

# DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION



## Building Communities of Communication for 75 Years: the department celebrates a milestone anniversary

By Bryan Reckard and Wallace Golding, doctoral students in communication

**75** YEARS  
DEPARTMENT OF  
COMMUNICATION  
1947-2022

The 2022-23 academic year marks the 75th anniversary of the Department of Communication. We are celebrating by hosting several events and activities throughout the year, and we

would love for you to join us as we celebrate the stories, history, and continued vibrancy of the department.

### Modest beginnings

The department has a long and storied history as one of the top communication departments in the nation. While rhetoric and public speaking had been taught at the university since the late 19th century, it was not until after the Second World War that a standalone department was created. Courses in public speaking and rhetoric had been offered in the Department of English's division of public speaking, but by 1947, the field of communication was establishing itself nationwide, especially at land grant universities. At Illinois, it had become too complex to house communication courses within an English department. In March of that year, the University of Illinois Board of Trustees authorized "the establishment of a new Department of Speech in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences." Courses from the English department were reassigned to the newly formed Department of Speech. Dr. Karl R. Wallace was hired away from the University of Virginia's School of Speech and Drama and appointed as the first head of the new department.

The department's early list of courses looked quite different from what is offered today. During the department's first year, more than 20 courses were offered, ranging from Speech I and Voice Improvement to Fundamentals of Acting and Methods of Teaching Lip Reading. Undergraduates had the option of majoring or minoring in Speech, while graduate students could choose between courses as diverse as Seminar in Play Directing, Seminar in Speech Science, or History of Rhetorical Theory. With new departmental status also came the ability to offer a doctoral degree in speech. The department awarded its first doctoral degree to George Washington Cartwright in 1951.

### A tradition of excellence

In the last 75 years, the department has had several different names, each of which reflected changes in the discipline itself, including the Department of Speech, Department of Speech and Theater, Department of Speech Communication, and, now, the Department of Communication. Despite various transitions in the department's name and scholarly emphases, the department's faculty and students have dependably excelled in research and teaching. "Unlike many departments around the country that have chosen a narrow focus (e.g., specializing in only humanistic or social science perspectives), we have continued to be a broad department, incorporating new topics and ever-changing methods while still highlighting ageless lessons and questions," department head John Caughlin said. "That mix of leading to the future while simultaneously relying on and teaching accumulated wisdom is a hallmark of our department culture, and I believe it will continue to serve us well for the next 75 years."

Consistently ranked among the top communication programs in the nation, the department has been home to four university scholars (the university's top honor for faculty who excel in the combination of teaching, research, and service), and faculty and graduate students have earned 44 teaching excellence awards. Faculty have also been awarded numerous national research and career awards for their contributions to the field.

Today, the department continues to lead the field in research and teaching, and its graduates reflect the high standards of excellence the department is known for. In a recent post-graduation survey, 90 percent of 2021 communication graduates reported securing their first destination for employment and graduate schools, and department alumni can be found working in varied communication occupations around the world. "The traditions of excellence have carried through many decades," said Barbara Hall, who was hired as the department's first full-time undergraduate academic advisor in 1988 and retired in 2018 after 30 years. "Alumni have gone on to make us proud, regardless of the degree they have earned. They have found success in a broad range of life endeavors, whether it be for profit or nonprofit, and in a variety of work environments."

*Continued on page 2*

# From the department head, John Caughlin

## Greetings from Lincoln Hall!



John Caughlin

I am writing these remarks as a new school year is about to begin. The campus is active with students moving in, and we can hear the band practicing. We are busy getting offices and computers ready for our new faculty (who you can learn about in this newsletter). There is still a lot to do, but I am confident that we will be ready for another great year.

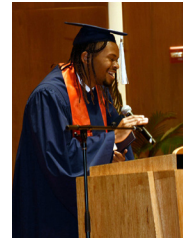
We have the added excitement this year of celebrating our 75th year as a department. You can learn more about that in this newsletter.

This time of year is always primarily about looking forward, but taking a moment to look back at the past year is incredibly gratifying. We went into the 2021-22 school year with a lot of uncertainty, and that uncertainty followed us throughout the year as we re-learned how to work in a new kind of environment.

One anecdote exemplifies the experiences we had this past year. Our spring convocation was our first one in person since 2019, and we worked hard to remember everything so the ceremony would be the professional event that our new graduates deserved. Our alumni speaker, Shayla Maatuka, and our student speaker, Trisha Bhagat, both did excellent jobs making meaningful remarks. Nobody tripped over their gowns trying to get on or off the stage.

We traditionally end our convocation by singing the alma mater (“Hail to the Orange”), but as we waited for the music

to start, we heard only silence. After a few nervous looks, it became clear that the music was not coming. Then, one of our new graduates, Sheldon Adams, hurried onto the stage, announced that there was no cause for worry because he used to be a music major, and then led us in the most memorable version of the alma mater I have experienced. The picture accompanying this letter is Sheldon leading us.



Sheldon Adams

That was typical of the last year. Things often did not go as planned, but we had so many people step up in ways that made things better than we would have planned.

We also had some losses this year, including the passing of our wonderful colleague Joseph Wenzel. His positive influence on the department and so many alumni cannot be overstated. You can read more about Professor Wenzel in this newsletter.

Yet through all the surprises and setbacks this year, we received invaluable support from alumni and remarkable contributions from students, staff, and faculty. I expect the next year to be more of the same. We cannot predict exactly how it will develop, but I am confident that we will have another year focused on stepping up and ensuring that our students have the quality of experiences expected from Communication at Illinois.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter. I appreciate you reading it. As always, if you have questions about the department or just want to reconnect, please feel free to reach out. We always like hearing from our alumni and other friends. Best wishes on a great remainder of 2022 and wonderful 2023.

## Milestone anniversary, *continued from page 1*

### Celebrating 75 years

The theme of our anniversary year is “Communities of Communication,” chosen to represent the diversity of our faculty, staff, students, and alumni. In October, the department welcomed back nearly a dozen alumni for a virtual Alumni Career Panel, where communication majors were given a chance to hear from professionals in occupations related to law, the nonprofit sector, marketing and communications, the health care industry, and other fields. Beyond demonstrating the department’s influence on students and highlighting the diverse and impactful work of alumni, the career panel proved a valuable learning tool for current students. Alumni advised undergraduates on how they might prepare for the professional world and spoke about trends in the communication field, including challenges and opportunities they will encounter when they graduate.

In spring 2023, the department will gather faculty, graduate students, and alumni of the graduate program for a two-day research symposium in Lincoln Hall that will be livestreamed

and open to the public. The 75th Anniversary Communication Research Symposium will include four research presentations by alumni of the department’s graduate program whose work reflects the depth and breadth of scholarship in the field. To cap off the event, participants will be invited to celebrate the department’s anniversary together during a closing reception. “The timing for the 75th anniversary couldn’t be better,” said Professor Ned O’Gorman, chair of the 75th Planning Committee. “After a rough couple of years due to COVID-19, we are getting to spend the year celebrating the accomplishments of our faculty, students, and alumni. It will be special.”

The department will also host an online storyboard and timeline featuring memories from alumni, faculty, and staff. We invite you to share your memories with us. You can find the link for the storyboard on the department’s homepage, [communication.illinois.edu](http://communication.illinois.edu). The site is currently running and will be accepting individual memory submissions to be published and posted to the 75th anniversary memory wall until May 1, 2023.

# Doctoral students win campus fellowships

**A number of doctoral students have won campus fellowships to support their research.**

**Nicole Campbell** was awarded a Humanities Research Institute (HRI) Interseminars Fellowship as part of a new HRI initiative exploring the theme, “Imagining Otherwise.” Campbell will work on a project examining the rhetoric of anti-prison activists and will collaborate with other fellows to plan a community symposium for fall 2023. See page 5 for more information on the HRI Interseminars initiative.

**Daniel DeVinney** was named a Humanities Research Institute Fellow, which will support his work on his dissertation project “The Post-Racial Imaginary: Visual Logics of Race in the Obama and Early Trump Eras.” DeVinney’s project aims to uncover the visual infrastructures that guided ideas about race during the Obama and Trump years.

**Victoria Fields** was awarded a Humanities Without Walls Summer Bridge Fellowship, which invites doctoral students to

work collaboratively with organizations in their community. In summer 2022, Fields worked with the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District’s Equity Council to help address racism and dismantle systems of oppression in healthcare.

**Sarah Julien-Bell** and **Shana Makos** were each awarded a Marion Morse Wood Fellowship, which supports research in interpersonal communication. Julien-Bell’s project, “Information Provision of Embodied Knowledge in the Physical Therapist-Patient Relationship,” will study how physical therapists understand the verbal and nonverbal messages patients use to communicate different forms of embodied knowledge, including pain. Makos’s project, “More Than Just Fitness: Developing an Interpersonal Theory of Community in CrossFit,” will use a variety of methods to develop an interpersonal theory of community by exploring the role of interpersonal communication in how CrossFit athletes define, experience, and construct community in their gyms.

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## Thompson builds network with College of Medicine

*By Wallace Golding*



Associate professor **Charee Thompson** is bridging disciplines through ongoing collaboration with the Carle Illinois College of Medicine, the world’s first engineering-based medical school. Through several studies that include physicians, other faculty, and medical residents, Thompson and her colleagues seek to improve health outcomes for people disenfranchised in healthcare because of

their identity or types of illnesses.

When Thompson joined the department in 2018 from Ohio University, she was introduced to several researchers at Carle, who quickly began partnering with her. Since then, she has designed and run studies investigating everything from implicit bias in medicine to patient-provider communication, all to the tune of more than \$240,000 in grant money. These studies, Thompson says, would not have been possible without her colleagues at the medical school. “There’s an ethos of collaboration between Carle and the school that helps cultivate these relationships and important work.”

Still, a communication perspective was vital to creating and sustaining this network of researchers. According to Thompson, her communication training naturally lends itself to work with experts outside her field, and those relationships make multidimensional research possible. “My training has well-equipped me to work transdisciplinarily,” she said. “We’re doing more than working across. We’re creating something new.” According to Wael Mostafa, a neurosurgeon and researcher at Carle Foundation Hospital and a close collaborator of Thompson’s, she “adds another important perspective to the

research questions at hand.” That perspective, Mostafa argues, was instrumental to broadening the scope of research and securing funding.

And those collaborations have produced important findings. Recently, Thompson and her colleagues found that patients’ perceptions of their own communication competence are just as important as their perception of their doctors’ communication competence in terms of managing their own pain and uncertainty. In other words, when patients leave the doctor believing they did not communicate well with their physicians, they have a more difficult time managing their pain. In another project, Thompson and others are building a virtual reality-based implicit bias training program for medical residents. An additional project investigates how communication helps and hurts long-term outcomes of pediatric conditions.

Thompson routinely brings graduate students onto her projects and invites them to participate in a collaborative environment. Graduate students in particular often find it difficult to become involved in collaborations like Thompson’s. Recognizing this, she insists that her research be a space of opportunity for other campus and community stakeholders. “It’s important to me that I help those we are training get opportunities they wouldn’t otherwise have,” Thompson said. “And we’re not just creating space for communication students, but also medical students, practitioners, and people across campus and in our community with different experience and expertise.” Thompson views her success as an opportunity to train young researchers and connect communication scholarship to the broader campus and community.

# Remembering Joseph Wenzel

By Wallace Golding

Professor emeritus Joseph (Joe) Wenzel died in Champaign in December 2021. Wenzel was a respected scholar, teacher, leader, and mentor, and an important member of our community for many decades. He was twice an alumnus of the University of Illinois, having received his bachelor's degree and doctorate from what was then the Department of Speech and Theater. Wenzel taught at Hunter College in New York for three years before returning to Illinois as an assistant professor in 1963. He spent the remainder of his academic career at Illinois, retiring in 1999.

Wenzel dedicated his career to the study of argumentation and rhetoric and made many important contributions to the field through his scholarship. His work was groundbreaking, according to Dale Hample, an Illinois alumnus (MA, '72; PhD, '75) and student of Wenzel. His graduate seminars asked students to "integrate argumentation with the then-new work on interpersonal communication, conversational structure, pragmatics, Habermasian philosophy, and cognitive psychology," Hample wrote in a remembrance of Wenzel shared by the National Communication Association. "We did all this together, under Wenzel's generous invitation and sharp questioning."



Joseph (Joe) Wenzel

During his time at Illinois, Wenzel directed 17 master's theses and doctoral dissertations and served on dozens of doctoral committees. Most of the students who worked with him went on to productive and important academic careers of their own. His lasting impact is in no small part a result of his unique approach to teaching. According to Hample, "Joe Wenzel was a most extraordinary teacher, a thing hard to document but unmistakable in person. Few professors could even organize a course with the breadth of Wenzel's, and even fewer could have genuinely stimulated so many lines of thought at once."

Wenzel's teaching record is littered with awards and accounts from former students and colleagues of his impact on them. Wenzel won the Campus Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, the highest award available to tenured and tenure-track faculty on campus, in 1977, and he was instrumental in developing and designing new courses in the department. He worked closely with undergraduate

students in his roles as Director of Forensics (1963-1968), Director of Undergraduate Studies (1974-1978), and Director of Verbal Communication (1994-1999). He also volunteered to coach forensics for far longer than his directorship and to coach the university's Mock Trial Team, even long after his retirement. For his students, the latter were "truly transformative informal learning opportunities," according to professor emerita Ruth Anne Clark.

His multiple stints as the department's associate head and director of graduate studies are further testament to the spirit of service Wenzel brought to the field and his academic home. Wenzel was an exceptional department citizen and was always willing to help his colleagues succeed by doing "the jobs that are essential to the functioning of the group but are probably no one's life's ambitions or top priority," Clark said. "I am confident that no member of the department has ever been more generous with personal time than Joe was. Joe's very essence was that of a team player."

Those close to Wenzel admired his humor and kindness, both in and out of professional settings. His commitment to service was part of a larger dedication to being in community with others, and that entailed more than work alone. For Hample, Wenzel embodied "generosity, pointed intelligence, practical wisdom, and a genuine fondness for me and many other people." Clark shared similar thoughts. "Joe, other colleagues, and I shared many ballroom lunches where we discussed departmental business, exchanged stories about our children and grandchildren, and enjoyed each other's company," Clark said. "Joe helped make coming to campus something I looked forward to every day."

We are grateful for Wenzel's nearly 40 years of service to the department. He was present for many transitions and a few name changes, and that the Department of Communication remains strong today is in no small measure thanks to his service, generosity, and commitment to community. "His legacy of serving the department and students is unsurpassed," according to department head John Caughlin. After attending Wenzel's celebration of life, Caughlin noted, "what struck me the most was the attendees and speakers were not only recalling fond memories of Joe, but they were demonstrating a real community of people he inspired. He was, of course, an internationally-renowned scholar and fantastic teacher, but I cannot think of a more impressive legacy than the enduring bonds and affection he fostered among so many."

# Bringing a communication perspective to innovative humanities initiative

By Wallace Golding



After a campus-wide competition that drew proposals from humanities and arts faculty across campus, associate professor **J. David Cisneros** and two other colleagues won the opportunity to co-lead an innovative new interdisciplinary humanities initiative on campus. Interseminars ask scholars from across campus to engage in interdisciplinary work within a common theme. Cisneros and two others, Patrick Earl Hammie and Jorge Lucero, both from the School of Art & Design, crafted a theme titled “Imagining Otherwise: Speculation in the Americas,” which was selected as the first of three Interseminars projects.

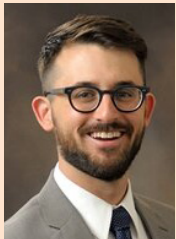
Collectively, the three projects, which will run consecutively from 2022 to 2025, are funded by a \$2 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and managed by the Humanities Research Institute. These funds will allow co-leaders and participants to collectively design programming specific to the project theme and create community-facing events. “Imagining Otherwise” asks participants to consider speculation as a way of looking differently at the world to both assess its status quo and to imagine how it could be different.

The program’s interdisciplinary focus pushes participants to think outside their disciplinary training and approach their research questions through different lenses. The core goal of the initiative, according to Cisneros, is to “learn how to work and talk together from very different disciplinary perspectives to solve some of our era’s defining issues.” That vision is shared by Humanities Research Institute director Antoinette Burton. “The creative energies and intellectual commitments we see in the first Interseminars cohort point to something we know but rarely have the opportunity to see at work: that is, the vital links between interdisciplinary graduate teaching and groundbreaking collaborative research in the humanities and arts,” Burton said. Communication is a natural fit for a program like this, Cisneros argues, because the field brings “a pragmatic social vision” to issues of social justice. “We need communication scholars and others to work together, but the initiative also asks academics like me to question our affinity for pragmatism.”

The grant provides funding for up to eight graduate fellowships per year. After Cisneros’s team was selected, they created their own competitive application process to select students to receive fellowships. One of them was won by communication doctoral student **Nicole Campbell**. Already, she is seeing the benefits of the Interseminars approach. “Discussing one topic and hearing the perspectives of other participants gives a fuller picture of the question in a way we do not get if we remain siloed in our own disciplines,” Campbell said. “By asking us to think through the limitations of disciplinary learning, we are asked also how we, in different disciplines, can help each other.” (Learn more about how Campbell’s research is supported by this fellowship on page 3.)



# Barley wins college teaching award



Associate professor **Will Barley** won a 2022 College of Liberal Arts & Sciences Dean's Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. The Dean's Award highlights teaching excellence in undergraduate instruction by tenured or tenure-track faculty. Barley, who joined the department in 2014, teaches courses in organizational communication, focusing on the ways different organizations use technologies for collaboration. He has also mentored undergraduate students through his research team. "I am so flattered to have been nominated and selected for this award," Barley said. "Knowing that my teaching has made a difference in the lives of my students has reinvigorated me to continue being the best instructor I can."

## Department welcomes new faculty, staff

The Department of Communication is excited to welcome six new faculty and staff who have joined us in the past year:



**George Alberti** joined the department this fall as an instructor for public speaking after having served in our department for three semesters as a teaching assistant for the course in both face-to-face and online formats. A musician by training, Alberti holds a bachelor's degree from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a master's degree from

Texas Christian University. He is working on a doctorate of musical arts at Illinois. He is also a private studio instructor for trombone, euphonium, and tuba.



**Leanne Cunningham** joined the department this fall as an instructor and director of the department's internship program and career resources. Leanne earned her bachelor's degree in our department, holds a master's degree in organizational communication from Suffolk University, and most recently taught at Parkland College. Throughout her

career she has taught courses in business communication, public speaking, and interpersonal communication. In addition, she brings valuable work experience to her role as internship director, having worked for nonprofits and as an independent trainer, speaking coach, and communication consultant. She will teach courses in our business communication curriculum.



**Frank Gallo** began this fall as a lecturer for the department's public speaking course. Gallo earned an undergraduate degree from Duquesne University, a master's degree from Shenandoah University, and a doctorate from the University of Hartford. A trained singer, choral conductor, and vocal music teacher, Gallo has served as an adjunct professor of

music at Parkland College, Lakeland University, and Holy Family

College. In 2020, his teaching talents were recognized by the State of Illinois Outstanding Adjunct Faculty of the Year Award.



**Minkyung Kim** joined the department this fall as an assistant professor. Kim received her PhD from Rutgers University. Her research explores how organizations facilitate positive community-wide impact in response to local problems and focuses specifically on how nonprofit organizations' communication practices promote engagement and

empowerment within the communities they serve. Kim teaches courses in organizational communication and its impacts on various communities.



**Morgan Klajbor-Smith** joined the department last spring as an undergraduate academic advisor after working in the Department of Computer Science at Illinois. Klajbor-Smith works with the department's undergraduate majors and minors to place them in courses across campus relevant to their goals, explore their interests, and reach

graduation successfully. She brings a wealth of experience working with diverse undergraduate students to our department.



**Michelle Malloch** joined the department as its graduate program office administrator last spring after working on campus for the Department of Clinical Veterinary Medicine and the Department of Material Science and Engineering. Malloch works closely with graduate students to ensure they have the resources they need. She also assists in

planning and hosting annual department events, including Welcome Weekend, the department's major graduate recruitment event.

# Ditewig-Morris, Poole retire



**Kate Ditewig-Morris**, senior instructor and director of the department's internship program since 2014, entered a phased retirement this past summer. Ditewig-Morris spent three decades as a corporate communication practitioner and manager specializing in executive-level strategic communication before completing her master's degree in the department and joining the faculty. A 2021 recipient of the Campus Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching,

Ditewig-Morris brought her real-world professional experiences to courses in Business Communication, Interviewing, and Oral and Written Communication. Kate has relocated to Eugene, Ore., with her husband Scott.

**M. Scott Poole**, David L. Swanson Professor of Communication, retired last spring after a distinguished career dedicated to the study of organizational and group communication. During his time at Illinois, Poole served also as a senior research scientist at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, director of I-CHASS: the Institute for Computing in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, and as a visiting professor at Vrije University in Amsterdam. Poole is the recipient of two of the discipline's highest honors, having been named an International Communication Association Fellow in 2004 and a National Communication Association Distinguished Scholar in 2005.



The department will miss both of these wonderful colleagues, and we are immensely thankful for their years of service.

**FALL 2022**


## Communication Newsletter

Editor: Cara Finnegan  
Writer: Wallace Golding

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)

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## Alumna Hale establishes international travel fund

*By Wallace Golding*

Claudia Hale, a two-time department alumna (MA, '73; PhD, '76) and professor emerita at Ohio University, has established a fund to support international research opportunities for graduate students studying in any area within the Department of Communication. Graduate students are often unable to afford travel to conduct research abroad. Hale's gift will help open more possibilities for this work while keeping the Illinois tradition alive around the globe.

The gift was influenced by Hale's own experience after leaving Illinois. While teaching interpersonal communication and conflict management at Ohio University, she found herself working with more international students than she had in the past. In order to work effectively with this group, she sought to change her approach to teaching and research. "I needed to acknowledge that my understanding of communication was largely bounded by my background as a white woman and a Westerner," Hale said. "I benefited tremendously from my interactions with all of my students, but especially those who approached the subject matter from a different world experience."

Hale hopes her gift will allow graduate students at Illinois whose research interests extend beyond the U.S. border to immerse themselves in the cultural and communicative

practices of the regions they study. "If I had enjoyed such an opportunity for international research earlier in my career, I'm not sure how or if things would have changed, but if I can help someone else think about communication and its challenges on a more global scale, I am happy to do so," Hale said. According to department head John Caughlin, the fund "will provide important opportunities and possibilities that our students otherwise would not have had."

The fund has already made an impact. Earlier this year, doctoral student Lauren Seitz spent three months in France studying its 2022 presidential election, the subject of her dissertation. Her presence in France added detail that would have been impossible to replicate from looking at speech transcripts alone. "Being in the crowds during rallies and talking with French people about their political perspectives helped me better understand the audience of French politicians, as well as the political participation of French citizens I witnessed," according to Seitz. "And my own lived experience as I was in the audience is important to understanding how political language worked in the moments I was studying." Seitz is grateful for the support provided by Dr. Hale's gift. "International travel's higher financial burden meant my research would not have been possible without gifts like these," Seitz said.



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

## Give Online

Visit our website at [communication.illinois.edu](http://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 **Leanne Cunningham** via email: [comm-internships@illinois.edu](mailto:comm-internships@illinois.edu).