s Jones College Prep—was named school counselor of the year by the American School Counselor Association. Nominated as one of six national finalists for the award, he was notified of the honor during a surprise assembly at the school.

“I’m a black, gay, cisgender man, and I’ve been able to turn my passions for performance, human behavior, education, and service to marginalized communities into a successful career in school counseling,” says Coleman. “I personally and professionally identify as a unicorn of sorts, and I use that to encourage my students to leverage their own unique strengths, perspectives, and abilities to meet their academic, personal-social, and college-career goals.”

Coleman credits his career success to his mentors, including theatre professor Cindy Gold and senior lecturer and theatre associate chair Mary Poole (GC75, GC87), adding that he’s honored to “pay it forward in this professional capacity.”

The October 5 episode of the half-hour comedy series Comedy Central Stand-Up Presents.

Morgan Elise Johnson (C11) was named one of Forbes magazine’s “30 Under 30” in the media category. With Tiffany Walden (J11), Johnson cofounded the TRiiBE (thetriibe.com), a Chicago-based media outlet with a mission of amplifying African American voices. She says of the honor, “The world now can look to the TRiiBE as a window into the multifaceted essence of black Chicago.”

Benjamin Kemper (C15) wrote the play Back When Mike Was Kate, a hopeful comedy about love, breakups, and identity that ran at Memphis’s Playhouse on the Square in January.

Shuhan Fan (GC16) and Luther Clement (GC17) created Stay Close, selected for inclusion in the Sundance Film Festival shorts competition. They made the film with funding from the TFI/ESPN Short Documentary Program. Stay Close tells the story of three generations of the Peter Westbrook Foundation’s sabre fencing program, where African American youth in New York City are trained to overcome their struggles and achieve Olympic heights. Produced by Ashley Brandon (GC17) and Nevo Shinaar (GC17), the film features music by composer Xiameng Summer Lin (GC17).

Jessieca Ynez Simmons (GC16) produced and directed the documentary I Can Only Be Mary Lane, an official selection in the Santa Cruz Film Festival, where it won the Director’s Award for Artist’s Merit.

Rosie Jo Neddy (C17) played Chava in Fiddler on the Roof at New York City’s National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene. The critically acclaimed production was performed in Yiddish.

Luis Perez (GC17) is the new board president of the Association of Independents in Radio. Most recently Perez was communications and distribution manager for the Chicago-based documentary producer Scrappers Film Group. Previously he was with Chicago Public Media for eight years.

Sebastian Pinzon Silva (GC17) was nominated for the International Documentary Association’s David L. Wolper Student Documentary Award for his thesis documentary film Palenque.
Lydia Clarke Heston (C45), actress, photographer, and widow of Academy Award–winning actor Charlton Heston, died on September 5 at age 95 in Santa Monica, California. A Wisconsin native, Lydia Clarke met her future husband in a theatre class while they were both Northwestern students and married him in 1944, shortly before he was deployed to serve in World War II; their marriage spanned 64 years, until his death in 2008. Clarke Heston appeared in such films as The Atomic City and The Greatest Show on Earth as well as in Broadway’s Detective Story but took a break from acting to pursue her love of photography and to raise their children, Fraser and Holly. Dean Barbara O’Keefe said that Clarke Heston “will always be radiant in our memories,” calling her and her husband “loyal and generous.”

Charlotte Rae (C48), the two-time Emmy-nominated actress best known for playing Mrs. Garrett on television’s Diff’rent Strokes and its spin-off, The Facts of Life, died August 8 at age 92 in Los Angeles. Born Charlotte Rae Lubotsky in Milwaukee, Rae showed an early knock for comedy and brought it to Northwestern, where she appeared in the Waa-Mu Show and other productions. Rae began working shortly after graduation but gained wide acclaim in the late 1970s when she joined the cast of Diff’rent Strokes. The popularity of her character led to The Facts of Life, which premiered in 1979. Author of the 2015 autobiography The Facts of My Life, Rae continued to appear on the stage into her 90s, earning acclaim and an Ovation Award nomination for her performance in Beckett’s Endgame at Los Angeles Center Theatre Group in 2016.

Facultty

Erwin F. “Bud” Beyer Jr. (C65), professor emeritus of theatre, died October 8 at age 78 in Evanston. After joining the Northwestern theatre faculty in 1972, Beyer led the acting program until 1989 and then chaired the department until 2002; he retired in 2008. Over his 34 years of teaching and directing, Beyer also founded and directed the Northwestern University Mime Company. Beyer worked extensively with musicians and orchestras and wrote the book Completing the Circle: Considerations for Change in the Performance of Music (GIA, 2014) to share his ideas with all artists seeking to complete the great circle of communication. As a former student wrote in tribute, “Bud as a teacher and as a human being sparked the human spirit. His influence will live on within all who truly knew him.” He is survived by his wife, Patti Beyer.
Elizabeth S. Bishop (C41) on August 16 at age 97 in Libertyville, Illinois

Ruby Le Neve Meredith (C46) on September 29 at age 95 in Lewiston, Idaho

Marianne Kaep Morrison (C46) on September 21 at age 93 in Littleton, Colorado

Frances G. Duval (C47) on August 14 at age 93 in Lititz, Pennsylvania

Bernice Chalfen Gregorio (C47, GC51) on June 21 at age 92 in Lake Forest, Illinois

Katherine Dorlee D. McGregor (C47) on November 13 at age 93 in Los Angeles

Elizabeth McCarthy (C48) on November 20 at age 93 in Framingham, Massachusetts

William H. Cohea Jr. (C49) on June 18 at age 91 in Bangor, Pennsylvania

William V. Haney (C49, GC50, GC53) on October 1 at age 93 in Evanston

Louise O. Mann-Jenkins (C49) on August 1 at age 91 in Bonita Springs, Florida

Rita Tyroler (C49) on September 10 at age 90 in Stuart, Florida

Robert B. Howland (C50) on March 1 in Iowa

Barbara Lloyd Krause (C50) on July 21 at age 89 in Houston

William E. Brady (C51) on September 19 at age 92 in South Bend, Indiana

Patricia A. Relyea (C51) on October 12 at age 89 in Vero Beach, Florida

Betty J. Jaacks (C52) on July 11 at age 87 in Vernon Hills, Illinois

Thomas G. Friss (C53) on November 18 at age 87 in Racine, Ohio

Radian Bruckwick Tyson (C53) on August 3 at age 86

Roma J. Brown (C55, GC56) on August 15 at age 85 in Lincoln, Massachusetts

Gladys Crane (GC55) on October 18 at age 89 in Laramie, Wyoming

Arthur B. E. Fuller (C55) on May 8 at age 84 in Miami

Carolyn Lowell Christian Wofford (C55) on August 16 at age 85 in Kirkville, Missouri

Barbara M. Lowry (C56) on June 18

Charles M. Crowe (C57) on November 1

Ann J. Sturgeon (C57) on July 26 at age 82 in Palm Coast, Florida

Thomas H. Hooper (GC58) on October 19 at age 84 in Hendersonville, North Carolina

Deloras Pemberton (C60, GC63) on November 13 at age 80 in Prairie Village, Kansas

Margaret J. Golding (C64) on July 29 at age 93 in Wisconsin

Rose A. Irvine (GC64) on August 18 at age 93 in Kingston, New York

Elaine Leslie Brown Hutton (GC65) on August 4 at age 75 in Burlington, Vermont

Elyse Dodgson (C66) on October 23 at age 73 in London, England

Rosemary A. Rohling (C67, GC68) on September 27 at age 73 in Copenhagen, Denmark

Merrilee J. Brownell (GC69) on July 18 at age 72 in Boise, Idaho

Philip L. Engle (C69) on November 18 at age 71 in Greensburg, Pennsylvania

Marilyn Mollie Kravit (C69) on November 21

Katherine B. H. Webb (GC74) on August 30 at age 69 in Aldie, Virginia

Linda S. Dewinter (C76) on October 18 at age 64 in Tulsa, Oklahoma

Patrick Thomas (C77) on November 1 at age 65 in New Orleans

Clifford B. Smith (C78) on August 20 at age 63 in Helena, Montana

Patricia Kay Dean (GC94) on November 17 at age 72 in Santa Fe, New Mexico

Todd Lillethun, former assistant director of the School of Communication’s Office of External Programs, Internships, and Career Services, on November 14 at age 46 in Chicago
Supporting communication breakthroughs

The extraordinary work that our community contributes to design for human health and welfare would not be possible without our donors—especially Roxelyn and Richard Pepper, Bill and Sheila Lambert, and April McClain Delaney and John Delaney.

The Peppers’ names ought to sound familiar, as their support of our communication sciences and disorders department has been so fervent that it now bears their name. In addition to the immensely generous naming gift conferred in 2005, Roxelyn (C53) and Richard (McC53) Pepper endow an annual lecture by one of our faculty members. It is impossible to overstate the profound effect the Peppers have had on the study of communication sciences and the work needed to diagnose and treat communication disorders. Because of them, we boast one of the world’s best programs in this field.

Through the Lambert Family Conference Fund, Bill and Sheila Lambert, with their son Phin (C04) and his wife, Dailey, provide the opportunity for our faculty across communication disciplines to share expertise, identify breakthroughs, and set research goals at the annual Lambert Family Conference. Last year the result of their support was “Black Arts International: Territories and Temporalities”; in 2019 the conference will showcase our leading-edge faculty in autism research and advocacy. The Lamberts additionally provide the funding for our innovative Lambert Family Simulation Lab (see page 23) and postdoctoral fellowships for work alongside a faculty member in communication sciences and disorders.

April McClain Delaney (C86) and John Delaney support the school through the April McClain Delaney Research Professorship and the Delaney Family Fund for Research and Communication, which have led to innovative work in such areas as interorganizational communication, the performing arts, and finding and solving healthcare disparities. Current research, as outlined in this issue, will have broad implications for how people across the lifespan can access, understand, and grow from communication interventions.

“Having the support of the Peppers, Lamberts, and Delaneys has meant that we can strive for more groundbreaking research, more innovative solutions to communication problems, and more opportunities for our faculty and students to improve health access and outcomes,” says Dean Barbara O’Keefe. “The only thing we value more than their research support is the steadfast friendship they’ve provided us over the years.”
A child taking part in a Seesaw Theatre multisensory production for kids with developmental differences
Dialogue is published for the alumni of the School of Communication. Comments and suggestions may be mailed to Dialogue, Northwestern University School of Communication, Evanston, Illinois 60208, or emailed to dialogue@northwestern.edu. Please email all address changes to BioUpdate@northwestern.edu.

Editors: Kerry Trotter, Kingsley Day
Designers: Henry McGill, Heather Cosgrove
Photo credits: Justin Barbin, Shane Collins, courtesy of Cindy Gold, courtesy of John Haas, Liz Lauren, Jim Prisching, Bill Richert, Jasmin Shah, Kerry Trotter

2-19/26.7M/KD-HM-HC/2759
© 2019 Northwestern University. All rights reserved.
Produced by Global Marketing and Communications.