

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION



There's an App for That: Communication Researchers Win the Health Make-A-Thon

By John Moist, Communication doctoral student

Inclusion and cultural competency are incredibly important in health care. Patients entrust providers with their health and livelihoods, and providers have a responsibility to communicate effectively about the needs, lives, and experiences of their patients. A team of researchers in the Department of Communication has won funding to develop an app designed to make patient-provider interactions easier and reduce health care disparities for marginalized and at-risk populations. Dr. **Mardia Bishop** assembled a team consisting of Dr. **Charee Thompson** as well as doctoral students **Sarah Bencivenga** and team lead **Victoria Fields**. Together, the group developed a proposal for an application that would simulate patient-provider interactions and increase cultural competency for medical students.

This past March, the team was chosen as one of the finalists in the Carle Illinois College of Medicine's 2021 Spring Health Make-A-Thon. The finalists were selected from a group of nearly 100 applicants and came from a wide variety of backgrounds. The competition's finalists included middle school students, college students, and health care providers. In April, the group proposed its project, "Healing Healthcare Disparities among BIPOC Patients through Virtual Reality Cultural Competency Training," to a panel of judges that included entrepreneurs, innovators, scholars, health care providers, and citizen scientists from across the state of Illinois. Contestants delivered their pitches in a "dolphin tank" format that the organizers describe as a "more friendly and approachable version of what's often called a 'shark tank' in the world of entrepreneurship." Contestants competing in the "dolphin tank" had just two minutes to pitch their ideas for improving human health. In the end, the Department of Communication team was one of ten

finalists chosen as recipients of \$10,000 each in research support, networking assistance, and Health Maker Lab resources to bring their idea to fruition.

The app in question is more than just a set of questions and answers to help train health care providers. It's an immersive, 360-degree virtual reality experience designed to help medical students gain competency and confidence in treating patients from a wide variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. While some simulation programs and trainings focus on interactivity, the team's application is also focused on fostering communication practices that can scale to different environments and contexts to help providers in a wide range of situations. Such training will help medical students gain real-world experience in communicating across cultural, racial, and economic barriers. Mardia Bishop said that these experiences are important for increasing empathy between provider and patient,

which can aid in reducing health care disparities between groups and help providers "better treat and build trust with BIPOC patients."

The team is now working with other partners to make the app a reality. Their work attracted the enthusiastic support of others, including Professor Kesh Kesavadas from the Department of Industrial and Enterprise Systems Engineering, who is aiding the team in the next stages of the development process. The next step in bringing their idea to life is producing a working prototype. The team is already hard at work developing an initial module for the application that will feature a script, filming, technical support, and embedded questions for participants. The team is also in the process of applying for additional



Continued on page 2

Greetings from John Caughlin, Department Head

What a year it has been since our last printed newsletter. I wrote last year about the health and social difficulties facing the world, but I had no idea how much those issues would still be affecting us a year later. Despite extraordinary efforts at all levels of the university, many students struggled this past year, and the conditions often exacerbated existing inequities among our students and within the rest of the community. The lessons we have learned over the past year have come at tremendous cost.



Yet there have been reasons to celebrate. As we returned more fully to campus this fall, I think we all agree that we never want to have a fully remote semester again. But being forced into remote education also taught us a lot about the resilience of our faculty, staff, and students. Collectively, we worked to create a much better educational experience than we could have hoped for given the circumstances. We also discovered some advantages of remote interaction. By moving our undergraduate awards event online, for example, we had far more participation from family and friends than we have ever had before. It was wonderful to see the personalized congratulations coming in while we recounted the details of each student's achievements. I am not sure we will ever return to an in-person reception for that event. Having more friends and family be able to attend that virtual celebration was meaningful, especially for the honorees.

Looking ahead, the department will celebrate its 75th anniversary during the 2022-23 school year, and we are planning to use some of what we have learned about remote events to include alumni and friends in our celebration. Watch our social media and newsletters for details.

You may have noticed that the first sentence of this message indicated that it has been a year since our last *printed* newsletter. If you inferred that this meant there was another, non-print newsletter, you were correct! Beginning in 2021, we began augmenting our annual fall printed newsletter with an email one that goes out in the spring. You can find the spring newsletter (and other past newsletters) online: communication.illinois.edu/resources/newsletters. If you did not receive the email newsletter earlier this year and you want to make sure you get them in the future, please send your updated email address to communication@illinois.edu.

Of course, you do not have to wait for the newsletters to be in contact with us. We love to hear from our alumni! Feel free to reach out any time. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy our current newsletter and that you have a safe and happy end to the year.

Health Make-A-Thon, continued

funding to support the project. Their success at the Health Make-A-Thon also put them into contact with the National Science Foundation's Innovation Corps here at the University of Illinois. The Innovation Corps, or I-Corps, is a public-private partnership that aids university faculty and student entrepreneurs in finding and identifying product opportunities that emerge from academic research. With the aid of the I-Corps, Bishop and the team plan to grow the impact of their application, identify potential collaborators, and perform market research to bolster their prototype.

The project has come a long way from its beginning as a teaching workshop that Bishop originally developed in collaboration with then-doctoral student Kristopher Weeks, a 2020 PhD in Communication. Their original goal focused on building inclusive environments and addressing microaggressions by developing trainings to help teachers in classrooms. Bishop is excited to apply



those ideas about cultural competency and language to address imbalances in health care. Team Lead Victoria Fields is also

looking forward to the future. "We feel excited about winning the Spring 2021 Health Make-A-Thon," she said. "We are grateful to receive \$10,000 in resources to address racism and reduce health disparities in medicine. Our expertise in communication and cultural competencies will allow us to spread our passion and improve the health care of marginalized populations."

How and Why Alum David Kleiman Gives Back to the Department

By John Moist, Communication doctoral student

Alumni giving supports a wide variety of programs, events, and scholarships on campus. In the Department of Communication, alumni generosity is having a direct, positive impact on the lives of individual students. We have seen time and time again that one person's contributions can have a lasting impact on students long after their time on campus has come to an end. One department alumnus is a particularly good example of how alumni giving can transform the experiences of Communication students. Two-degree Communication alumnus **David Kleiman** (BA, '65; MA, '66) says he wanted a way to "formally thank" those who inspired him to do his best at Illinois. In particular, he remembers the impact of three professors at Illinois, each of whom shaped his life's story in some way: **Wayne Brockriede**, **Joseph Wenzel**, and **Kenneth Burns**. "All three professors shared similar characteristics," he said. They were excellent teachers who were "extraordinarily competent in their subject matter." They were approachable, with high standards, but in a way that was thoroughly "committed to their students and their welfare." In particular, Kleiman remembers Kenneth Burns, who "had a very expansive view of the role of the speech teacher and was a gifted teacher as well." Wayne Brockriede, who received his PhD from the University of Illinois, was Kleiman's dissertation advisor at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Kleiman has chosen to give back in order to thank the department for the excellent education he received and the financial assistance he had access to while completing his master's degree.

Kleiman's generosity has supported a number of scholarships, fellowships, and programs, including the Kenneth M. Burns Undergraduate Scholarship, the David C. Kleiman Scholarship in Communication, the Wayne Brockriede Graduate Fellowship, and the Lincoln Hall Debate Series. The Kenneth M. Burns Undergraduate Scholarship is given to junior students who demonstrate "exceptional, continued service as a mentor to others and/or strong leadership skills" during their time at Illinois. Kleiman says he felt it was important to endow the Burns scholarship to students who "excelled in non-academic studies by volunteering their time and energy to worthy organizations while in college." In the spring of 2021, **Rylee Sjuts** received the Kenneth M. Burns Undergraduate Scholarship for her dedication to leadership and service. Sjuts said, "Receiving the Kenneth M. Burns scholarship has taken away some of the financial burden that college brings and allowed me to fully focus on my four short years here at the University of Illinois." The David C. Kleiman Scholarship in Communication, also designed for undergraduate students, supports a junior or senior student who shows unique academic promise during their

studies in the department. In the spring of 2021, **Morgan Coyle** received the Kleiman Scholarship. Receiving this scholarship, Coyle said, "made all of my hard work and late nights studying feel worth it.

I am forever grateful." Kleiman also endowed the Wayne Brockriede Graduate Fellowship, awarded to a graduate student in Communication whose research interests include a particular focus on argumentation, which was the foundation of Brockriede's own scholarship. **Dominique Nicole Campbell**, a recipient of the Brockriede Fellowship in 2019, is thankful for the support it represented. "I am eminently grateful for the Brockriede Scholarship," she says. "While I earned my master's degree it provided financial security, an invaluable comfort during a grueling and uncertain time. It allowed me to fulfill a longtime dream, attending graduate school at the University of Illinois." Campbell, who studies political and legal rhetoric, is continuing her education as a doctoral student in the Department of Communication with a focus on the Supreme Court.

Kleiman's support also helped to fund the CMN 112 Lincoln Hall Debate Series, an annual event in which students from Oral & Written Communication compete in a debate about a current social or political issue. Students from throughout the Oral & Written Communication course are polled to determine what topic they'd like to debate, and finalists perform their arguments and cross-examinations in front of a live audience. For the fourth annual Lincoln Hall Debate Series, hosted this past spring, students chose the topic of increasing the nation's minimum wage. Finalists in the Debate Series are eligible for educational stipends, and many students look forward to and attend the competition each year.

Department of Communication Head **John Caughlin** thinks alumni giving is important to the department and its future. "When alumni feel strongly enough about their experiences with the department that they want to give back," he said, "it's a wonderful thing. It's great for the faculty and students who benefit from their generosity, and it's also inspiring. It makes us even more committed to providing rich opportunities that will prepare the next generation of alumni." Caughlin believes that the future holds more opportunities for growth. "We want to continue to be the kind of department that elicits such strong commitment," he said. "It's a real pleasure to get to work with people like David who are enthusiastic about giving back and helping us make sure current students become the successful alumni of the future." Alumni giving is a valued way for alumni to continue to participate in what Kleiman calls the "Illinois Tradition of Excellence."



David Kleiman

Communication Instructors Win Teaching Awards

Four exceptional instructors from the department recently won awards from the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences and the campus.



2021 PhD graduate **Katie Bruner** won the LAS Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching for Teaching Assistants. While at Illinois Bruner taught courses in visual politics, communication and popular culture, and public communication in everyday life. Bruner is thankful for the opportunity to teach at Illinois and wrote that “the most rewarding part of teaching...

has been how curious my students are.” Katie’s teaching invites students to bring their own interests to class material, which she said makes teaching more “dynamic and exciting.” Bruner completed her PhD in the department this past summer and is now working at Northeastern University in Boston.



Kate Ditewig-Morris, senior instructor and director of the department’s internship program, won a Campus Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award for her innovation in undergraduate instruction and her contributions to undergraduate learning outside of the classroom. Ditewig-Morris said that one of the greatest joys of her life is working with

students. They “remind me of what it is to be young and brilliant and hungry for life,” she said. She’s also thankful for her colleagues in the Department of Communication, who “support and inspire me through their greatness to do my best work.”



Teaching associate professor **Grace Giorgio** won the 2021 King Broadrick-Allen Award given by the Campus Honors Program. The award honors a faculty member who has made significant contributions to the mission of the Campus Honors Program at Illinois. Giorgio directs the department’s Oral and

Written Communication courses as well as teaches courses in gender communication, communicating public policy, and communication and popular culture. She has taught communication courses in the Campus Honors Program since 2012. Giorgio enjoys bringing ideas from the discipline to students in the program, who come from majors all across campus. This group of students, she said, is “inquisitive, dedicated to learning, and produce creative and academically rigorous research projects. They are also a lot of fun to be around!”



Associate professor **Lisa Guntzville** won the College of LAS Dean’s Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. The Dean’s Award highlights excellence in undergraduate instruction from an instructor within the college’s tenure system. Dr. Guntzville teaches courses in interpersonal communication and health

communication. She’s grateful to her students for their “engagement and excitement about communication.” Hearing students’ stories about how class concepts connect to their lives and working with them one-on-one, she said, makes teaching at Illinois “a fun and rewarding experience.”

This year the Department of Communication celebrates the tenth anniversary of the Health Communication Online Master of Science program. HCOM, as the program is known, is a two-year online program that helps students evaluate communication practices in patient-provider relationships, health organizations, and the media. Most students who enroll in the program are professionals already working in the health care industry in some capacity. The HCOM program was founded by the late Professor **Dale Brashers**. Program Coordinator Dr. **Lauren Weiner** feels that Brashers' legacy lives on in the program. "Many students ask me what makes this program unique from other programs," she said, "and I always consider the culture of the program to be a product of the spirit of what went into building it— a spirit that endures to this day." The program also owes a debt to Professor **John Lammers**, who served as its first director and shepherded the program through its early stages as one of two pilot online master's programs at the university. At launch, the program enrolled ten students; this fall, upwards of twenty-five will enter. A small cohort size helps keep instruction quality high, Weiner said, and it also helps provide

opportunities for one-on-one mentoring. The current HCOM Director, Professor **Brian Quick**, agrees. "Teaching in HCOM is wonderful," he said. "Our students continue to amaze me with how they make meaningful connections between the theories discussed in class and their working environments. Our discussions are really fun and engaging, and I look forward to each and every opportunity I have to work with our HCOM students."

Students value the flexibility of the program, as well as the opportunities it affords for building relationships with professors and other students in the program. Weiner says that students tell her they've made close friends through the program, and many say that they feel that sense of belonging long after they've graduated. The HCOM program is valued not only for the connections students make, but also for the high-quality training they receive while they're enrolled. "We critically examine major problems in health care in each of our courses," Weiner said, "and teach students how to assess and evaluate systems and procedures to find breakdowns in communication and enact solutions to those issues." Students are encouraged to take what they're learning beyond the classroom and apply it to issues, concerns, and

problems that they encounter in the world around them. Weiner recalled a student who told her that learning in HCOM was like finding a flashlight to illuminate a walk through the dark. "To say the program has been 'illuminating' would be accurate," the student wrote, "but also an understatement." Weiner agrees. "It's a beautiful thing to see the relationships that grow out of the work in HCOM. It's without a doubt one of my favorite parts of working with these students."

As the program begins its second decade, the future of the Health Communication Online Master of Science program is bright. Administrators in the program look forward to becoming part of the solution to the disparities, misunderstandings, and unequal treatment that may arise in health care settings. "In HCOM, the worlds of research,

practice, and patient care collide all the time,"

Weiner said, and those collisions can prompt larger positive changes throughout health care. Changes are coming for HCOM, as well. The program is planning to extend opportunities for non-degree-seeking students to become familiar with health communication, and the program also plans to host a webcast series called "Conversations in Health Communication"

that will feature scholars from different realms of health care and health communication research. The program also hosts the annual Dale Brashers Memorial Lecture each spring, a free educational event open to the public. It honors Brashers' legacy as a pioneering health communication scholar. Next spring, Dr. Gary Kreps of George Mason University will give the 2022 Dale Brashers Memorial Lecture. Kreps is an internationally recognized expert in public health communication.

In our changing world, more challenges undoubtedly lie ahead for connecting patients to the quality care that they need. Educational programs like HCOM go a long way toward answering those challenges and making a healthier future for all of us.





DEPT. OF COMMUNICATION INVITES YOU

Undergrad Research Spotlight

The Department of Communication hosted its first annual Undergraduate Research Spotlight this past spring.

Held virtually via Zoom, the event was designed so that undergraduates who have participated in departmental research projects had an opportunity to share publicly what they learned. Students reflected on their research experiences as well as gave formal presentations on their own research findings before taking questions from audience members. Projects spanned a wide variety of topics, from interpersonal, organizational, and health communication to media studies. The event was spearheaded by doctoral student **Luisa Ruge-Jones** with the aid of Professor **Cara Finnegan** and doctoral student **Sarah Julien-Bell**. Ruge-Jones also coordinates the department's Mentoring Through Research and Practice (MTRP) program, which matches doctoral students with undergraduates who want to learn how to conduct communication research. In 2020-21, thirty-eight undergraduates participated in the mentoring program, and fifteen of those students presented their research at the first annual research spotlight.

For students, the spotlight is a venue for showcasing their hard work while also helping them develop real-world skills with broad applicability to their lives.

Providing undergraduates with a forum for talking about their research in public helps students practice communicating complex ideas, a tangible skill they can take into their future careers. Some MTRP students have already taken their research beyond our campus, like **Alana Leonhard** (BA, '21). Leonhard, whose graduate student mentor was doctoral student **Lindsay Kelpinski**, presented her research on "Small Talk in the Patient-Provider Context" at the Undergraduate Research Spotlight. Later, she shared that work at a campus-wide undergraduate research symposium and her work will also be a part of a presentation at the National Communication Association's annual convention.

Ruge-Jones considers the MTRP program valuable because it "works to foster research capacity for undergraduates and builds community through engaged scholarship between undergraduate researchers, graduate students, faculty, and staff," she said. "It's one of many ways we are working to bring people together and enhance our shared experiences as communication scholars and practitioners."

RETIREMENTS:

Lammers, Strum

Two beloved members of our department retired this past spring: **John Lammers** and **Mary Strum**.



Professor **John Lammers**, who arrived at the University of Illinois in 2000, dedicated his career to the study of health and organizational communication. His research focuses on the impact that institutional influences have on communication within organizations. He served for ten years as director of the department's Health Communication Online Master of Science Program (HCOM). He has relocated to Iowa City, Iowa, where he has joined his spouse Barbara Wilson in her new role as president of the University of Iowa.



Mary Strum, who spent more than two decades in service to the department, has also retired. Among her many departmental roles, Strum served as the department's graduate program office coordinator. In that role, she coordinated all aspects of the graduate student experience in the department, from the application process all the way to graduation and dissertation deposit. Strum plans to travel to visit family around the country and spend as much time as she can with her grandchildren.

The department will miss both of these wonderful colleagues and we are immensely thankful for their decades of service!

FALL 2021

Communication Newsletter

Editor: Cara Finnegan
Writer: John Moist
Editorial Support: Colleen Kling

Department of Communication
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
702 S. Wright St., MC-456
Urbana, IL 61801
communication@illinois.edu
hcom.illinois.edu

-  [Facebook.com/IllinoisComm](https://www.facebook.com/IllinoisComm)
-  [Twitter.com/IllinoisComm](https://twitter.com/IllinoisComm)
-  [Linkedin.com/groups/University of Illinois Department of Communication](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/University-of-Illinois-Department-of-Communication)

Produced by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences Office of Communications and Marketing

75 YEARS
DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNICATION
1947-2022



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES
3001 Lincoln Hall | 702 S. Wright St. | Urbana, IL 61801

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #75
Champaign, IL

Invest in the Future of the Department of Communication

You can make a gift to the department online, by phone, or by connecting with associate director of development, **Joseph Baldwin**, by calling (217) 300-5967 or emailing him at jbbaldw2@illinois.edu.



You can designate your gift to:

- Building the Future for Communication Students Scholarship Fund
- Communication Annual Fund, which supports an array of activities
- Robert L. Husband Leadership in Communication Fund
- Joseph Wenzel Undergraduate Support Fund
- Thomas Conley History of Rhetoric Award
- Ruth Anne Clark Student Scholar Award Fund
- Dale Brashers Memorial Fund

You can also boost your gift:

See if your company is listed as one that has a matching gift program (some even double or triple your gift).

Ensure continued excellence in teaching, research, and public engagement by supporting the Department of Communication with a gift!

Give Online

Visit our website at communication.illinois.edu and click on the **Give!** button.

Got Internships?

Communication students are eager for real-world experience. We offer our students course credit for interning with organizations that put them to work in a supervised learning setting. Employers who partner with us report that they benefit from our students' communication skills and gain from evaluating the on-the job performance of potential employees. Communication interns are eager to apply what they have learned to the work world. If you have internships to offer or would like more information, please contact **Kate Ditewig-Morris** via email: comm-internships@illinois.edu.