

# COM GRAD NEWS



Newsletter for the Graduate Program in Communication  
at Illinois State University

## Coordinator's Corner

By Dr. Aimee Miller-Ott

I am happy to report that we have been back on campus since August and have had a somewhat regular (albeit masked) semester in Fell Hall. I thought for this issue, I'd let the grad students in our program tell the story of our semester. So I asked current students to describe their experiences back on campus this fall in one word or phrase.

Some students highlighted the joy of being back on campus, using words and phrases like *exciting*, *enriching*, *refreshing*, *energizing*, *amazing*, *fulfilling*, *rewarding*, and *love human connection*.

Acknowledging the challenges of a semester on campus after being away for so long, some shared sentiments like *exhausting*, *draining*, *overwhelming*, *stressful*, *tough*, and *nerve-racking*, all understandable feelings that I know I have felt this semester at one point or another.

There is no doubt that everyone, including faculty and staff, would agree with one student who wrote that this semester was an *adjustment*.

Truly highlighting the paradox of the semester, students wrote *stressful but great in some ways* and *an overwhelming yet long-awaited return to socialization*.

Lastly, one student wrote that they felt *grateful*. I too am grateful for many things -- the network of faculty, students, staff, and alumni who make our program so outstanding; the students who showed up in August ready to kick some butt and excel in coursework, research, assistantships, and service; the faculty who showed up for our students and for one another; the faculty, staff, and students who created support networks for one another.

I know that I am more than ready for winter break after this semester! I hope that you all have a wonderful holiday season that includes a lot of rest, love and joy, laughter and fun, gratitude, and good health. Cheers to the end of 2021 and to an amazing start to the new year for you all!

## IN THIS ISSUE

---

**WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP  
TO THIS FALL**

---

**FACULTY & STUDENT  
ACHIEVEMENTS**

---

**IMPORTANT FACULTY  
PRESENTATIONS**

---

**THE ONE & ONLY,  
MS. PATTY FRANZ**

---



# What We've Been Up To This Fall

## Professional Development Workshops

We held two professional development workshops this fall. The first, facilitated by Dr. Becky Hayes and Dr. Aimee Miller-Ott, focused on submitting to and attending academic conferences. The focus of the second workshop was applying to and succeeding in doctoral programs. Program alumni Dr. Samantha Shebib, Benjamin Lynn, and Divine Narkotey Aboagye shared their experiences and also gave advice to our current students about making the most of their time in our master's program.

Thank you to our alumni who always give their time and expertise! If you were a student in our program and would like to find ways to share your experiences and advice with our students, please contact Aimee Miller-Ott at [aeott@ilstu.edu](mailto:aeott@ilstu.edu).

## Research Presentations

At November's National Communication Association conference, several current and former grad program members presented their work, including faculty members John Baldwin, Lauren Bratslavsky, Byron Craig, Ashley Hall, John Hooker, Steve Hunt, Kevin Meyer, Aimee Miller-Ott, Cheri Simonds, Roth Smith, and Lindsey Thomas; current student Taylor Newswander; and alumni Lisa DeWeert, Samantha Dunn, Alex Kritselis, and Jared Worwood.



We also held a fall research colloquium, which provides an opportunity for faculty and students to talk about their current research with others in the program. Dr. Andrew Ventimiglia presented his work on *Cross and Crown™: Faith Brands and Trademarks in American Religion*. Zach Thornhill, a second year master's student, presented on his project with Dr. Hunt, titled *Competitive Debate in a Pandemic World: Analyzing the Effects of COVID-19 on Collegiate Debate*. We look forward to holding more of these colloquia in the spring.

## Civic Engagement on Campus and in the Community



The Center for Civic Engagement provides many important services and programs on campus and in the community, including but not limited to supporting in- and out-of-class learning experiences, facilitating Deliberative Dialogues on campus, running the Alternative Breaks program, and coordinating campus and community partners to register, educate, and mobilize ISU students to the ballot box for elections. Joshua Crockett, a first-year student in our master's program, is a graduate assistant in the ISU Center for Civic Engagement this year. In this role, Joshua is able to support civic education and political engagement on ISU's campus. He explained that he's "thrilled to be a part of the Voter Engagement Coalition and offer support to ISU's voter engagement efforts. When young people show up, get involved, and vote – people start to listen, and election outcomes start to reflect the priorities of young people across the country." This is just a fraction of the excellent work Joshua is doing in his GA position.

Joshua attended Heartland Community College for two years and then transferred to ISU in Fall 2019 and majored in political science and minored in Civic Engagement and Responsibility. He decided to seek a master's degree in COM because of "the versatility and diversity of learning outcomes offered to students" and the ability to gain a "holistic understanding of communication that may be applied to all facets of life and diverse industries." Joshua hopes to work in political communication after grad school. He considers the Center to be "the defining experience of my time as an Illinois State student." Joshua was recently elected to the Heartland Community College's Board of Trustees. On the board, he is able "to give back to the community that gave me so much." To learn more about the Center for Civic Engagement and Joshua's work at the Center, you can email Joshua at [vpsajrcrocl@ilstu.edu](mailto:vpsajrcrocl@ilstu.edu).

## Keeping Students Connected Through the GSA

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) held various in-person events to bring students together outside of class. They held a pizza party on Redbird Plaza in September. In October, GSA held a movie night to watch *Moonlight*. The GSA Board is currently planning a holiday social for December to help students de-stress around finals week. This year's board members are (pictured from left to right) Jennifer Zheng (President), Zach Thornhill (Event Coordinator), Tyler Martin (Treasurer), Isa Scaturro (Event Coordinator & Secretary), and Emily



Deppermann (First Year Representative). As Jennifer Zheng, GSA President, reflected on the Fall semester, "Our board had an awesome time planning the events this semester and is super excited for more events next semester!"



# Faculty & Student Achievements

## Faculty Awards

Congratulations to all graduate faculty members who have recently received awards and recognitions. Here is a selection of our faculty members and their achievements:

### Dr. John Hooker

- School of Communication Outstanding Tenure Track Service Award

### Dr. Megan Hopper

- School of Communication Outstanding Tenure Track Scholarship Award

### Dr. Aimee Miller-Ott

- College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Researcher Award
- Promotion to Full Professor
- School of Communication Outstanding Tenure Track Teaching Award

### Dr. Brent Simonds & Dr. Cheri Simonds

- BEA Festival of Media Arts Award of Excellence in the Instructional/Educational category

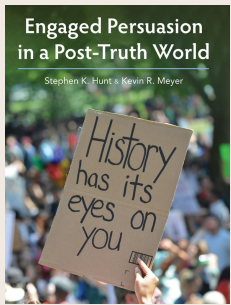
### Dr. Lindsey Thomas

- College of Arts and Sciences Excellence Award for Outstanding Scholarly Achievement - Pre-Tenure
- NCA Family Communication Division "Distinguished Journal Article Award"
- School of Communication Trifecta Award (exemplary in research/teaching/service)

### Dr. Joseph Zompetti

- Center for Civic Engagement Fellowship for 2022

## New Book on Persuasion by Drs. Hunt and Meyer



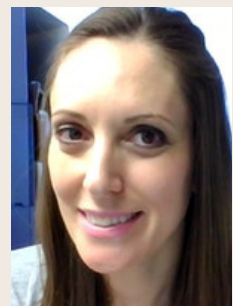
Congratulations to Dr. Steve Hunt and Dr. Kevin Meyer for their new book titled, *Engaged Persuasion in a Post-Truth World*, published by Cognella (cover of book, left). Dr. Hunt explained that the book, written for advanced undergrad and graduate students, is about “persuasion to advance the common good and restore a commitment to democratic values . . . it challenges readers to use persuasion theory to engage some of the most pressing issues of our time.” He said that no other book on the market addresses challenges of the post-truth era. Intended takeaways for the reader include “learning how to become an engaged citizen, understanding how to avoid and counter persuasive misinformation and disinformation, and becoming a more competent producer and consumer of persuasive messages.”

## Faculty-Graduate Student Research Collaborations

Faculty have been busy collaborating with students on research projects. Dr. Caleb Carr (pictured top right) and first year students Mary Katreeb and Temisa Godinez recently completed a project titled *Temporal Impacts of Social Media Faux Pas on Perceived Employee Hireability* that focused on how time impacts employers'/recruiters' perception of employees' employability and person-job fit when looking at social media faux pas. Their project is currently under review for possible presentation with the International Communication Association and for possible publication in *Media Psychology*.



Dr. Aimee Miller-Ott (picture bottom right) completed a project with second year student Evan Lobdell and a doctoral student at Arizona State University titled "*It Just Shifted Everything in Our Family Dynamic: Recalibration within the Family System in Response to Alzheimer's Disease*." They investigated the ways that participants enacted changes to the family system throughout a family member's Alzheimer's Disease. Their project is currently under review for possible presentation with the Central States Communication Association and for possible publication in the *Journal of Family Communication*.



Jacob Valov, a recent graduate from our program, had his debut academic publication in the *Journal of Media Psychology*. His article titled *An Explication of Identity Shift Theory: Getting Our Shift Together*, theorizes the processes by which individuals' self-statements online change how they see themselves. This project, led by Dr. Carr, was the outcome of collaboration with six other scholars and started while Mr. Valov was a graduate student here at ISU. Jacob is currently a Ph.D. student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Please consider contacting the faculty members who led the research teams for more information about their projects.



# Important Faculty Presentations

Dr. Joe Zompetti and Dr. Byron Craig shared their work with the ISU community this fall semester. Both professors spoke on relevant issues informed by their own research.

## The Deleterious Dynamics of Disinformation: Lessons from Post-Soviet Societies (Fall International Seminar Series Presentation)

During his presentation on October 13, Dr. Zompetti spoke about Russian disinformation campaigns in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia and how Russia, as well as China and Turkey, are already infiltrating information sources in the U.S. His goal of the talk was to "increase awareness to those at the lecture not only that this happening in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia but to explain that it's getting worse." Dr. Zompetti warns that people need to be more responsible in their consumption of media and social media, pointing out that "even mainstream media reports what is trending on social media." When asked to provide ways that people can protect themselves from disinformation, he offered the following:



- Diversify news sources (don't just rely on one source for all information)
- Do not fall prey to superficial consumptions of news, like a Tweet or a headline
- Probe more deeply into topics and information
- Fact check information a little

If you feel like you don't have time to do this with every news item or issue, Dr. Zompetti advised that in instances in which you are trying to figure out an issue that really matters to you or when you are making a major life or political decision, at least then be sure to invest more time in diversifying and increase the depth of your news consumption.

## Can America be Redeemed? 'Looking Up' At America's Past Through the National Memorial for Peace and Justice (African American Studies Fall Speaker Series)



Dr. Craig's presentation on November 5 addressed the question: How can the nation remember lynching in a way that can heal and redeem the American project of democracy? This talk was part of a larger project aimed to study "democracy's demons," which Dr. Craig explained as "locating moments of memory and/or memorials that are constitutive of a rhetoric that have always put what we claim is democracy in peril." The talk focused on the National Memorial on Peace and Justice, a site of memory at which people can "memorialize the victims of Lynching and mass incarceration, [but] we can also locate the way(s) in which we have responded to these moments of terror." At the end of the talk, Dr. Craig addressed "how we might, through

identifying these moments of anti-Black violence, find our way toward a different type of democracy." When asked to explain the main takeaways of the talk to the audience, Dr. Craig explained, "My hope was that I would offer an example of how to best, or at least in one way, engage with sites of memory. This would also, I hope, provide us with an empathic understanding of the horrors of violence, state-sanctioned and vigilante, when done on Black bodies in the U.S."



# So Long For Now but Not Good-Bye, Patty Franz



Patty Franz, a constant in the School of Communication for the past 23 years, 20 of those in our graduate program, is hanging up her administrative hat this fall and permanently retiring from the School. From processing all of those paper override forms to reaching out to students to make sure they have gloves and a coat for winter or remembered to sign up for university health insurance, Patty has made a significant impact on the School and will be greatly missed. I know that personally, in the past few years since becoming the program coordinator, Patty has been integral to making me feel welcome in this role. She has been a fantastic right-hand woman for me, and I will forever be grateful for all she has taught me, both as a colleague and friend.

Patty's plans for retirement include doing special projects about her home, spending time with her husband and children, reading, and volunteering. She also said that it would be good to "take off and visit grad students in every part of the United States." So if you hear a knock on your front door, it may be Patty stopping by for a visit!

Patty said that she will miss a lot about the School of Communication, including "faculty, grad students, and staff; our relationship talks and different opinions; the excitement of never having the same type of day; events like our Chili Cook-off; and working with TRANSFORMERS and Operation Santa."

There is no doubt that Patty has meant a lot to the program for many people. Here is just a fraction of what Patty has added to this program, in the words of some faculty and current and former graduate students:

"During my first year in the master's program, the GSA made t-shirts that said, "Keep calm and ask Patty" because, well, Patty knows just about everything! Question about your assistantship? Ask Patty. Question about registration? Ask Patty. Question about where to find an apartment in town? Ask Patty! Patty is integral to the success of the Communication master's program at ISU. She's a guiding light for graduate students—kind, genuine, and endlessly supportive. I am so, so grateful she's been a part of my grad school experience at ISU."

"As both a former graduate student and a current graduate faculty member within the SoC, I can confidently say that Patty is the foundation of our graduate program. The amount of support she provides our students and the graduate faculty is unparalleled and she will be greatly missed!"

"Patty is always kind! She genuinely cares about us and is always willing to help. My family is not from the U.S. and she always asks how they are doing. Love her positivity!!"

"Patty Franz has been an invaluable asset to the School of Communication. She has an unwavering commitment to our graduate students that lasts well beyond their time in our program. She has also been an innovator with civic engagement initiatives and she modernized our speech lab and textbook sales operations. Most important, she's been one of my most prized colleagues in the nearly 24 years I have been at ISU. Patty is amazing!"

Upon reflecting on her time in the School, Patty said: "I am BLESSED that I worked in the School of Communication with a wonderful group of people. I loved working with the grad students. This is why when I [first] retired, I came back. I will now keep updated on everyone on Facebook. Thank you all for not making this a job, but rather an enjoyable place to work."

**We were blessed to have you here, Patty! We will miss you.**

**We wish you every happiness that your life in retirement has to offer you, Jim, and your entire family.**

**If you are interested in making a gift to the graduate program or donating your time or resources, check out our website (<https://communication.illinoisstate.edu>) or reach out via email (Aimee Miller-Ott, Graduate Program Coordinator, [aeott@ilstu.edu](mailto:aeott@ilstu.edu))**