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School of Communication

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Congratulations Leigh, New Director

Dr. Leigh Ford selected as new Director for the School of Communication

“As Director of the School, the needs and concerns of faculty, students, and staff will be my personal mission. Given that our WMU faculty are already committed teachers and engaged scholars, I see the Director’s role as supporting, sustaining, and advancing their good work. After years of observing the leadership of Dr. Steve Rhodes, I have learned that being a Director requires as much tenacity as diplomacy, and as much innovation as appreciation for the mundane. I believe that I can manage these dialectics effectively. My actions will be grounded in the vision of a pluralistic approach to communication studies and motivated by the belief that Communication is a vitally important discipline within today’s higher education and is foundational to the well being of individuals and communities.”

- Dr. Leigh Ford, noted in her letter of application

Those of you who know Leigh, know she will bring an unending work ethic, outstanding leadership skills, and a passion for the School of Communication unmatched by anyone.

For those of you who do not know Leigh, she has a long history with the School. Leigh was one of our first graduate assistants back in the early 1980s.

Specifically, for the first year of her MA program with us, she was the editorial assistant to Dr. Peter Northouse for our “Communication Research Bulletin.” In her second and final year in the program, she was our first graduate teaching assistant under the leadership of Dr. Shirley VanHoeven.

Leigh went on to Purdue for her Ph.D. and was an assistant professor at New Mexico State University before returning to Western Michigan in 1999.

Leigh served eight years as our Director of Graduate Studies and recently was promoted to the rank of full professor. Her record of teaching, research, and service exemplifies the values and mission of the School.

Over the years, Leigh has provided exemplary leadership to the graduate program and to the School of Communication. She also has worked effectively with her colleagues to create a mutually beneficial climate of collaboration between professors and graduate students.

Further, she has made important contributions as a collaborative member of many university committees and has provided leadership in a number of areas of benefit to the faculty and students of WMU. She also has achieved national recognition in her leadership to the communication discipline, in particular in health communication and community engagement. These experiences are indicators of the commitment, approach, and values she brings to the position of the Director of the School of Communication.
As you know from the exciting announcement on our front page, I will retire as director on June 30, 2009, thus becoming Director Emeritus. In my role as Director Emeritus I will continue to work on alumni outreach and development on behalf of the School, our External Board, and all our students and alumni.

As my colleagues have heard me say too often, “I could have retired happily not having been chair/director.” However, with their support and encouragement, I am glad I was given the opportunity to serve them, our students, and our alumni for the past 10 years.

In July I will start a professional sabbatical and then I will officially return to the faculty in my former status as a full professor in January 2010. This will be an exciting change. I love teaching, and although I taught an occasional course during my 10 years as director, the classroom is what I have missed the most during that time.

Although I may have been in a very public position as director, the School of Communication has had 100 years of excellence because of more than one person, and that will be true of its next 100 years. As I pursue this next phase of my career, it will be exciting to watch how the School will continue to prosper under Leigh’s leadership!

I want to close this last official newsletter letter by thanking everyone for their hard work and support during my time as director. I have so many of you to thank that I do not know where to start; your support and work on behalf of the School have been so important to becoming what we are today that I am at a loss for words.

So, I will close by simply saying: “Thank you with all my heart!”

Steven C. Rhodes
Director

Edwards Receives Two Teaching Awards

Dr. Chad Edwards has been recognized by the both Western Michigan University and the College of Arts & Sciences as one of the College’s outstanding teachers. He will receive the WMU Distinguished Teaching Award and the College’s Teaching Excellence Award.

Prior to joining the School of Communication faculty, Chad was a Hartel Teaching Fellow at Marietta College. The prestigious position provided a preview of the excellence in teaching Chad has brought to our staff.

One nominee wrote: “Dr. Edwards’ presence has greatly helped improve our undergraduate and graduate programs—he is an outstanding teacher and is recognized as such by students and colleagues. He has accumulated a record of achievement as a teacher, and he has a strong reputation as an outstanding educator in his field of Instructional Communication.”

When notified of the awards, Chad responded: “I feel extremely grateful for being acknowledged for my teaching at Western Michigan University. It is an honor to work with such great communication students in the lab and classroom who help me try out new teaching ideas and techniques.”

New Books

Richard A. Gershon
In his latest book, “Telecommunications and Business Strategy,” Richard Gershon examines telecommunications industry structures and the management practices and business strategies affecting the delivery of information and entertainment services to consumers.

Peter G. Northouse
Offering a straightforward introduction to the basic principles of leadership, Peter G. Northhouse’s “Introduction to Leadership: Concepts and Practice,” focuses on providing readers with practical strategies for becoming better leaders.
Machiorlatti Receives Award

Dr. Jennifer Machiorlatti, associate professor of communication, was honored by Western Michigan University as one of two WMU faculty to receive the Emerging Scholar Award during WMU’s Academic Convocation ceremonies.

The Emerging Scholar Award program acknowledges the accomplishments of WMU faculty who are among the rising stars in U.S. higher education. It is designed to celebrate the contributions of faculty who are in the first decade of their careers at WMU, have achieved national recognition, and demonstrated outstanding promise to achieve prominence in their continuing work. The award goes to scholars nominated for consideration through a campuswide selection process and carries a $2,000 cash prize.

An award-winning filmmaker, Jennifer’s work is regularly screened at conferences and film festivals. Her most recent widely viewed work was a video production on “Copyright and Creativity in the Digital Age,” which she co-produced with Dr. Rebekah Farrugia, WMU assistant professor of communication. The work was selected for juried national and international film festivals.

“Dr. Machiorlatti is an outstanding scholar with both a national and international reputation who engages in both traditional scholarship and creative activities, which is a rare accomplishment,” wrote an administrator familiar with her work. “Dr. Machiorlatti is one of our brightest and most outstanding colleagues.”

“What amazes me is the breadth and scope of Dr. Machiorlatti’s vision,” wrote a scholar from another nation in critiquing her work. “…her international and national work and research is of a significance of the highest order.”

Borden’s Ethics Book Earns National Recognition

A book by School of Communication professor Dr. Sandra L. Borden won a prestigious national award -- the 2008 Clifford G. Christians Ethics Research Award. The book, “Journalism as Practice: MacIntyre, Virtue Ethics and the Press,” explores the importance of focusing on journalism as a virtuous practice. The book also was named as one of three finalists for the 2008 Tankard Book Award.

The Christians Ethics Research Award recognizes scholarship highlighting important theoretical issues in the areas of ethics; mass communication theory; and the relationship between media, technology, and culture. The award is given annually by the Carl Couch Center for Social and Internet Research and named after communication ethics scholar Clifford G. Christians. Sandy’s name will be added to the award plaque housed at the Institute of Communications Research, the institute Christians directs at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

In the book, Sandy asserts that focusing on journalism's virtues can help journalists better withstand the moral challenges they face when corporate media conglomerates “commodify” the news to achieve global market dominance. She explores how journalists are placed in an ethical bind as they try to contribute to the common good while also responding to heightened pressures to report stories that contribute to a profitable bottom line.

Throughout the book, Sandy argues that journalists need to develop and promote “journalism as practice”—a robust group identity based on shared goals to create common civic knowledge and an informed public.
t was an unveiling like none other. There were hugs, high fives, fist pumps, enormous smiles, gleams in people’s eyes, and yes, even tears. It was a long time coming. It was a dream, a vision, made reality. It was the unveiling and ribbon cutting ceremony for the School of Communication’s new facilities in Brown Hall. The event, held a few days prior to Western Michigan University’s 2008 homecoming, drew over one hundred faculty, students, alumni and emeriti. These distinguished guests created a climate of communication and WMU pride that words can’t even begin to describe.

Dr. Steve Rhodes, Director of the School, got the evening started when he said, “We are here tonight to officially dedicate the School of Communication spaces in Brown Hall with a ceremonial ribbon cutting; to honor new inductees into our Alumni Academy; to thank those special alumni who made our new spaces possible; and to celebrate having reached the phase one goal of our centennial celebration capital campaign—over two million dollars in gifts and pledges.”

The ribbon cutting was conducted by WMU President John Dunn, Arts and Sciences Dean Thomas Kent, and student ambassadors from the School of Communication. “As a Communication graduate (B.S. ’77, M.A. ’87) it was wonderful to see the ‘new and improved’ Brown Hall,” said Michael Betz, co-owner of ImageStream—Creative Communications, a full-service new media production company in Portage, Mich. “Not only are the renovations striking from a design standpoint, the more important observation is that the new facilities will be a tremendous enhancement to the curriculum.”

“In the ‘70s, we were assured that a good mass communication education could be had, even though the technical facilities were antiquated,” Betz added. “That may have been true then, but it is clearly no longer the case. The new production and editing facilities will give new graduates both the theoretical understanding of communication that they need, as well as the technical skills necessary to enter the job market. Congratulations to all who were involved in this exceptional Communication makeover!”

And yes, for those who remember Brown Hall as brown and sunflower yellow in color, with restrooms for men and women on alternating floors, and a thermostat that had two extremes—sauna or freezer—it’s definitely not what it used to be. The new Brown Hall is the new gold standard for enriching student’s academic studies and their pursuits of excellence. It was a long time in coming and it’s now our new reality.

“How wonderful that Communication students now have this updated facility to learn and create in,” said retired media executive Laurie DeVarney (B.A. ’77). “It was so delightful to have been a part of the ‘unveiling’ and to share the excitement of students and faculty as they toured the new classrooms and production studios. The significant investment by the University and its generous benefactors will continue to enable School of Communication graduates to be competitive in the professional world, and fluent in the latest technology.
“Providing students with a first-class learning environment like this makes a strong statement of support by the University,” DeVarney continued. “Being able to offer an outstanding roster of faculty and state-of-the-art production facilities only strengthens the School of Communication’s position as one of the best schools in the country for students seeking careers in the communication industry. Our graduates prove this by their ability to succeed in the marketplace.”

A very special part of the evening was the recognition of three alumni whose financial gifts were honored by having new spaces dedicated in their names by the School of Communication.

- The School of Communication’s Clifford Center was made possible through a generous donation from Jack Clifford and his late wife Marguerite.
- The James P. Hickey Audio Lab was made possible through a generous donation from Jim Hickey.
- The Randy and Lisa Doran Conference Center was made possible through a generous donation from Randy and Lisa Doran.
- The Marguerite Clifford Film Auditorium was made possible through a generous donation from Jack Clifford in memory and honor of his late wife Marguerite.

The anonymous 1970 WMU alumna recently finalized an estate gift that designates one million dollars to the School. Half the gift will be used to establish an endowed visiting lectureship, and the other half will go to fund an endowed professorship.

The donor recently reestablished close contact with the School after receiving copies of the School’s e-newsletter. Subsequently, Director of the School, Steve Rhodes, and the alumna had numerous delightful conversations that led to her decision to make the gift, and to her specific instructions for its use.

“This alumna remembered that in her public speaking classes, students were required to attend campus speeches and critique the speakers,” Rhodes said. “The exercise had a tremendous impact on and value to her in developing and refining her own speaking style. Her gift will allow the School of Communication to launch a prestigious lecture series for students where they can hear ideas expressed by distinguished presenters and witness models of excellence in oral presentation.”

The donor, whose career has been in academia, sees the lectureship endowment as a tool to enhance the School’s academic offerings. Funds generated by the endowment will be used for two major lectures each academic year and to support additional guest speakers.

The endowed professorship will recognize the scholarly achievement of a tenure-track faculty member in the School who holds the rank of associate professor or higher. Funds generated will provide support for augmenting the recipient’s salary, helping fund professional travel, obtaining staff support, and helping with the acquisition of teaching or research materials to support the faculty member’s scholarly work.

This is the second one million gift to the School of Communication in a little over a year. In late 2007 it was announced that the School will receive 20 percent of an anonymous five million dollar bequest to WMU, to be administered after the donor’s death, and which is intended to boost ongoing faculty recruitment and retention efforts.

According to Rhodes, “As I’ve said to my faculty, they all share in these successes. Without the ability to talk about our good faculty, programs, students, alumni, and our external board, it would be difficult for me to respond to prospective donors when the opportunities present themselves.”

“Being able to offer an outstanding roster of faculty and state-of-the-art production facilities only strengthens the School of Communication’s position as one of the best schools in the country for students seeking careers in the communication industry. Our graduates prove this by their ability to succeed in the marketplace.”

Laurie Cottrell DeVarney (B.A. ’77)
Student Highlights

Film Students Invited to Cannes Festival

Three students have been invited to attend the Cannes International Film Festival. Brian Lane of Saline, Mich., Katharine Densmore of Augusta, Mich., and Mallory Yockey of Roseville, Mich., all major in film, video and media studies in the School of Communication. All were selected for the following programs: Brian for the American Pavilion Student Program; and Katherine and Mallory for the Adobe Reel Ideas Studio Student Filmmaking Program.

It is the second year in a row that WMU School of Communication students have been selected for Cannes summer programs.

The Cannes International Film Festival is regarded as the largest and most prestigious film festival in the world. Held annually in the town of Cannes on the southern coast of France, it attracts the best and brightest in the industry to exhibit, propose, network and, most importantly, screen awarding winning films.

Since 1989, The American Pavilion has been the focus of the U.S. film industry’s presence at the Cannes International Film Festival, serving as a communication and hospitality center for journalists, publicists, celebrities, filmmakers and motion picture executives. Brian was one of 145 students selected worldwide. For the past 20 years, the American Pavilion has offered film students the chance to participate in its student program. The program involves completing a work placement and participating in educational workshops, seminars, pitch sessions, roundtable discussions and screenings.

As participants in the Adobe Reel Ideas Studio Student Filmmaking Program, Katie and Mallory made a short film at the festival with other students from around the world. The filmmaking program is a collaborative, mentored experience in which students work in diverse teams and are provided insider access to film-world luminaries and premieres.

“I encourage all of my students to apply to these programs,” says Dr. Jennifer A. Machiorlatti, associate professor of communication and the students’ video production mentor. “This is really a pivotal moment in their lives. To join other U.S. film schools such as Chapman, NYU and USC, as well as students from some of the world’s top film programs, is a wonderful opportunity for collaboration and international exposure.”

In the News

Gabriel Giron
Gabe, a Film, Video, and Media Studies (FVM) major, has been awarded the InterCom Memorial Scholarship for 2008. InterCom, an association of professional communicators based in Kalamazoo, Mich., awards the scholarship annually.

Sarah Lee
Sarah’s paper, “Understanding a Four-Year College Newspaper’s Newsroom Culture and Change,” was selected as the Top Student Paper submitted to AE-JMC’s Scholastic Journalism Division. In addition to presenting her paper at the annual convention, Sarah was inducted into the journalism honors society, Kappa Tau Alpha, and also received a Michigan Association of Broadcasting Scholarship.

Graduate Students Win Awards
Two School of Communication graduate students have won the university’s highest awards in research and teaching. Jacqueline M. Miekisztyn was selected to receive one of the awards for The All-University Graduate Teachers for 2008–09. Elizabeth Lyons was selected to receive one of the awards for The All-University Scholars for 2008–09.
Amanda Torrens, an Organizational Communication major, was awarded the American Humanics (AH) NextGen Leader award. The Next Generation Nonprofit Leaders Program (NextGen) is a competitive internship scholarship program for American Humanics students. It is designed to provide assistance to a racially and ethnically diverse group of students who have demonstrated leadership potential. The program provides NextGen Leaders with the opportunity to complete their AH certification requirements, specifically the minimum 300-hour nonprofit internship. NextGen Leaders receive a scholarship of $4,500 from AH during their internship, along with access to and support from a network of nonprofit leaders who serve as mentors. NextGen Leaders also received special recognition at the 2008 American Management/Leadership Institute in Kansas City.

It takes a lot of hard work and determination to complete an American Humanics certificate. There are three required classes, volunteer hours, and participation in the American Humanics Student Association, maintaining a profile on the Humanics website, and completing the 300-hour nonprofit internship. Students are also required to attend the American Humanics Management Institute, a three-day conference in the U.S., at least once.

WMU Students Sweep Journalism Competition Awards

Three School of Communication journalism majors swept the Michigan Excellence in Journalism Competition for Student Web Site Feature Writing. The Detroit Press Club Foundation sponsors the competition, which honors the best in Michigan journalism.

Nicole Roland won first place for her story, “Youth offenders influenced by family’s criminal past.” The story chronicles a local family, all of whose members have been incarcerated.

Sam Barbatano won second place for his story, “Birdland jazz show DJ riffs on collecting.” The in-depth profile explores the devotion of one WIDR disc jockey and community resident to collecting jazz records.

Allison Groce won third place for her story, “A story of a local high school dropout.” The portrait examines the unlikely reasons why one teen dropped out, and her fight to finish high school.

All three students wrote their stories in JRN 4100, Professor Sue Ellen Christian’s capstone reporting and writing course in spring 2009. Christian published the students’ stories in an online newspaper, Off-Campus.com.

The course was held off campus at the Douglass Community Center to encourage students to report on often overlooked community issues on the city’s Northside. The judges said of Nicole’s story: “The family profile presents a microcosm of what the cops call ‘criminal families,’ families where neglectful, perhaps criminal parents, beget kids who, themselves, grow up to be criminals.”

“Professor Christian pushed each one of us to write the best possible piece we could, and the result put us in a room with the best professional and student journalists in the state,” Sam said. “It was an honor and a privilege.”

Youth Media Producers Receive Awards

The Michigan Association Of Broadcasters announced the winners of the 2009 High School and College Broadcast Awards Competition. Two of the School of Communication’s Kalamazoo Youth Media Initiative documentaries won (a tie for first place) in the Talk Show/Nonfiction Long Form category.

1st Place (tie) - Katharine Densmore, School of Communication, Western Michigan University, “The Evolution of the Eastside.”

1st Place (tie) - Brian Lane and Joe Johnson, School of Communication, Western Michigan University, “Our Neighborhood, Our Education: Stories from the Southside.”
Student Highlights

2008 Scholars Awards

Presidential Scholar
Awarded for excellence in the study of communication and overall academic excellence and leadership.

Krystal Bresnahan
Krystal M. Bresnahan is an alumnus of Lee Honors College and has recently earned a bachelor’s degree in interpersonal communication with a 4.0 grade average. Additionally, Krystal has received the Honors Development Scholarship and a WMU academic scholarship.

She has been an Honors Freshmen Orientation Volunteer, H.S.A. Co-Chair of the 2007 WMU Homecoming Dance Committee, member of Lambda Pi Eta Honor Society, and an alternative spring break participant, where she tutored and mentored sexually and emotionally abused teenage girls.

Krystal has also taken advantage of the Grand Tour of Europe study abroad program offered by Western Michigan University in an effort to expand her knowledge through experience. She was a research assistant for Dr. Chad Edwards and has successfully defended her senior honors thesis on humor and computer-mediated word of mouth communication. Presently, she is a graduate teaching assistant in the School of Communication at Western Michigan University.

Record Number of Undergraduate Awards

This year the School of Communication had a record number of students participating in the annual College of Arts & Sciences Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities program.

The students, their project title, and faculty mentor are listed and pictured below:

1. Nathaniel Abernathy, Through the Inferno: The Journey of Dante—creation of a video game, Faculty Sponsor: Kevin Abbott
2. Katharine Densmore, A Different Promise: The Evolution of the Eastside—a video documentary, Faculty Sponsor: Jennifer Machiorlatti
3. Alex Inkster, KYMI Feature and Sundance Film Festival—attendance at the Sundance Film Festival, Faculty Sponsor: Jennifer Machiorlatti
4. Brian Lane, Kalamazoo Youth Media Initiative, pilot program engaging local youth in video production, Faculty Sponsor: Jennifer Machiorlatti
5. Tina Swanson, Matriarchal Voices—research project related to Native American and First Nations women working in film and video storytelling, Faculty Sponsor: Jennifer Machiorlatti
6. Nayibe Tavares, Exploration of Communicative Experiences of International Students from the Dominican Republic Enrolled at Western Michigan University, Faculty Sponsor: Mark Orbe
7. Mallory Yockey, Wings of Hope Hospice—production of an informational video for Wings of Hope Hospice, Faculty Sponsor: Jennifer Machiorlatti

Student Highlights
Record Number of Undergraduate Awards

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Inkster Invited to Sundance Film Festival

Alex Inkster, a School of Communication student majoring in film and media studies, was selected to participate in the Adobe Reel Ideas Student Film Program at the Sundance Film Festival.

Alex served as the cinematographer for one of eight student groups filming documentaries as part of the Slamdance competition. Alex’s group was chosen to make a film about a stray dog in Park City. In addition, he participated in educational workshops in production planning and technology.

“There were a lot of celebrities there,” Alex said. “It’s a touristy town, but it was nice. It was fun meeting a lot of people.”

Alex, who plans to graduate in June, recently was awarded a College of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Award and worked on the Kalamazoo Youth Media Initiative, which premiered in February.

WMU students are no strangers to the Adobe Reel Ideas Student Film Program. Three film, video and media studies students from WMU took part in the program at the Cannes Film Festival in France, winning first place in 2007 and third in 2008 with their teams. This is the first time the program has been held at Sundance.

“This was really a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” said Dr. Jennifer Machiorlatti, associate professor of communication and Alex’s mentor, “to study with master filmmakers, work collaboratively with students from around the world and participate first hand in one of America’s most prestigious film festivals.”

Alex wore his WMU Bronco colors with pride.

TIM Majors Excel at Telecommunications and Information Management Conference

Two Telecommunications and Information Management (TIM) majors, Matthew Andreychuk and Sean Bradford, presented their research at the 2009 International Telecommunications Education and Research Association (ITERA) Conference in Atlanta, in April. During the awards reception and dinner, Matthew Andreychuk (second from right), a senior from Vassar, Mich., received the Best Undergraduate Student Research Paper Award.

Student paper submissions are competitively selected for presentation at the conference. ITERA awards only two top papers; one at the graduate level and one at the undergraduate level. Matt Andreychuk’s paper was entitled: “Sony Inc., A Case Study Analysis in Strategic Innovation.”

WMU’s TIM program is an interdisciplinary major offered through the School of Communication, College of Arts & Sciences (CAS) and the Computer Information Systems (CIS) program, Haworth College of Business (HCOB). The TIM major is designed to train students in a variety of telecommunications and data communication subdisciplines. The U.S. Department of Labor considers Information Technology Management one of the fastest growing occupations in the U.S.

Western Mich. University and the TIM program is a member of the ITERA consortium of schools, representing some of the nation’s best programs in the field of telecommunications and information sciences. The TIM program is co-directed by Dr. Richard Gershon (CAS) and Dr. Mike Tarn (HCOB).

www.itera.org
Something was in the air at Western Michigan University’s homecoming this year. It wasn’t the sound of the Bronco marching band warming up, or the cheering Bronco fans in Waldo Stadium. It was a Bronco buzz streaming from the School of Communication’s Tailgate at the Tower outside the newly renovated Brown Hall. Over 150 people attended the fifth annual School of Communication’s Tailgate at the Tower. People of all ages enjoyed WIDR music broadcasting from the steps of Brown Hall, devoured delicious tailgate fare, and reconnected with friends. Look for and plan to attend future School of Communication Alumni events.
In November 2008, nearly 40 students from nine colleges and universities in Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin came to Western Michigan University to compete in the third Upper Midwest Regional Ethics Bowl.

The event was one of eight regional ethics bowls that took place as part of the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl. On March 5, 2009, the 32 top-scoring teams in the eight regional ethics bowls competed for the national championship at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, which took place this year in Cincinnati.

The Upper Midwest Regional Ethics Bowl was co-sponsored this year by WMU’s Center for the Study of Ethics in Society, the School of Communication, Lee Honors College, and the Department of Philosophy. The competition was held in the School of Communication’s newly renovated spaces in Brown Hall.

The Ethics Bowl provides students with an opportunity to practice applying moral theories and argumentation principles. They receive 15 case studies in advance involving ethical issues in a number of practical contexts, including engineering, law, medicine, personal relationships, school, and politics.

During a round, each team takes turns presenting its position on a case and critiquing the other team’s position on a different case. Teams must answer questions about their positions from a panel of judges. Judges assign scores based on logical consistency, clarity, focus, and thoroughness.

WMU Hosts Intercollegiate Midwest Regional Ethics Bowl

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Bob Hercules brought his latest documentary, “Senator Obama Goes to Africa,” to WMU for a preview as part of the Brown Hall re-opening celebration in October 2008. This latest screening was the first official event held in the School’s new Marguerite Clifford Film Auditorium. In 2007, Bob’s award winning documentary, “Forgiving Dr. Mengele,” was also shown by the School of Communication.

Part personal odyssey and part chronicle of diplomacy in action, this timely and poignant documentary follows Senator Barack Obama as he travels to the land of his ancestors. From South Africa to Kenya to a Darfur refugee camp in Chad, Obama explores the vast continent that is gaining increasing importance in this age of globalization.

Senator Obama narrates the film, giving his own perspective on the journey and the significance of Africa to U.S. interests. Additional perspective is included through interviews with experts on African affairs and U.S. political commentators.

Bob received his undergraduate degree from WMU School of Communication. He is a veteran filmmaker whose earlier documentary, “Forgiving Dr. Mengele,” won the Special Jury Prize at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival and the Crystal Heart Award at the 2006 Heartland Film Festival.

Bob’s 1999 documentary, “The Democratic Promise: Saul Alinsky & His Legacy,” won Best Documentary at the 1999 Philadelphia International Film Festival and was shown on PBS in 2000. For more about Bob and his work, visit his company’s website at www.mediaprocess.com.
June Cottrell
Master of Speech Education -1966
In 1966, June was an instructor in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences and taught a variety of courses in the Department of Communication and the Department of Theatre, and earned emeritus status in both departments. She became widely recognized for her work in theatre and communication education. Among her many honors are national recognition from the American Alliance for Theatre Education and special recognition for her outstanding service by the Michigan Speech Communication Association.

Laurel Cottrell DeVarney
Bachelor of Communication & English -1977
While at Western, Laurie took up residence in Brown Hall. Passionate about open government, Laurie embarked on a 20-year odyssey of pioneering award-winning communication operations in several major California cities, including Pasadena, Santa Monica, and Oakland. Laurie is a firm believer in giving back to her community. Her volunteer service includes serving two terms as chair of the Spokane Regional Cable Television Advisory Board. She is also a certified Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian for children who are wards of the court.

Gary Dembs
Bachelor of Communication -1978
He is president and founder of the Non-Profit Personnel Network (NPPN), a retained executive search firm exclusively serving the national non-profit sector. Recognized as a leader in the industry, NPPN is the only firm of its kind in Michigan and one of only a few nationally. Among his many community service efforts, Gary serves on the board of Common Ground Sanctuary, a Detroit-area crisis management agency. Gary also helped found—and served as first president of—Yad Ezra, an emergency food pantry in Berkley, Mich.

Patricia Dolly
Master of Organizational Communication -1992
Professionally, she has years of experience in higher education at both public and private institutions. Her experience ranges from faculty member to chief operating officer to president—her current role—at Oakland Community College, the Auburn Hills Campus.

Matt James
B.S. ‘82
Matt is senior vice president for media and public education at the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Matt was elected to a three-year term as Chairman of the board of directors of the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health.
Matt graduated in 1982, and was a newscaster and reporter for WMUK-FM, WMU’s National Public Radio affiliate. Matt oversees the Kaiser Family Foundation’s media and public education programs, which includes partnerships with MTV, BET, the Washington Post, the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, National Public Radio and others. Matt also serves as executive director of kaisernetwork.org, a daily online health information resource for the health policy community, and recently launched Kaiser Health News, a nonprofit health news service.
Matt served as a communications and philanthropic advisor to Cisco Systems, Inc. In 1994, he was appointed by President Bill Clinton to the board of the Morris K. Udall Foundation for Scholarship and Excellence in Environmental Policy.
Curt Fonger  
Bachelor of Speech -1972  
Curt did radio news and disc jockeying at WIDR. Curt currently anchors on the web and CBS12 News at 6 and 11 in West Palm Beach. The Curt Fonger Invitational golf tournament—one of numerous charities Curt is involved with—has raised thousands of dollars for the Boys and Girls Club of St. Lucie County, Fla.

Claudia Marshall  
Bachelor of Broadcast & Cable Production -1984  
Claudia is the lively host of The Morning Show on WFUV in New York. She is an award-winning journalist, an accomplished musician and best known for her insightful interviews with everybody, from Yusuf Islam and Lucinda Williams to Martin Amis and Sting. Claudia has hosted WFUV weekday mornings since 2001 and has garnered awards including “Best Consumer Reporting” (New York Press Club) and “Best Use of Sound” (Public Radio News Directors). She found her calling working at WIDR-FM, the campus radio station at Western.

Neil Smith  
Bachelor of Communication -1977  
A member of the WMU Athletic Hall of Fame, Neil was named NHL Executive of the Year in 1992 by The Sporting News. In 1996, he received a Distinguished Alumni Award—WMU’s most prestigious alumni award. Neil is a color analyst for NHL games on Versus cable channel and the NHL Network. He is also working on Hockey Night in Canada Radio as a host.

Timothy Terrentine  
Master of Communication - 2006  
Tim is the Executive Director of Kalamazoo’s Douglass Community Association which was established in 1919 which sees approximately 600-700 kids a day in the summer and 150-200 kids during the school year. Tim’s goals for the Douglass Community Association are: collaboration, education, and community advancement. A 1997 graduate of Kalamazoo Central High School, he has recently been featured in several articles in local news papers for being a Kalamazoo native who has given back to the community.

Shirley Woodworth  
Bachelor of Speech -1951,  
Master of Communication - 1970  
An emerita of our School of Communication, Shirley taught in the department as an associate professor from 1965 to 1997. She taught a wide range of courses, from argumentation and debate to theories of interpersonal communication. She was elected to the AAUP executive committee in 1982, and served as grievance officer from 1985 until 1990, when she was elected AAUP president. She also served on the 1987 and 1990 negotiating teams. In 1987, she received the Woman of the Year award, presented by WMU Commission on the status of Women.

For more information about these and other alumni, or to submit your own alumni updates, please visit www.wmich.edu/communication.
Ewa Urban
M.A. Communication ‘07
Career Advisor, WMU Career & Student Employment Services

Ewa joined WMU in May 2006 as a career advisor for Extended University Programs. Prior, she taught writing at KVCC and worked at a career transition company, Right Management, where she assisted laid-off employees with their job search. Ewa lived in Poland, where she was an English teacher, and a translator in a foreign language school she established and managed.

How has your degree been of value to you?

The master’s degree in Communication has helped me develop strong research and writing skills, which have proven extremely valuable in my current role. I was able to take the initiative to collect and analyze research data and use it to develop instructional materials. The work I completed in my program prepared me for further graduate studies and allowed me to build relationships with wonderful faculty and other graduate students.

Recommendations for current students:

Since the degree in Communication is so broad and the interests of faculty span so many areas of Communication, I would recommend students determine early in the program where they would like their master’s in Communication to take them professionally.

Connecting with the right faculty and selecting courses that will help gain the knowledge and skills needed for the career path they want to pursue, and will ensure a smooth transition from the master’s program to the next professional stage. It is also valuable to develop networking contacts with other students in the program and learn about their professional backgrounds and the organizations where they work.

Lisa Wolaver
B.A., Public Relations ‘07
Public Relations Professional, Chicago, IL

How has your degree been of value to you?

The courses in the Public Relations program have proven extremely valuable. They provided me with the writing, speaking, and interviewing skills needed to successfully negotiate both client and media relations. In particular, my interviewing skills have helped me discuss and negotiate story lines with reporters. All of my PR courses have helped me transition easily into the workplace.

Recommendations for current students:

Find an internship and make sure you get media relations experience. Start early and obtain any experience you can. Become involved in groups associated with your major and don’t pass up unpaid internships. These experiences can get you to the position you really want down the road. Internships also help expose you to the writing style business professionals expect and look for in entry-level PR positions.
Shirley VanHoeven

Walking the beach on a chilly and bright sunny morning is a good time to think about the past seven years since retiring from WMU. The problem is that upon returning home I cannot seem to go to the computer and write these thoughts down as I have been requested to do for this Newsletter.

It is difficult to write about myself when I would much rather be writing about issues in organizational communication such as conflict management, leadership, power and culture. What a historical time we are now living in to be teaching these courses! I envy my colleagues.

Retirement has not come easily for me, with the first few years being the hardest. Such a major change of lifestyle is difficult for some of us and I fall into that category, but time helps and I think that I have made it.

So how am I spending my time?

Being on the Advisory Board to the School of Communication since 2001 has kept me in close contact with colleagues and former students who are professionally involved throughout the country. This is an exciting board that has become a very strong support organization for Dr. Steve Rhodes, faculty, and the School of Communication. Staying in touch with the university is important for me.

A trip to Russia in 2005 expanded my educational view of the country. We boarded a boat in Moscow and sailed the Volga River for eight days to St. Petersburg. Daily side trips into the countryside villages gave us a wonderful perspective and understanding of the people. St. Petersburg stood in contrast to the village life. Its magnificent museums, historical and cultural representations of Russia were spectacular.

Tennis continues to be a big part of my retirement days, playing several times a week. In Florida our association has beautiful courts and organized women’s tennis. I am also on the Country Creek women’s tennis team which plays other tennis teams in the area.

Two years ago while in Florida, I decided to try my hand at painting. I thought that I should try something new, so I joined the Estero Art League and enrolled in an acrylics class. Well, I am never going to be a Grandma Moses, but I have been having fun and I thoroughly enjoy working with colors and applying the colors on the canvas. This year, I have added watercolors to my list of classes.

Since I now spend eight months of the year living on Lake Michigan—about 20 miles north of Muskegon—I have become very involved with the Muskegon Museum of Art. This museum is a jewel and owns many masterpieces.

Presently, I am serving on the Friends of Art Board and am involved with extensive volunteer work which is very rewarding. I have been involved in presenting programs on women artists including Mary Cassatt which means that I do a great deal of reading. In June 2008, I became president of the board.

Why You Should Join...

Think back to when you were a WMU student. Wouldn’t it have been great to have a professional in your field to give career advice, or a resume critique? This is precisely what the Mentor Program through the Western Alumni Association does. It provides the means to help Western students get a leg up in the professional world.

There are over 400 alumni mentors on the system and more join all the time. However, there is a need for mentors in the Communication field to join this network. All seven colleges are represented, with the largest number coming from the Haworth College of Business. These mentors consist of Western Michigan University graduates from all over the country and the world. Thirty-two states, Washington D.C., and Pakistan are represented.

Can I Volunteer to Share Specific Types of Career-Related Information?

Yes, you can choose the type(s) of guidance you’re willing to provide: employer information, career advising, regional information, resume review and mock interviews. You can also choose the type(s) of volunteering you would like to do: job shadowing, informational interviews, mentoring, classroom speaking, and internship sites.

How do I become an Alumni Mentor?

To become an alumni mentor, you must first be a member of the WMU Alumni Association. The next step would be to register to become a mentor on the Mentor Program Registration page at www.wmich.edu/alumni. Once you have registered, you will be contacted by the alumni office with more information, including how to access the Mentor Program via the program entrance instructions.

www.wmich.edu/alumni/volunteering