

InterCom

Spring 2024 | THE COLLEGE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS ALUMNI MAGAZINE



EMMIE THOMPSON

A Trailblazing SJMC Student and Student Body President Paving the Way for Change After 100 Years



**College of Information
and Communications**
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Spring 2024

**Welcomes New Director
Damion Waymer, Ph.D.**

"I see active, engaged students winning awards and alumni being recognized for their excellence. I'm joining an organization that has clear momentum and a clear track record for excellence."

MOSAIC AWARD WINNER



2023 Ad Team

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Alumni and Events that played crucial parts in the growth over the course of the J-school's 100 years.

FROM THE DEAN



A NOTE FROM THE DEAN

Tom Reichert

As we reflect on the past year, we note the College of Information and Communications continues to flourish and evolve — much of it due to good ol' perspiration and ingenuity, but also thanks to your enduring support and dedication.

In the face of challenges, we've witnessed remarkable achievements. Our students have delved into cutting-edge research, embraced innovation, and amplified their impact across various media and information landscapes. Our faculty's commitment to excellence has propelled us forward, fostering an environment where creativity and critical thinking thrive.

We continue to see growth at all levels. For example, we have a record number of students enrolled in our longstanding degree options, as well as in new degrees and exciting new coursework. At the master's level, our iSchool added a new online M.S. in Information Security and Cyber Leadership. It joins our relatively new M.S. in Data

Analytics and Communication degree offered jointly by both our schools. A new B.A. degree in sports media offered by the SJMC promises to be a popular option for students across campus. And our information science degree now has new track options for students such as user experience, cybersecurity and data analytics, among others.

We're also fortunate to have two new school directors. Lyda Fontes McCartin and Damion Waymer joined us this past summer and they are already making a positive impact. Both are bringing fresh perspectives to bear as they prepare their programs for upcoming national reaccreditation visits. They are accompanied by very talented new faculty and staff who joined us this year. See Waymer's profile within this issue.

The School of Journalism and Mass Communications celebrated a monumental milestone — its centennial. This historic occasion is not just a commemoration of 100 years of excellence but also a springboard into an exciting

future. Embracing the rapid advancements in technology, the J-school — and the college as a whole — are already integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into curriculum and research initiatives. This intersection of core competencies in journalism, librarianship, communication and AI will shape the next generation of information professionals, preparing them for the dynamic challenges of the industry.

Your continued involvement remains invaluable as we chart this new course. Join us in celebrating our rich history while embracing the transformative potential of new technology. Together, let us ensure that the next hundred years are marked by innovation, integrity, impactful storytelling and getting information to citizens so they can make good decisions for themselves and our society.

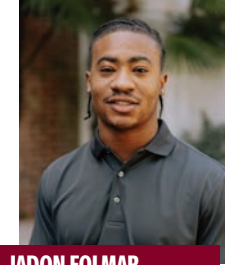
Forever to thee!

Tom Reichert
Tom Reichert

INTERCOM STAFF



HAYLEY DUNN



JADON FOLMAR



CECELIA HAGGAN



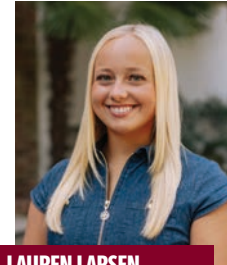
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EMILIE VIGLIOTTA



KENDALL WASE



MEET THE STAFF

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ITS ALL ABOUT FAMILY, FRIENDS, CO-WORKERS AND THE **SJMC** TO THE SPORTS BROADCASTER OF THE YEAR

“It’s going to be a great night,” Andrea Mock exclaimed to Chandler Mack before the South Carolina Broadcasters Association award ceremony.

Mock, Mack’s colleague at WLTX, was the emcee for the event. This particular night, Mack was awarded the South Carolina Broadcasters Association’s Sportscaster of the Year marking his second consecutive year as a nominee. Though his hopes were high, he was fully aware that he was competing against some exceptional sportscasters throughout the state, he said. Little did he know that this year would be his year to win.

“It was a different walk up to the stage from the past year when I was awarded 2nd place” Mack said, “It’s an incredible feeling to be recognized and honored for your hard work.”

His achievement had roots in a dream. With a family history filled with Gamecock Alumni, Mack felt drawn to pursue his passion at the University of South Carolina. He recognized that his love for sports couldn’t stay on the court, leading him to chase his sports passion in the newsroom.

After making this pivotal decision, Mack wasted no time in preparing himself for his career, dedicating his time outside the classroom to reporting for Student Gamecock Television, sports writing for ColaDaily, and participating in internships.

It was his internship at WLTX that set him on the path to where he stands today.

As Mack continues to work as a sports anchor and reporter at WLTX, he attributes much of his success to the unwavering support and encouragement of his family, friends, coworkers, and the J-school. They are the driving force that motivates him every single day.

— ElizaPearl Philpot, senior, public relations

“Seeing the evolution and growth of the J-school at USC made the decision to pursue my dream career there a no-brainer,” Mack says.

CONFETTI.



“I had the confetti from when South Carolina won the SEC Tournament last year, I have it from the championship when LSU won, so it became a cool thing where now I’m just a little confetti gremlin and keep it because it’s a cool memento,” Kimberly Elchlepp, SJMC public relations graduate and 2012 alumnae, said.

She even has some from the Gamecock women’s basketball 2022 national championship win. However, confetti isn’t Elchlepp’s only collection — she’s been collecting jobs and experiences as her career progressed — all starting back at the SJMC.

Her career began in Columbia, both at USC and in downtown Five Points. Elchlepp spent her undergraduate career balancing outside internships at the Ronald McDonald House and Flock and Rally, a local PR agency, with a job at Yesterday’s, where she spent five years cultivating relationships with the regulars at the now closed restaurant.

After graduating in 2012, Elchlepp decided on a whim to apply to grad school at Georgetown University, her acceptance arriving at the same time that one of her regular restaurant customers connected her with the head of PR for CNN in Washington, DC.

“We talked a few times,” Elchlepp said about the contact. “She said that I should apply for their internship, and I ended up staying on in a freelance kind of role. I would work at CNN all day, go to class at night. Honestly, I feel like I got just as much out of CNN as I did the grad program.”

However, her career plan was never news and politics, as Elchlepp was a sport and entertainment management minor while at USC. She applied to ESPN for a senior public

— Emilie Vigliotta, junior, public relations

relations position, and was instead offered a role as a content information and listings coordinator.

“I didn’t know what listings were, and I was like, how do you make a career out of this?”

Elchlepp says, “This is definitely one of those positions that you come in, do it for a couple of years, and then you move on to something else.”

That’s exactly what she did, taking advantage of the foot in the door. During her two years as listing coordinator, Elchlepp spent her free time knocking on doors, helping with sports show *His & Hers*, and taking advantage of every opportunity she spotted for professional growth.

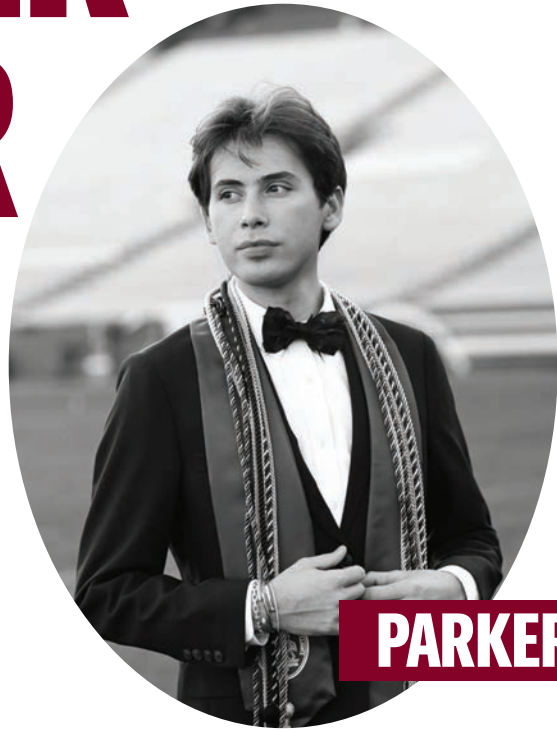
This visibility led her to a position as a senior publicist, starting on the college track and eventually managing seven or eight sports. “They had assigned a few things, but over the years, I collected teams as I went. It was very intentional,” Elchlepp says. “There’s no designated role for women’s sports at ESPN, I just sort of created it.”

Seeking a better work-life balance, Elchlepp started at Learfield Sports, a collegiate sports marketing company, in summer 2023. She continues to collect new experiences, balancing her 9 to 5 with a program for female entrepreneurs at Cornell University.

Eventually, Elchlepp imagines opening a PR agency focused on underserved talent and teaching as an adjunct back where her collection of careers and opportunities began — here at USC.

“I’m here today because of my experience in South Carolina,” she says.

POWER OF PR



PARKER METTS

Parker Metts, a 23-year-old recent graduate, credits his success in various industries to skills learned at SJMC.

Metts, SJMC public relations alumnus, has excelled in the workforce during college and after.

He managed both locations of *Miss Cocky* boutique, a game day fashion and apparel store in Columbia and Chapin, South Carolina. Now, he is a professional development associate at Unum International, a company offering comprehensive employee benefits through the workplace.

Metts began working at *Miss Cocky* boutique in high school and was promoted to a management position during his sophomore college year, when COVID-19 was having its greatest impact.

Later, he assisted the opening of the second location, managing both *Miss Cocky* locations before the age of 21. Metts translated skills he absorbed in class to his everyday life.

"In any type of situation that I've been involved in, if you have good communication skills and good people skills, you can always find a bridge to fix a situation, a crisis or help

someone's day get a little bit better," Metts says. Metts discussed the lack of understanding of the public

"People are always going to need someone that's a good communicator."

relations major and the questioning of its value, saying that it is versatile and useful to any area of work.

"I wish people would understand how you can really use all of these skills in the workforce."

His public relations communications skills learned as a SJMC student prepared him to work with a variety of people in any work environment, he says.

Metts believes that public relations plays an important role in every industry, and he wants others to see how communicators and writers can stand out and succeed in their careers.

— Kendall Wase, junior, public relations

EMBRACE *the* JOURNEY



Building Self Esteem Leads to Miss SC 2023



"It's all about showing girls that you can be different and you can be unique and still be someone that people not only look up to but also are drawn to." says 2018 J-school graduate Jada Samuel.

Samuel, Miss South Carolina 2023 is the founder of the nonprofit IShapeMe, a mentoring organization aimed at empowering young girls mentally, physically, and spiritually.

"I had my own personal struggles with self-esteem issues growing up," Samuel says. "I had really bad eczema. I had such a struggle with confidence."

IShapeMe focuses on curating a safe place for girls to have difficult conversations surrounding womanhood, self-esteem, and to get help navigating the struggles of being a teenage girl.

After she felt she had overcome her struggles, she wanted to hold an event to have conversations to empower and uplift the women in her community.

She began with the girls at her church, and planned a sleepover, bringing in guest speakers to talk with them and to provide a safe space for them to have these conversations.

"What was supposed to be 15 girls, ended up being over 75," Samuel said. "It let me know that there was a need to have these conversations."

Samuel says that her own journey began post-college. She's taken up pageantry and embraced who she is and her spoken word talent.

"I really tried to embrace that my journey may be different," says Samuel. "A lot of times we are often stuck in what our title is going to be, or stuck on how we present ourselves to the world. I try to let girls know that it's okay to be a multi-hyphenate in your community and career."

— Hayley Dunn, senior, public relations



HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

EMAIL J SCOTT PARKER AT
J.SCOTTPARKER@SC.EDU

COCKABOOSE KICKOFF

CIC alumni gathered outside Williams-Brice Stadium for a lively celebration and reunion on homecoming weekend, Saturday, October 14 – a Cockaboose event honoring 100 years of J-school education.

The university owns two of the very sought-after Cockabooses, rotating their use among the various colleges.

“With such a high demand, we started to inquire about using one of the two Cockabooses a whole year in advance,” Danielle McNaughton, alumni engagement coordinator, says. “The CIC was lucky enough to be chosen to utilize one of the Cockabooses, which is kind of a big deal.”

Festivities commenced three hours before kickoff against the Florida Gators. Centennial swag – customized rally towels, koozies, and miniature flags – were handed out to alumni, friends, and family at the celebration.

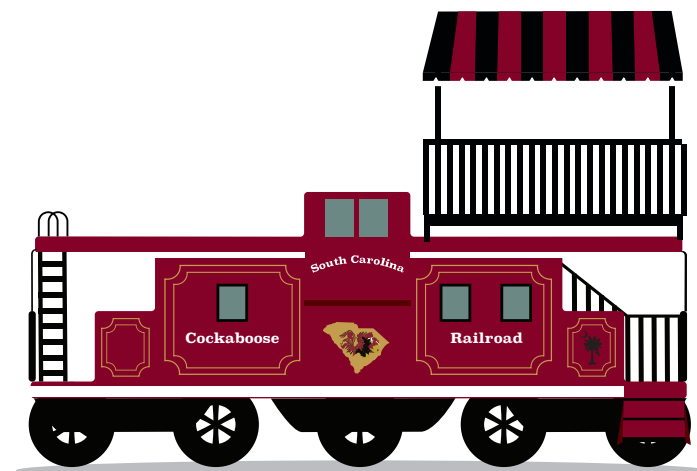
The party included a personalized performance by the Carolina Band and a special cheer from the Gamecock Cheerleaders as they passed by during the Gamecock Walk.

A delicious full tailgate menu, consisted of tasty treats including cotton candy, popcorn, a savory sausage bar, a variety of different chips and dips, and food from Horseshoe Catering.

Around 100 enthusiastic alumni and friends attended the centennial kickoff event. Old friends reconnected, some introducing each other to new additions to their families. Former president of the university Harris Pastides made an appearance, emphasizing the significance of the J-school centennial.

It was a day filled with unforgettable memories shared among alumni, spouses, children and old friends, recognizing the J-school's excellent education, and lasting connections between CIC alumni and friends.

— Mac Niedbalski, junior, public relations



JOINING THE RANKS OF THE PROFESSORS THAT INSPIRED HER



“There are days when I wear the faculty hat and days when I wear the alumna hat,” Public Relations Sequence Head and Senior Instructor Kelly Davis says.

Not only does Davis have two roles as alumna and instructor, she has received two awards, one named in honor of one of her professors, the Mary Caldwell Award for Excellence in Teaching, and the J-school Distinguished Alumni Award.

“Receiving this award during my campaigns class resonates with me because it is named after my old campaigns professor, Mary Caldwell. As we move through the semester, much of what I am going to teach is inspired by her,” Davis says.

At 23 years old, sitting at the front of her campaigns class, graduate student Kelly Davis listened intently to former J-school faculty member Mary Caldwell's lecture on evaluation being the most important part of a campaign.

Now, standing at the front of her own campaign class, Davis lectures while students eagerly take notes on her slide stating “evaluation is the most important part.”

Explaining Mary Caldwell's inspiration Davis made clear that the exceptional messages given during her days as a graduate student transfer into the teachings she includes today.

“Mary Caldwell was a mentor to me and continues to influence my teachings today,” says Davis. Davis teaches that campaigns have four parts, research, planning, implementation, and evaluation. As learned from Caldwell, Davis teaches that evaluation — where assessments are made of the entire process — is the most important phase of a public relations campaign.

Another of Davis' former professors - now turned colleague — Professor Emeritus Dr. Erik Collins — first recipient of the Mary Caldwell Award, stuck his head into Davis' office to congratulate her.

“I still have the same textbook from my law class with Dr. Collins sitting on my shelf here in the office,” Davis says.

Professor Davis recalls moments that have come full circle, whether it be in the journalism school, textbooks in her faculty office from her student days, or presenting slides to her students that her former teacher once taught her.

— Catherine Livingston, senior, public relations

RHYTHM, BLUES AND ROOTS

SJMC alumnus writer combines education and childhood passion

Antwane Folk is a busy guy.

He describes himself as “dedicated, hardworking, and passionate.” He likes to always give 100 percent in everything he does. He is the opposite of lazy.

Folk graduated in 2012 from the J-school with a major in public relations. He was part of the Fashion Board USC club, allowing him to work with different personalities.

As an outside activity while at the J-school, he ran a Facebook page about American singer-songwriter Mary J Blige, promoting her upcoming album. Folk increased the online presence to 20,000 likes and averaged weekly engagement of more than 500,000 users. It was the spark that ignited his career.

Approaching graduation, he felt pressure because he didn't have a job lined up. One day while scrolling through Twitter (now X), he saw a music publication, *Rated RnB*, that was looking for interns. He applied — his Facebook page was a big factor in earning the internship in 2013. He rose quickly, becoming an editorialist.

Since then, he has written over 5,000 articles and has interviewed musicians and artists including Brandy, Mary J. Blige, Maxwell and many more. His work has been cited in publications such as *Vogue*, *Pitchfork*, *Old Paris* and *Page 6*.

Music is a strong passion for Folk — with influences of hip-hop, gospel and R&B from his parents, he fell in love with

music at an early age. He loves to tell the stories of artists in his articles. Throughout his time at *Rated RnB*, he has built relationships and connections with people behind the scenes like publicists, producers and songwriters.

One of his annual pieces is predicting the winners for Grammy Awards in R&B categories, eventually leading to becoming a member of the Grammy Recording Academy, completing a strenuous application process requiring recommendations.

“Already having relationships with those behind the scenes... I was able to get recommendations pretty quickly,” Folk says. The process took about six to nine months. As a member, he recommends artists for certain awards and is part of the discussion about who wins.

Aside from being an editorialist, Folk also works for the Arts and Science Council in Charlotte, North Carolina — a nonprofit organization that supports creatives. His job is to raise funds to support these artists. He has worked at the council for four years, since 2019.

In the future, he would like to become a mentor, because he didn't have one.

“I wish I took more time to slow down... sometimes things happen for a reason, but there are some things I would do differently. And I wished I had a mentor.”

He wants to be a part of someone's future.

—Nadia Henwood, junior, public relations



FROM THE **SJMC** TO SENIOR COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIST

an early stint in Augusta, Georgia, which set the stage for her future endeavors. Apel was the sole manager of a TV station and trained producers and reporters alike on content creation. Through this, networking proved to be pivotal as she met key individuals at job fairs, leading to opportunities that aligned with her aspirations.

“Even if you’re not doing it for the money, just getting experience in writing, getting feedback, those skills play a part in helping you move between fields,” Apel says.

Becoming a digital content specialist in Nashville was the result of embracing roles that allowed her to apply her journalistic skills in different domains. Apel had various jobs — a multimedia producer, a managing editor and a client services manager. She emphasizes the importance of adapting education to the changing landscape of digital media.

Pursuing an MBA at Vanderbilt University, Apel demonstrates dedication to continuous learning and professional growth. Her diverse academic background and extensive experience in digital content creation position her as a strategic communicator capable of navigating the evolving landscape of media and marketing.

Offering advice to aspiring journalists, Apel stresses the value of internships, continual skill development, and active contribution to university publications. She highlights the significance of curiosity, asking questions and staying informed with top-tier publications to refine one’s writing skills.

“I subscribe to top publications and I read constantly. Reading the news helps you become a better writer because you’re reading top quality work,” Apel says.

As a digital content specialist turned senior communications strategist, Apel serves as an inspiration to aspiring communicators and journalists. Her ability to seamlessly transition and excel in diverse communication roles underscores the value of a well-rounded education and the importance of leveraging skills acquired from journalism in other professional domains.

“I always just want to be known for helping people. That’s what I have for a legacy to be. That is the one thing I miss, just being around people more and sharing information,” Apel says. “What motivates me to go to work every day is getting people information that I believe will help them.”

—Ava Iserloth, junior, public relations

KARA APEL

SJMC alumna, has carved an inspiring path from her days as an active student to her current

role as a senior communications strategist, bringing her expertise from the world of digital journalism into marketing.

Graduating from SJMC in 2011, Apel’s collegiate journey was marked by dynamic involvement in various societies and activities, including serving as editor-in-chief at *The Daily Gamecock* — strengthening her journalistic acumen and instilling leadership skills and editorial finesse that would become her hallmark.

Apel’s dedication extended beyond the *Gamecock’s* newsroom. She contributed her time to Dance Marathon as a morale leader, exemplifying her commitment to philanthropy and community engagement. Engaging in various facets of university life, she found a balance between academics and extracurricular activities. Apel emphasizes the importance of time management and leveraging each experience to enhance her skill set.

“Just being very particular about what you’re saying ‘yes’ to, and if you maybe try to switch what’s the best use of your time, ask yourself, is it a big deal at school and is it a big deal at work?” she asks.

Reflecting on her journalism education, Apel highlights the significance of the practical aspect of learning, especially her senior practicum. She acknowledged the close-knit relationships fostered during her time at the journalism school, specifically the profound impact of mentorship and collaborative projects with peers.

Transitioning from academia to the professional world, Apel navigated her career through diverse roles, including

CONNECTING LITERACY, HERITAGE, & ARTIFACTS

PORCHIA MOORE

iSchool alumna, has been striving to help the world

understand and connect threads between literacy, cultural heritage and historical artifacts centering on the Black, Indigenous and People of Color Movement.

Moore grew up not far from the university in Columbia, with her mother, a teacher, and her father, who was involved in higher education in politics and history.

Her background is where Moore gained her love and passion for literacy and informatics. Education was extremely important in Moore’s household – her parents were first-generation students and encouraged their daughter to spend her time reading and learning as much as possible.

“While other people were attending, like football games, basketball games, and sporting events, we were going to historic house museums,” Moore says.

Moore attended College of Charleston, finding a love for English literature while pursuing her degree. She got a master’s degree from a joint program at College of Charleston and The Citadel in English literature with a focus on African American literature.

“And while I was taking classes at The Citadel, I learned about a program called the JET Program, which stands for



Japan exchange and teaching,” Moore said, “And it was a life changing moment for me.”

The JET program allowed students to be in an English as a second language class with a Japanese-speaking teacher. The program’s mission was sharing cultural heritage. Following the program, Moore moved to Japan, teaching in a rural area.

“The town where I was placed to teach was actually a village, with rice fields, as far as I could see,” Moore says, “They got a traffic light and became a town. I lived in the city, so I rode my bike, almost an hour from the little town where I worked. And it was absolutely fantastic.”

Moore returned to South Carolina, getting a Ph. D. at the School of Information Science.

“What I was curious about is how every time I went to visit a museum or cultural heritage’s place, I would literally be the only person of color or one of a small handful,” Moore says.

She researched the lack of diversity in museums and heritage site attendance, collaborating with I-School faculty, pioneering the Inclusive Museum Movement.

After her time in the research field, Moore was sent a job posting by friends and colleagues for what turned out to be the next step in her career – associate director of the Center for Arts at University of Florida, connecting literacy and education.

Over the years, Moore has been on NPR’s *Here and Now*, and co-authored a book. She was recognized by Forbes and created an activist scholarship at UF.

— Maeve Rossig, junior, public relations

STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT PAVING THE WAY FOR CHANGE

Story by Ava Iserloth, senior, public relations
Photos by Anna Surette



Emmie Thompson, a SJC senior from Lexington, South Carolina, stands at the helm of the University of South Carolina as the Student Body president, poised to make significant waves in the landscape of student governance.

Her journey to this prestigious position is underlined by passion for USC and a relentless commitment to fostering positive change within the campus community. Majoring in public relations with minors in economics and business administration, Thompson aims to leverage her academic experiences by bringing tangible change during her tenure.

Born and raised in South Carolina, Thompson's lifelong dream was to become a part of the vibrant fabric of USC. Upon admission, her aspirations transcended personal success; she sought an avenue to channel her enthusiasm for service. In her pursuit, she delved into student government, enticed by the potential to influence meaningful transformations.

"I've always had a huge passion for the university," Thompson said. "I wanted to make a difference, even if it's just a little bit."

Thompson became the secretary of Campus Relations during her freshman year. This experience proved pivotal, unveiling the interworkings of administration and igniting a desire to initiate change. She steadily ascended, eventually serving as deputy chief of staff to a former Student Body president. Thompson's transition from the position of Secretary to assuming the mantle of Student Body president wasn't arbitrary.

"You have to be able to drive tangible change because if all your time is wasted on things that are unrealistic, you'll never get anywhere," Thompson says.

In an *InterCom* interview, Thompson elaborated on the core initiatives driving her administration. Collaborating closely with Vice President Aubriana Reeves, the Student Body's vision is grounded in feasible reforms aimed at enriching the student experience.

A key initiative is the advocacy for meaningful academic reform. Thompson emphasizes the need for Carolina Core classes that equip students with vital life skills post-graduation. Furthermore, her administration is championing mental health resources, stressing the importance of a supportive and inclusive campus environment.

Her commitment to improving student life extends beyond her official role. She is motivated by identifying and addressing realistic issues that can positively impact student lives. Her focus on small, achievable goals stems from personal experience, as she navigated through mental health challenges and learned the significance of incremental progress. Thompson's ethos revolves around 'little wins,' underscoring the impact of incremental progress. Her overarching goal is to sculpt a campus characterized by inclusivity, collaboration, and a steadfast commitment to change.

Thompson's vision as Student Body president encompasses several ambitious plans. Her proposals include implementing a game day Uber discount, installing phone chargers at Williams-Brice Stadium, discounted parking passes, advocating for relevant Carolina Core classes, and enhancing communication within student government. Moreover, she aims to increase diversity within student government, ensuring broader representation across campus communities.

"I think we are in such a polarizing world with different ideas," Thompson says, "figuring out ways to collaborate is going to be pivotal."

With a substantial budget at her disposal, Thompson is determined to ensure that resources are channeled effectively.

"Figure out ways to collaborate and actually make the most of what you can do for everybody, even with different beliefs," Thompson says.

Her additional non-academic responsibilities — from leading a Bible study to working part-time at a consulting firm — underscore her approach to managing a packed schedule. Thompson's proactive attitude toward time management aligns with her goal of maximizing her effectiveness in her various roles.

Thompson attributes her leadership style to family influences and mentorship. Her parents instilled in her a service-oriented attitude and an unwavering dedication to community enhancement, which remains the cornerstone of her leadership.

Thompson's leadership emphasizes the significance of relationships, kindness, and collaborative efforts in driving meaningful change. Her administration has spearheaded initiatives addressing pressing issues like mental health resources, academic reforms and streamlining campus amenities.

Thompson's ascendancy as the student body president — featured on the *InterCom* cover — symbolizes J-school progress and inclusivity as it enters its next 100 years. Her narrative stands as a beacon, inspiring future generations to lead, serve, and effectuate positive change.

"I think we are on the right trajectory," Thompson says, "Seeing women in leadership roles has been really inspiring for me."

Her vision for USC's future is rooted in unity, collaboration, and the power of incremental change. Thompson champions the idea that every small win, no matter how seemingly insignificant, contributes to a larger, collective positive impact. Her aspiration to leave behind a legacy of inclusivity, collaboration, and empathy resonates deeply within the university community.

As she looks ahead, Thompson envisions a campus environment where gender barriers dissolve, where student leaders unite, collaborate and work collectively to create an inclusive, supportive and thriving university community.

Emmie Thompson's remarkable journey, leadership, and vision serve as an inspiration and a testament to the power of genuine leadership, empathy, and the pursuit of pragmatic change.





Photo by Elizabeth Grushkowsky

WHEN COCKY COMES TO TOWN

Story by William Meares, senior, public relations

Chants fill the air at elementary school around the state of South Carolina when Cocky's Reading Express comes to visit.

Hundreds of eyes lock in on USC Gamecocks mascot Cocky, cheering and excited.

Cocky's Reading Express is the I School's literacy outreach initiative – with the goal of eradicating illiteracy in South Carolina through a lifetime love of reading. Originally started in 2005 by then-student government president Tommy Preston, Cocky's Reading Express finds its home in the South Carolina Center for Community Literacy, now overseen by passionate coordinator Margaret Cook.

Cook has a background in puppetry and a master of fine arts from Carnegie Mellon University.

She originally targeted adults with puppetry and pop-up shows in hopes of recapturing childhood wonder. Cook has now gone from recapturing childhood wonder in adults to storytelling and connecting with children via Cocky's Reading Express.

In their own bus, Cocky's Express, Cook, Cocky and a band of volunteers travel to a South Carolina Title 1 school, conducting visiting groups of kids, kindergarten through second grade.

"So what we do is we go in super high energy and give them a really fun time," Cook says. "We show them the joys of reading, and we also show them how fun it can be being an adult that reads... We sing songs, we dance around together, we read stories."

After being given some hugs, Cocky supplies the kids with a bookbag containing a new book that they can take home, a sticker, a class photo with Cocky and, most importantly, a memory.

All of these artifacts that are taken home are extremely vital to the Cocky's Reading Express formula – in exchange for the book and sticker each student promises to read 10 minutes a day to whomever will listen, bringing up the topic of literacy at home and acting as a way to get parents involved in their child's reading, Cook says.

A large number of South Carolina Title 1 schools are also in "book deserts." A book desert has extremely limited access to age-appropriate reading material. Book deserts are prominent in South Carolina and Cocky's Reading Express cannot get to everyone — leading to the creation of the Adopt a School program by Cook and the South Carolina Center for Community Literacy.

"What the Adopt a School program does is it partners organizations, businesses, community groups with a school for a year of literacy service," Cook says. "Now, the goal here is to not just have a one-off story time. It's really to foster a relationship between local organizations and the schools, because literacy really needs to become a community effort. We need more people involved in kids' education, and this is just a method for us to do that."

By being stewards of literacy, as Cook describes it, the two organizations will expose students to career fields and occupations with which they may not ever have had first hand contact, acting as an introduction to the world beyond, Cook says. Mixed with the memorable experience of meeting Cocky, the Adopt-A-School program has the potential to increase the desire to pursue post-secondary education in a time where enrollment is declining.

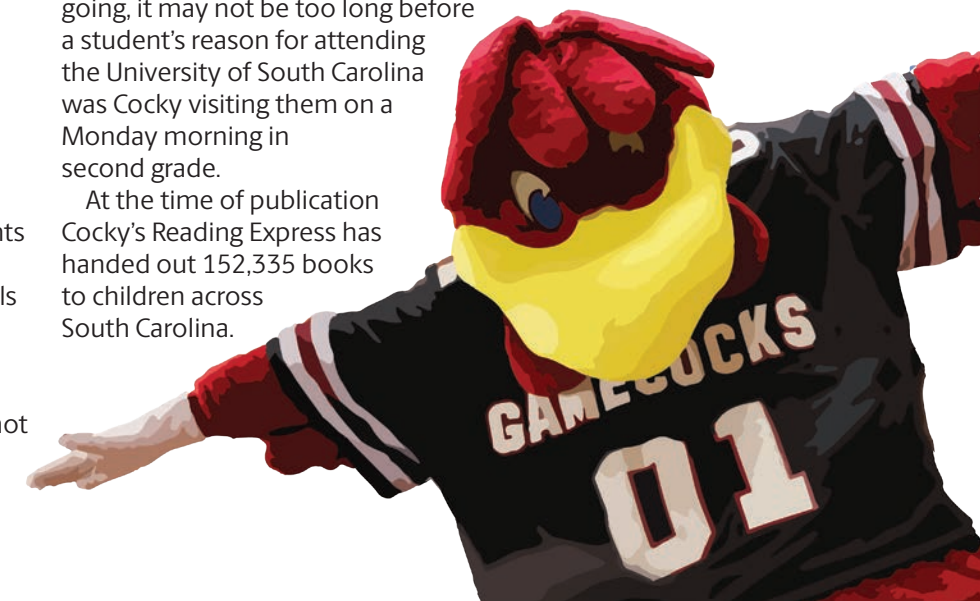
Currently there is a partnership between Dominion Energy and Cocky's Reading Express — "Conservation with Cocky" teaching the lesson of keeping water, oceans and beaches clean.

The South Carolina Center for Community Literacy is currently looking for more organizations to be in the first round of the new Adopt-A-School initiative. With help from the community, Cook sees a bright future for the students of South Carolina.

"Everything has a domino effect, and I want that domino to just push us towards having a literacy rich culture in South Carolina, with a lot of community involvement," Cook says.

Maybe, at the rate Cocky's Reading Express is going, it may not be too long before a student's reason for attending the University of South Carolina was Cocky visiting them on a Monday morning in second grade.

At the time of publication Cocky's Reading Express has handed out 152,335 books to children across South Carolina.





DAMION WAYMER

STUDENT SUCCESS DRIVES NEW SJMC DIRECTOR

Story by ElizaPearl Philpot, senior, public relations

Success is synonymous with student achievement at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SJMC), newly appointed director Damion Waymer says.

He is determined to measure success through student accomplishments. Waymer says he is thrilled to have the opportunity to serve as the new director of SJMC.

Waymer is prepared to take calculated risks to achieve success.

He has seen the rewards of risk-taking and is ready to take risks head-on, breaking barriers for the school, students and faculty.

Waymer earned a corporate communication undergraduate degree at the College of Charleston before continuing his academic success at Purdue University, earning his master's and doctorate in communications, both in public relations.

He has been recognized with several prestigious awards, most recently, as a distinguished alumnus at Purdue University College of Liberal Arts.

He joins SJMC from the University of Alabama, where he served as senior associate dean of the College of Communications and Information.

Having grown up in Orangeburg, South Carolina, Waymer is excited to bring his talents and abilities home to the state's flagship university. He is confident in his abilities to help advance the SJMC, propelling the next generation of communicators. Waymer says he envisions the school's becoming a regional

and national research, career readiness and teaching excellence leader.

Waymer is proud to show off what the SJMC offers employers.

When asked what success looks like to him, Waymer says, "Success is the students, it's why we are here. If our students are successful and career-ready that is successful."

"The faculty is at the front line of helping these students succeed."

As a professor himself, Waymer knows what it takes to ensure students are equipped to thrive in the workforce.

"Come sit in on a senior seminar and see how the students are being prepared for the industry," Waymer says. "Or sit in one of the public relations or advertising capstone courses to see the clients and the real-world work the students are doing. The proof is in the pudding."

SJMC Dean Tom Reichert expresses equal enthusiasm.

"Dr. Waymer will set the tone for the J-school's next 100 years of success," Reichert says. "His energy and administrative experience will be vital assets in guiding the school's evolution to meet student and industry needs."

Reichert and the J-school, eagerly anticipate the future — with Waymer's passion for student and faculty success.

***"You miss opportunities to push yourself and to push the boundaries of experience and education by playing it safe," Waymer says.
"Calculated risks come with rewards."***



A PIONEER for WOMEN JOURNALISTS

Story by Lauren Larsen, junior, print journalism

Students arrived at the J-school in 1965 looking forward to new classes. But something was a little different. For the first time ever, there was a full-time female professor — Lee Skidmore (now Wenthe).

“A lot of people have asked me ‘How did it feel to be the only woman?’ I don’t know because I have nothing to compare it to. But for me, the experience was terrific,” Wenthe says.

The biggest challenge was being one of the youngest professors, at 23 years old, Wenthe says. Some of her past classmates even became her students.

“I introduced myself and I said, I’m Miss Skidmore and for those of you who have known me in classes, you can continue to call me Lee,” Wenthe says.

She called some of her colleagues Dr. or Mr. because they were much older, but she was never treated differently for being a woman.

“I never once heard anything that was patronizing or rude. These guys were gentlemen with a capital G,” Wenthe says.

Wenthe taught advertising and public relations courses, where many of her female students looked to her as a mother figure, she says.

Wenthe also helped female students get a start in the industry, using her ad agency connections. Each year she noticed a rise in female class project leadership, despite fewer women than men in her classes.

Surprisingly enough, Wenthe never envisioned herself becoming a professor.

“When I started college, my father wanted me to minor in education, because he said that I would always have a job. But I knew I wanted to major in journalism,” Wenthe says.



LEE WENTHE

Wenthe’s father graduated from the J-school in 1934, and her mother was the widely known secretary to the university registrar. She didn’t think about going elsewhere.

As a journalism major, Wenthe had a slight problem — she often made her friends ask questions for her because she was too shy. Looking towards other journalism paths, she took advertising copywriting her senior year and loved it.

“I thought this is terrific. I don’t have to ask questions,” Wenthe says. “I don’t have to go out and meet people. They just give me information.”

Today, Wenthe’s biggest piece of advice comes from what she struggled with in the past.

“Don’t be shy. Put yourself out there,” Wenthe says. “I hate to think of what I probably missed as an undergraduate because I was too shy.”

Wenthe says “don’t be shy” applies not only to people but to taking advantage of different opportunities.

Wenthe started her career as a junior copywriter in Greenville. The office eventually relocated to Columbia, and she found herself running into people connected to USC.

After going back to USC for her master’s degree, Wenthe’s ultimate plan was to be a copywriter in New York. She had just come back from job interviews there, when the J-school dean, Al Scroggins, convinced her to take up teaching at USC.

“He said, think about this. You could work here for a couple of years and make some money and then go up there. But I never did,” Wenthe says.



Fourth from the left, back row, Wenthe is pictured with her male colleagues

“It’s something I never dreamed of. I always just figured being first you know, that was enough.”

Wenthe taught until December 1973 and never regretted it. She left after moving back to Edisto Island full-time and having her first child.

When coming back to the industry, Wenthe became the marketing director of today’s South Carolina Federal Credit Union. A few years later, she missed teaching and went to teach at the University of Georgia for 23 years.

Post-teaching, Wenthe stayed involved with national ad club meetings through the American Advertising Federation, where she often ran into Bonnie Drewniany, an advertising professor at USC.

One day, Drewniany called her asking if she knew of a graduate student alum interested in being a visiting professor at the J-school for one year. Wenthe impulsively said, “What about me?” Drewniany was overjoyed she was interested in coming back.

For Wenthe, this one-year position turned into a five-year long term.

“I ended up spending five years there. And quite frankly, they were the best years of my teaching career,” Wenthe says.

As a visiting professor from 2001-2006, Wenthe described the faculty as ‘wonderful’ and the experience as more fun and relaxed.

“Every year was going to be the last year and I didn’t have any pressure on me,” Wenthe says.

Today, Wenthe still meets with other retired faculty members, to chat and hear about J school updates. Some of these colleagues from the J-school have become great friends.

“It’s just a nice, supportive, fun group to be with,” Wenthe said.

Today, most students in the J-school are women — not the norm in 1965. As the first female professor, Wenthe was a role model for young women.

“I think [the J-school] is a fantastic place where women feel comfortable and get the skills and intellectual rigor they need to succeed,” CIC Dean, Tom Reichert says.

Wenthe’s accomplishments will be honored by naming a J school office in her honor, Reichert said.

“The chance that I had to work at my alma mater was something I’ve always been grateful for,” Wenthe notes.

She is extremely appreciative and said her parents would be proud of her.

“I was stunned when [Reichert] told me,” Wenthe said about having an office named in her honor. “It’s something I never dreamed of. I always just figured being first, you know, that was enough.”



INSPIRED TO FOLLOW IN HIS FOOTSTEPS

Story by Addison Sipe, senior, visual communications

SJMC Professor Jarvis “Jay” Latham was known as a hard-working man dedicated to his students’ success. To me, Professor Latham was “Papa Jay” — my grandfather.

My grandfather was a professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications for 25 years, inspiring many students through teaching — also learning more about himself along his career path.

After “Papa Jay” graduated from the University of North Carolina, in the School of Radio, Television and Motion Pictures, he joined the Air Force Reserve as a 2nd lieutenant serving as a sack bomber pilot. In 1974, he realized he could not let go of his love for broadcast journalism learned in college.

He was admitted to the SJMC, studying for a master’s degree. During his first year, he was approached about possibly becoming a professor. He told the school he would try it out for a year — which turned into 25 years.

“Papa Jay” became a full-time professor in 1976 and formed connections with a lot of his students. He played a key role in the development of the senior capstone course in 1993 and taught an on-air broadcast course with former SJMC professor Sonya Duhé. He would always say that she made the students look good while he made them sound good.

My grandmother, the source for this story, recalls many of his former students coming back to thank him for his amazing work and expressing that he was the reason for their career success.

She also remembers countless letters in the mail from students thanking him after their careers had started.

To me, it is amazing to hear stories of how inspirational my grandfather was in the SJMC and the lives that he positively impacted. While he was teaching, the school and his office were located in the Carolina Coliseum.

As I walk through the halls of the coliseum to my classes, I often think of how many times my grandfather walked these same halls. His love and dedication for his work inspired me to select visual communications for my college major.

“Papa Jay” was a natural teacher, whether it be in a classroom, his Sunday school at church, or at home storytelling to his children and grandchildren. One of the most important memories I have of him as a grandfather is that every Christmas Eve, he would read from the Bible of Jesus’ birth. It was the warmth of his voice and the way he spoke deep within his chest that put us into a trance — all of the grandchildren staring at him in awe.

Every time we would drive away from my grandparents’ house, they would stand in the driveway waving goodbye. As years passed, he had to wave from his brown leather chair through the window, not able to walk outside.

I never knew that once when I saw him wave from his little window with a warm smile on his face that would be the last time I saw him.

“Papa Jay” passed away on September 13, 2021. His passing was one of the most difficult times in my life and I struggled for a long period of time, seeing my headstrong mother being so sad about her dad.

My grandfather was such an important figure in my life while growing up and he is one of the key reasons I chose to pursue my major at the SJMC.

He may have been known to many as an inspirational and hardworking professor, but to me he was known as amazing “Papa Jay,” showing his unlimited family love, hugging you so tight you couldn’t breathe.

As I continue my SJMC career, following in his footsteps, I pray that he can see my success and be proud of everything I do.

COURAGEOUS COURAGEOUS COURAGEOUS COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

Addressing the Tough Topics with Leigh Moscovitz

Story by Cecelia Haggan, junior, public relations

Gay marriage rights. Child abductions. Coming out as a gay male athlete. J-school professor, Leigh Moscovitz does not shy away from the hard topics.

Moscovitz has authored three books on these tough topics during her career. Her books provide deep insights into how media influences public opinion on these topics, highlighting struggles faced by marginalized communities in their quest for equal rights.

The Battle Over Marriage: Gay Rights Activism Through the Media, released over a decade ago, delves into the media’s pivotal role fighting for same-sex marriage equality.

“I mean at the time that I started the project there was only one state that had legalized same-sex marriage, which was Massachusetts,” Moscovitz says. “It almost overnight replaced controversial issues like abortion as the most talked about controversial topic. It seems odd now but that was only ten years ago.”

Snatched; Child Abductions in U.S. News Media, co-authored with her friend from graduate school, Spring-Serenity Duval, looks at media attention with child abduction cases.

“We looked at issues like, you’ll see this in all of my work, issues of race, and class, and gender, and it was primarily, well really only, stories of young white girls that would reach the level of national prominence,” she says. “But if a child of color went missing from an underprivileged neighborhood, little to no media attention at all. None at the national level.”



“And then we’re looking at the statistics that show that the more news attention that is on a case like this, the more likely the child is to be found. There are literally life and death consequences for the types of stories that media are drawn to, and the types of stories that they ignore.”

Moscovitz co-authored another book, *Media and the Coming Out of Gay Male Athletes in American Team Sports*, about the consequences of coming out as a gay male athlete in the big four sport leagues.

“It’s almost like we’ll pretend that it’s this welcoming environment and the professional sports environment is totally cool with you being out,” Moscovitz says. “But the realities are that these players faced really severe consequences for coming out.”

Moscovitz’s book explores the paradox of what it means to be a gay athlete in male sports. She and her co-author traveled the country to interview athletes, including the NBA performer Jason Collins, who came out as gay at the end of the 2012-13 basketball season.

“So you can see what drew us to this book, it wasn’t just the media coverage of these stories but also what the athletes themselves had experienced too,” she says. “We know there are a lot more gay athletes out there than one at the professional level, but there is only one who felt safe enough to tell their story.”

Moscovitz teaches courses in undergraduate and graduate programs in media and public relations writing, research methods, media literacies, and gender in media, according to the CIC website.

She came from a journalism school environment as an undergraduate at Indiana University. When she saw an open position with USC’s public relations program, she knew the SJMC could provide her with the environment she was looking for.

“So um yeah, I do study stuff that kind of pisses me off,” she says with a laugh. “If something kind of makes me angry or I don’t quite understand it, then I’m drawn to that.”

AWARDING WINNING ALUM X2

Alum named Journalist of the Year Twice in One Decade

Story by Lauren Larsen, junior, print journalism

Avery Wilks, vice president of communications at the Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina, graduated as an honors student less than ten years ago. He has already been named two-time Journalist of the Year by the South Carolina Press Association.

His career accomplishments in such a short time are far from ordinary, and it all started at the J-school.

As a South Carolina native interested in sports journalism, Wilks says coming to USC was a no brainer. Not only was South Carolina the flagship journalism school in the state, but it was also close to home.

At USC, Wilks' professors made an impact on his college experience.

"I remember my journalism school professors, much, much better than any of my other kind of gen-ed course professors," Wilks said. "Because they were so knowledgeable about what they were teaching us."

One who stood out to him was copyediting professor Doug Fisher. Although he was tough, he taught his students how to be good writers.

"I had some professors come up to me and say well, you could do this journalism thing. You're pretty good. But you really need to start actually doing it," Wilks says.

After his junior year, he worked at *The Aiken Standard* through the South Carolina Press Association's internship program. After his senior year, he was a Dow Jones News Fund recipient for sports copyediting, funding his internship at the *Tulsa World*.

During Wilks' senior year, he participated in "senior semester," which is a nine-to-five class schedule resembling life in a newsroom, teaching him about finding stories, while reinforcing his love for journalism.

"I think I just realized that every time I wrote a story, I just enjoyed it," Wilks says. "I just enjoyed the act of writing, the act of learning, interviewing people finding out new things, revealing things that I didn't know before."



"I'd say just work really hard, and try things you know, say yes to opportunities as they come along, and don't be afraid to fail."

Wilks' sports journalism career began by starting a newsletter and website publication, *Garnet Report*, with fellow honors students. The newsletter included links to *The State* and the *Daily Gamecock* articles — as well as their own writings — focused on campus sports and news.

Though the publication no longer exists, Wilks is grateful for what he learned.

"I learned so much and I failed so often trying different things that ultimately I was able to write my senior thesis on everything I learned about the digital news business," Wilks says.

Later, he accepted a position with *Gamecock Central* sports publication during his junior year. He covered as many Gamecock football and basketball games as he could to pick up extra money.

"It became a very stressful time, but also, I just learned a lot," Wilks says.

Wilks went into press boxes at various SEC stadiums and met journalists from large newspapers and Sports Illustrated.

But when it came to looking for jobs post-grad, Wilks decided he wanted to slightly change his career path.

"After four years of covering USC football, baseball, basketball, women's basketball while I was in school, I got really burned out," Wilks says.

After graduation, Wilks switched to politics and investigative reporting at *The State* and *The Post and Courier*.

Wilks received the South Carolina Journalist of the Year award in 2018 while with *The State*, and in 2023

while at *The Post and Courier*.

Wilks' award while at *The State* was for covering the abandoned VC Summer Nuclear Station debacle, one of the largest business regulatory failures in South Carolina history.

Wilks' recognition while at *The Post and Courier* included his coverage of the sensational Murdaugh murder trial, and "P&C Uncovered" — partnering with local South Carolina newspapers on investigative reporting the smaller papers might not have been able to pull off on their own.

"Being able to go in and help them do the stories that they'd always wanted to do, or, you know, uncover these things that they long suspected were going on, that was a really, really rewarding and gratifying experience," Wilks says.

Today Wilks works as the vice president of communications for the Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina, a nonprofit dedicated to delivering reliable and inexpensive power to community members.

"I wasn't looking to leave journalism, really, but when the opportunity came to work here, it just seemed like a natural fit," Wilks says. "I wanted to work somewhere that I felt was making South Carolina a better place."

In his new position, Wilks still writes articles for the co-op's magazine, *South Carolina Living*, the largest print publication in South Carolina.

Wilks' advice for student journalists is to make the most of their time at the J-school.



BLUFFING HER WAY TO SUCCESS

Story by Mac Niedbalski, junior, public relations

Paula Novacki thought she was going to go into the public relations field during her time at the J-school.

Novacki was a very active PR major, was involved in PRSSA at the Carolina Agency, and participated in the Bateman team competition. After graduating in 2014, she moved to Washington, D.C. to join an independent advertising agency, working as a paid media manager for almost two years.

After going to work for a large, world-renowned advertising and PR agency between NYC and D.C., Novacki helped build the firm's public affairs paid media practice. After the 2016 election, political accounts were lost, and budgets were slashed.

"And then at some point, maybe in 2018 or 2019, I was like, you know what, I need to figure out what I'm doing next," Novacki says, "I've kind of hit a ceiling point here. I'm over DC on a personal level, and I was considering moving to New York to work for a larger agency."

"I thought about working for Google or Facebook, but I really wanted to get out of the political and public affairs scene before the 2020 cycle just because it's brutal, and I wanted to do something a little less sensitive," she says.

With no children or mortgage holding her back, she decided to quit her job, sell all of the things in her apartment, and travel the world.

Deciding to travel to Mexico first, Novacki became a hostel bartender. "It was some of the best times of my life," she says.

While in Mexico, she also completed freelance work, which went so well that she got a unique opportunity to work for Uber on some of its paid social work. She was only supposed to work on one project, which turned into five projects, which turned into "Can you run all of



PAULA NOVACKI

global Uber Eats for eight different markets for us on the paid social front?"

Her response was, "I can't work for you because I have my own agency, but you can hire my agency to do that."

She had no agency at the time. She was bluffing. Their response was basically, "Sounds good, send us the paperwork."

She hired a contractor she had met at the hostel in Mexico and asked if he would be interested in learning paid media and working for her. He was willing, and that was the start of PN Media.

"I had no business plan. I did not intend to start an agency at all. And it kind of kicked off from there. And then, one contractor turns into three or four contractors," she says.

After PN Media got on its feet, Novacki moved to Southeast Asia and lived in Bali.

"I had four or five people working for me in the States," Novacki says, "We had maybe four or five clients, one of which was Uber, which was great. And we were doing great work on that, so we were getting referred to other clients. And then COVID hit in February of 2020."

Due to the uncertainties of COVID, she moved back to the States, living in Denver, Colorado, where she had yet to learn what would happen next.



"Oh, my God, what am I gonna do, I don't have a job. I don't have clients, I don't have money," she thought.

But she realized something. Many advertising agencies had gone through layoffs and had clients that still needed to be fulfilled and work that needed to be executed, but they couldn't hire people at the time, she used these layoffs to her advantage, pivoting her approach to a consultancy for advertising agencies.

"At one point, I had 20 people working for me," Novacki says, "and we had five to 10 different ad agencies as long-standing routine clients. And that's where the business really grew. From 2020 to 2021, I stayed in Denver; through that time, I hired more people and built out a full team."

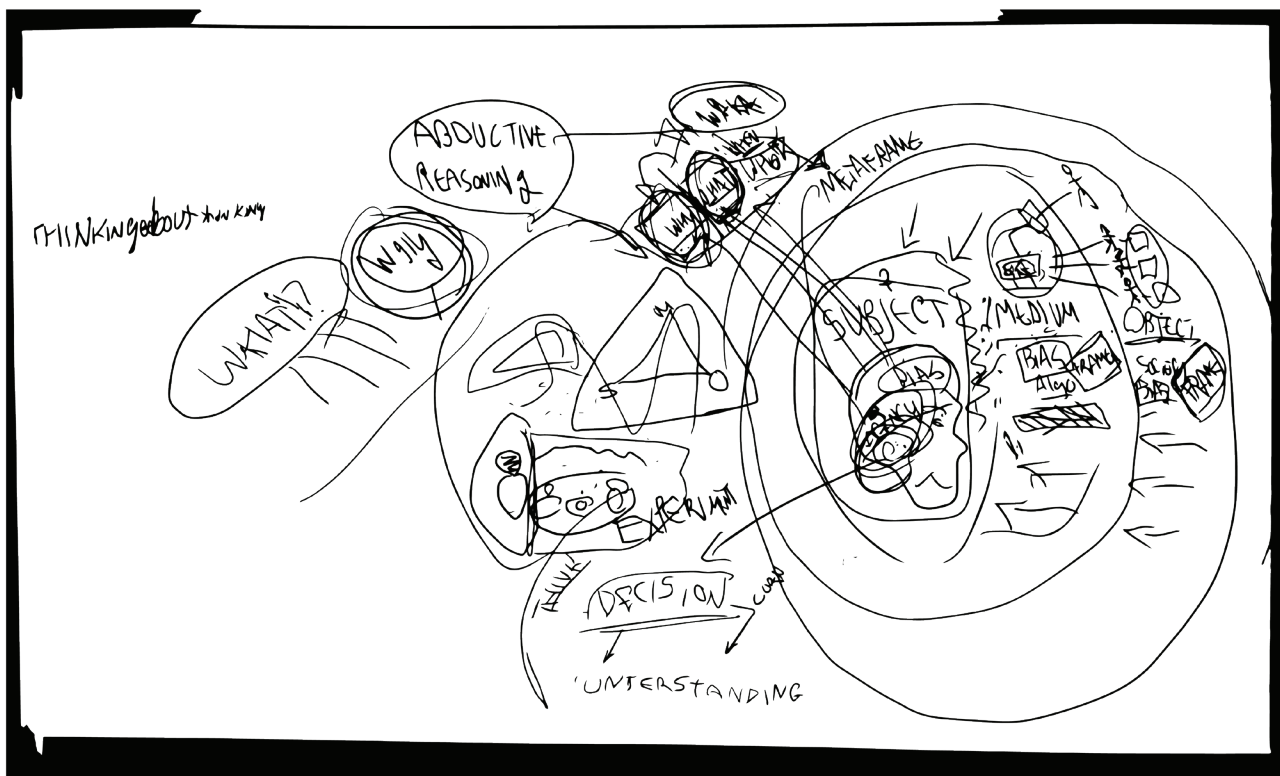
This past summer, a bigger firm, New York-based Smart Media Technologies (SMT) acquired PN Media. In June 2023, Novacki brought her team over to SMT. She is the VP of growth and client strategy, overseeing her former PN Media team.

Novacki's journey, starting in public relations and going on to founding and expanding PN Media, showcases her determination and adaptability.

She became the head of a thriving agency (even though she initially bluffed her way into it). With COVID-19 pandemic uncertainties, she changed her approach to consultancy, filling a gap in the advertising industry and expanding her team.

SMT's acquiring PN Media in 2023 marks another milestone in her career. Novacki finds success – no matter where she goes in the world.





Thinking About Thinking

Story by Catherine Livingston, senior, public relations

In the information age, where the boundaries between human cognition and artificial intelligence blur, I-school Assistant Professor Alamir Novin delves into an intricate realm – Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). Novin’s research unveils the subtle yet pervasive biases embedded within algorithms governing our digital landscapes.

Novin challenges the “boxes” or “frames” confining our thinking. The labyrinth of biases Novin explores, whether cognitive, algorithmic, or societal, are intricately interwoven, shaping how we perceive information and influencing future generations’ learning processes.

Novin’s current research focuses on the symbiotic relationship between cognitive bias and computer algorithms within HCI. His research is shedding light on the often-overlooked algorithmic bias in technologies, revealing the unsettling reality of search engine algorithms – demonstrating how biases subtly sway perceptions by emphasizing certain search results over others.

His studies extend to individuals’ cognitive biases, particularly in the context of learning. Novin’s experiments expose students to various interfaces and search engines, revealing how cognitive biases can subtly alter their understanding of topics, even within well-informed demographics of students that have an extensive understanding of the topic being reported on.

“I look at students,” Novin says. “How are students learning about things? These are the same students that could go off and become the future biologists and scientists of our generation.”

In emphasizing bias impact on decision-making, Novin raises critical questions about biases’ long-term consequences, especially in shaping perspectives of future scientists and researchers, underscoring the nuanced relationship between algorithmic bias and human agency.

“In HCI, the medium is the computer and the object is the people on the internet who are informing you or the documents that the people wrote that the subject is reading,” he says. “The subject holds the cognitive bias, the medium holds the algorithmic bias, and the object holds the social bias. The bias within the object contributes to the medium. Everything has a bias, so you can never get rid of them. The measure is when it becomes an error. This is because it can affect decision making.”

Novin advocates for metacognition as a powerful and transformative tool to navigate the biases embedded in digital interfaces. Metacognition – often encapsulated in the concept of “thinking about thinking” – emerges as a guiding philosophy for individuals seeking to comprehend and mitigate biases in their decision-making processes, he says.

At its core, metacognition involves a heightened awareness of cognitive processes – a reflective and introspective practice where individuals deliberately examine how they process information, interpret data, and form conclusions.

Novin contends that this deliberate act of self-awareness is pivotal in mitigating the impact of biases. It is not merely about absorbing information but about understanding the cognitive processes involved in that absorption.

“Thinking about thinking” becomes a mantra for navigating the labyrinth of biases in the digital age. This metacognitive approach is not passive but active engagement with one’s thought processes.

“Why am I thinking what I’m thinking?”

By questioning the framing of information, “individuals can understand that when they focus on a topic of information, they are excluding other information,” Novin says. Navigating the vast sea of information online, this self-reflective practice allows people to question why certain information is presented and “framed,” how it is processed, and what biases may be at play.

When people actively engage in “thinking about thinking,” they become architects of their cognitive landscapes, capable of discerning between genuine understanding and the subtle influence of biases.

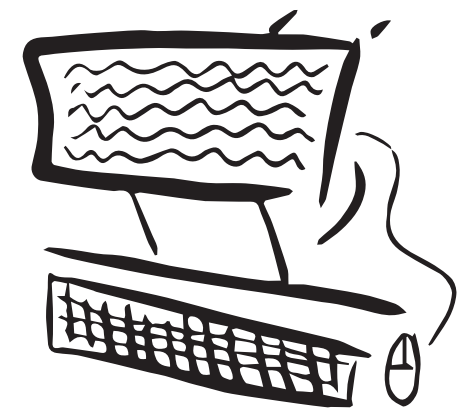
This metacognitive approach is particularly potent in an era where digital interfaces serve as primary conduits for information consumption. As individuals traverse the complex terrain of online platforms, they are bombarded with diverse perspectives and information. Metacognition empowers individuals to discern the “framing” of this information, question the algorithms shaping their digital experience, and consciously choose how to process and internalize the content before them, he says.

Novin’s advocacy for metacognition extends beyond academia into a broader philosophy for navigating the complexities of the information age. He calls for individuals to actively participate in their own learning, to constantly question and refine their thought processes, and to cultivate a mindset that is resilient to the subtle biases that permeate our digital existence.

As we integrate metacognition into our information consumption approach, we become more discerning learners and contribute to the broader discourse on bias and its implications. By encouraging individuals to actively engage in “thinking about thinking,” Novin offers a pathway toward a future where awareness and critical thinking serve as the cornerstone of a digitally literate society.

Assistant Professor
ALAMIR NOVIN

To learn more about Novin and his research, please scan the QR code below:



BE RELEVANT, BE REAL

Media influencer seminar highlights what it takes to be successful

Story by Kaitlyn Howard, junior, public relations

The J-school is celebrating 100 years of teaching, learning and success, leading the school to where it is now — continuing to grow and modernize. Social media has become the modern 21st century topic. As a journalism school, professors want to teach students how they can incorporate social media, not just in their personal lives but in future careers.

A recent SJMC workshop, “How to be a Social Media Influencer,” involved the entire university. SJMC Director of Special Projects Randy Covington, organizer of the event, says his goalshhh were pulling together influencers and seeing what attendees could learn as well as providing information regarding what students need to know about social media.

“This is intended to be a fun and informational event,” Covington said. “Being that the media world has changed, and with students living in this world today, it’s not surprising that we have influencers and forms of communication that have become powerful.”

The workshop incorporated sources having a role in the modern media world— influencers. Influencers have followers and are what give

social media its power, in the sense that they are the ones spreading ideas and products to the people who see their posts.

The difference between a content creator and an influencer is an important factor to consider because everyone is a content creator, said Jabari Evans, assistant professor of race and media at the J-school.

Being an influencer is about the impact, Evans said. When thinking about social media, are we thinking about its impact, he asked. The online presence of over two billion people in one space has an impact, with ideas flowing around constantly, brains soaking up around 285 pieces of content daily. Anyone can share their daily lives, but Evans asked how many people are creating impact.

Evans used an analogy – if you’re driving down the street and see a purple cow, compared to a regular cow, you would probably pull over and look more closely at it because it’s something you have never seen before. But once you see the purple cow again, you will probably keep driving past it.

Just like content seen on social media, once viewers see something different that catches their attention, they will most likely scroll past it the next time they see it. Evans asked, once something stands out, how can an influencer make that product or idea keep someone’s attention?

According to the influencers at the social media event, it’s all about creating your own niche and sticking to it. By creating this aesthetic about your life and what you’re showing to the world, you can keep people entertained with your page. Being able to engage with your community is also very important because people enjoy feeling acknowledged, presenters said.

“I have watched the industry change and brand awareness is just as important as being authentic in what you do,” said presenter Caroline Rogers, who runs her own public relations and marketing firm.

Rogers works with content creators, exposing them to the skin care product companies she represents. She believes in picking a niche, in her case skin care products, in order to represent brands fitting well with the total brand image.

“You don’t want the viewer to feel like it’s a paid ad,” following the idea of being your most authentic self, Rogers said.

Presenters CJ Tamasco and Michaela Taylor, who run USC’s social media, talked about how content has shifted over the last few years. They believe, just as Caroline Rogers said, if something looks like an advertisement, people scroll past it – you have to focus on what is authentic to your brand image.

It is important to find who your target market is, presenters said, and in this case, it’s the students. Therefore, Taylor and Tamasco adjust their content to interest students.

“Making the content more relatable and authentic has been such a game changer with what we are producing because we’re able to show what it is like to be a student at the University of South Carolina,” Taylor said.

Using trending sounds and templates allows the presenters to use current content, creating a brand

image, and finding a niche. For them, the university itself is the brand.

“I am in the influencer space, and you want to see what people are posting,” Tamasco said. “Then take those tips and apply them to yourself and your brand.”

With all the personal excitement and fulfillment that comes with being a social media influencer, there is also burnout and discomfort. Influencers Parker Reese and Josalyn Sanders discussed how much they love being able to share their lives with people, but not every day is filled with enthusiasm and motivation.

Parker Reese, a USC cheerleader, has had a social media following since she was 12 years old. Josalyn Sanders does Youtube “get ready with me” videos — showing day-to-day routines to her 50,000 subscribers. Both content creators have created a brand niche.

Relatability has become a hot social media topic. People love seeing real-life events, including good and bad days. Maintaining work-life balance is important, Reese said, because burnout can affect your engagement.

“Choosing to promote things you love and can really relate to will make it easier to stay with it,” Sanders said. Both influencers agree that planning your week and content ahead can reduce burnout.

PARKER REESE



Your life should make your content, not your content make your life, Sanders and Reese emphasized.

The “How to be a Social Media Influencer even” was an opportunity for students to learn from influencers firsthand. The event encouraged students not only to try social media, but to inform students university wide about the J-school’s programs on up-to-date topics.

Covington expressed the importance of continuing to stay relevant, allowing students to keep up with the new ways of communication.

With the media becoming such a huge part of people’s lives, ask yourself, what does a career look like for you in the future?

BRIDGING HIP-HOP AND ACADEMIA

JABARI EVANS

Story by Alexandra Tudor, senior, journalism

Without question, the digitization of community has created a social shift in today's youth. Thanks to the internet, information is more accessible than ever before. Removing barriers to educational information has improved equity. But how has such easy, unfiltered access affected developing minds?

Has our education system effectively leveraged these tools? Or have these traditional models fallen short in guiding youth?

Jabari Evans, SJMC assistant professor of race and media, seeks to answer these questions in his community-oriented work with Connected Learning and Hip-Hop-based education.

Evans' route to academia was unconventional. He first pursued a bachelor's degree in sports journalism while attending the University of Pennsylvania. There, he met music collaborator Double O and became inspired to delve professionally into the world of hip-hop. The duo formed the group, Kidz in the Hall — and were signed by Rawkus Records. They released their debut album, *School Was My Hustle*, in 2006. Since then, the group has sold over 300,000 records worldwide.

Upon graduation, he enrolled in the University of Southern California to pursue a Master of Social Work. Evans questioned whether a Ph.D. was relevant to his career aspirations.

"I had a couple of professors during my master's that said, 'this is something we think you can do; you have a unique perspective that is needed in academia.'

So, I began take that seriously," Evans says.

Evans' research explores self-expression strategies used by black youth on social media platforms. He argues in favor of harnessing their interests, such as hip-hop, to promote media literacy.

"Often, it's seen as a deficiency, when really, their personal interest should be leveraged as a strength to get more positive outcomes," Evans says.

Incorporating individuals' academic and social identities is a framework known as Connected Learning. It follows a three-pronged approach — converging professional interests, peer cultures, and academic experience.

"Not everyone has the resources, or those natural abilities to engage in activities that they don't like. Connected Learning comes from a standpoint of meeting young people where they are," Evans says.

Evans has observed a shift in youth identity formation. Unfettered access to digital tools and online content has blurred roles they inhabit.

"When I was in eighth grade, there was a thought that you were 'turning off' your outside self while you were inside the school building," Evans says. "That's not happening in today's environment."

Educators may be inclined to push back against these changes by implementing restrictions. Evans strongly discourages the temptation. To fully connect with students, educators should examine their personal media diets and digital literacy skills.

"We're doing ourselves a disservice by trying to police what a student is doing online. We need to be leveraging it as a strength."

There are clear merits to embracing hip-hop culture in academia — but doing so comes with a host of challenges.

"A lot in urban education is used as a shiny toy, to indicate inclusivity," says Evans. "At the crux of the work happening, a lot of the times it's very superficial. Sometimes, it's not actually meeting the interests of the students involved. It's a cautionary tale of the ways in which hip-hop is appropriated."

Evans believes authenticity is the key to hip-hop's relevance as an academic tool.

"You have universities, who have moved away from just hiring people who think about hip-hop, to hiring people who've actually participated in it. Artists that are deeply embedded in communities where hip-hop is happening," Evans says.

Evans' forthcoming book, *Hip-Hop Civics* (University of Michigan Press), explores a hip-hop-based education program piloted in two of Chicago's lowest-performing schools. It will be available in 2024.



DR. HULL'S UNIQUE, FUN TEACHING STYLE

KEVIN HULL

Story by Jadon Folmar, senior, public relations

If you are a student in the J-school, then you have been touched by the work of Dr. Kevin Hull during your college career. Hull is the associate professor sports media lead in the J-school. He has worked at the J-school for eight years, helping students become better media consumers and analysts.

In August, his teaching was recognized with the first ever "Great Idea for Teaching" award at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications conference in Washington.

The AEJMC is a large annual conference where teachers share research and unique ways of teaching.

Hull had submitted a project created from one of his sports media classes – the "locomotives assignment" – where students act as the head of social media for a new sports team coming to Columbia.

Students explain how they gain community interest, appealing to the audience and gaining a full fan base before the opening season.

"It was one of those projects that I just was really happy with," Hull says. "I thought it turned out really well. And so, I submitted it in April for the competition. And then, I later found out that I had won."

Hull knew he had created a "hit" assignment based on student feedback and interaction.

"To get the same positive feedback from fellow professors

throughout the country as I did from students was really rewarding," Hull says. "My peers recognized that this was a good assignment, not just my students liked it because they thought it was a fun assignment."

"Sometimes, as a teacher, you make these assignments and sometimes they're hits," Hull says.

"And frankly, sometimes they're misses, there's certain times you assign something that didn't really work out so well, but this one in particular, it was a project where I assigned it and I thought, this is a pretty good assignment."

Teaching and making an impact on dream-chasing students' lives have been Hull's calling since his days working as a news anchor at a television station in Wilmington, N.C., he says.

Over the summers at the television station, he enjoyed guiding and teaching the interns.

"One day it finally hit me, my favorite part of the job is working with interns, teaching these people, maybe this is what I should be doing with my life," Hull says.

Hull knew that teaching was his calling, he said. He began his academic career teaching high school-level digital media, but quickly realized that the age group was not the best fit for him.

After a short high school teaching stint, Hull enrolled in the doctoral program in Mass Communications at the University of Florida.

Upon graduation, Hull began job-searching. Location meant a lot to him because he loved living in Wilmington and being back in the Carolinas near his grandfather.

Hull's job search in the Southeast led him to the J-school. He learned in the job interview there were no sports media-focused classes, but he was encouraged to create them for students if he accepted the job.

"The runway was kind of there for me to create these sports media classes, coming to USC," Hull says. "When we started it was nothing and now it's a lot. It was a perfect fit, I thought."

Hull's teaching style combines having fun with learning, he says.

"That's the whole game here," Hull says. "Trying to make sure that the students are learning, and you know, you want the class to be fun and interesting, but also obviously educational."

"You can have a project where it ends and they get something that they can use for their portfolios or something that they can use when applying for jobs or just skills," Hull says.

"I have students, when applying for these jobs for social media, you might use part of the locomotive design."

His vision is to develop a class where students put all of the information they learned throughout the semester into one final assignment.

"Through like 10 weeks, you've learned a whole bunch of stuff," Hull says. "And I thought instead of giving a test, I thought having some sort of product would be a better way to kind of demonstrate – yes, I've learned this. Yes, I know what the audience is. I know what an audience analysis is like. And so, that was kind of the inspiration. I want the students to come out of it with skills that they can then demonstrate they've learned a lot in this class."

After Hull's accomplishments through his eight years at the J-school, he is just getting started, he says. So be on the lookout for his next big idea and positive impact on the university.

"I love the school. I'm very fond of my coworkers. I'm so proud of what we've done with the sports media. When I started here, it was nothing," Hull says. "And now we have a concentration. We have a minor. We have a major that's working its way up through the approval levels. It might be a sports media major by this time next year."

"I'm really proud to have been on the ground floor of that to help develop that. And, I want to see where it can go."



SJMC EXPERIENCES LEAD TO ETV LEADERSHIP

Standing in her cap and gown on graduation day at USC, Adrienne Fairwell could only think to herself "thank goodness I made it."

Today, Adrienne Fairwell is the new President and CEO of South Carolina ETV and Public Radio.

The broadcast journalism major recalled her studies as being difficult and not for the "faint of heart." Fairwell says she was very thankful that she made it through all four years, earning her bachelor's degree at a prestigious college and university.

Fairwell was passionate about learning from one professor in particular, John Lopiccolo, Ph.D. He was also her advisor, inspiring her daily and noting that "his toughness was demonstrative of how strongly he cared for his profession and students," she says. He critiqued her work "with such passion" which "allowed [her] to elevate [her] level of thinking and approach to journalism."

Another inspiring SJMC professor she mentioned was Kenneth Campbell, Ph.D., noting how he would probably be surprised to learn of his impact on her career.

"Seeing a person of color as a professor during my tenure, as an aspiring journalist was something we were not used to seeing in the small town of North Augusta, where I'm from", she says.

Inspired by these professors, she strives to be the best version of herself in her profession.

Fairwell was frank about her biggest takeaway from her college experience. "The importance of time management, making and meeting deadlines, and the importance of high ethics and integrity," she says.

— Addison Sipe, senior, visual communications



MATTES EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF REALLY UNDERSTANDING THE NONPROFIT THAT THE PARTICIPANTS WERE HELPING AND THE MESSAGE THAT IT WAS TRYING TO PUT OUT — AN ESSENTIAL FIRST STEP TO THE CREATIVE PROCESS.



COULD YOU PRODUCE A FULL MARKETING CAMPAIGN IN 24 HOURS?

Story by Audrey Mayfield, senior, public relations

Pulling an all nighter that results in a full marketing campaign is the goal of CreateAthon every year at the SJMC.

CreateAthon is a volunteer event for J-school students to get hands-on experience in communications and marketing while providing real campaigns to nonprofits all over the state.

Every year, around 50-80 student volunteers join professional mentors, challenged to produce communications and marketing materials for nonprofits – all in 24 hours.

In 2023, the Nov. 3-4 CreateAthon was the event's 10th anniversary. Seventy-seven student volunteers created a total of 194 pieces of content for eight clients. CreateAthon has helped over 65 nonprofits around South Carolina, producing a variety of content including print, video, brochures and websites valued at more than \$2 million.

SASS Go, an organization based in Columbia working with women to prevent and defend against sexual violence and domestic abuse, worked with CreateAthon in 2021 and 2022. Founder and President Shannon Henry says CreateAthon provides invaluable marketing material to nonprofits that

they may not otherwise be able to afford.

Insight and creativity by the student volunteers, as well as the variety of materials they created, was what she appreciated most about participating as a client.

"I loved that we had print as well as video and things that we could market on social media. So we really got a variety of information," Henry says.

Henry recommends participation in CreateAthon to any nonprofits in the area, whether they are struggling with marketing or just looking for fresh ideas on how to get their message out. "Any company can always use fresh ideas and new talent," she says. "And if they say they don't think they can, then they need to think again."

CreateAthon's stated mission is to "combine creativity and compassion" – a message that resonated with sophomore visual communications major Hunter Mattes. 2023 was her first time volunteering for CreateAthon, and she said she chose to participate because it was a good way to combine helping a nonprofit with building her professional profile, all while having fun.

Her team's client was Visions of Women. The team spent the first few hours researching and learning about the client and the message they were tasked with conveying.

"For the first few hours we just learned about what VOW was, what their message is and what they needed from us," Mattes says. "Then we divided out tasks and gave each other feedback as the night went on."

Though a full 24 hours of work could be exhausting for anyone, Mattes says the final product was her favorite part. "I most liked the presentation when we got to show the founder of VOW our work," she says. "She loved it so much she gave us all hugs. I felt super proud."

Insight provided by professional mentors is a big part of the CreateAthon. The mentors help lead and guide each student team. Mentors range from CIC alumni to the event's own director and SJMC senior instructor Scott Farrand.

Anna Ottinger, senior visual communications major and volunteer on the team for Turning Pages, says her mentor, Jared Owenby, provided valuable insights and guidance to their creative process. Owenby is a professional copywriter and CIC alumnus.

"Our mentor, Jared, did a great job leading us but still allowing us the creative freedom that we had," Ottinger says. "He structured our conversations and narrowed down our processes and of course answered any of our questions along the way."

This year's CreateAthon was Ottinger's second as a volunteer, and she said her favorite part about the event is getting hands-on experience and being able to meet new

people in the team environment.

Nearing the midpoint of the 24 hours at 11 p.m., the teams met once more at the "Throwdown," showing each other what they had come up with so far. It was an opportunity to show off their ideas and get feedback from other teams and mentors. Ottinger's Turning Pages team won "Most Likely to Succeed" at the Throwdown in 2023.

At 2:30 p.m. the next day, the end of the full 24 hours, the teams presented their materials to the nonprofits whom they worked for. Farrand said at CreateAthon's opening ceremony that presentations often get emotional, with the clients finally getting to see the work the students have done for them and the message they so strongly believe in. He said that at least one person cries at the presentations each year. The presentations are the moment where all the hard work pays off, and the volunteers get to see the true impact of what they have done.

The winner of last year's Best in Show award and the group whose work was to be submitted to the 2023 South Carolina Advertising Awards was Ottinger's team for Turning Pages, an organization whose goal is to improve adult literacy across the state. Their campaign titled "A World Without Words" consisted of 33 different visual elements including pamphlets, social media posts, and even bus stop ads to help people envision a world in which they could not read. The goal was to inspire them to volunteer or donate to people who face that reality.

ALUMNI *Notes*

1980s

Roni Robbins, BA, '87, Robbins is an award-winning author who has 35 years of experience as a published writer. Her novel *Hands of Gold* ranked no. 14 on Amazon's Kindle Bestseller list for biographical literary fiction.

1990s

Dr. Amanda Sturgill, BA, '90, is following in the footsteps of Henry Price and teaching editing at Elon University. Her book, *Detecting Deception: Tools to Fight Fake News* and her podcast, *UnSpun*, are keeping her busy.

2000s

Michael Lambert, MLIS, '00, serves as the director of the San Francisco Public Library and the current Public Library Association president-elect.

Beatriz Wallace, MLIS, '01, was recently appointed to the 2024 Pura Belpre Award Selection Committee.



Sarah Chakales, BA, '07, joined NBC 12 in her hometown of Richmond, Virginia, as a general assignment reporter in October 2023.

Alana Lewis, MLIS, '07, was named the South Carolina Association of School Librarians (SCASL) Lowcountry Regional School Librarian of the Year! She will compete for the state title of School Librarian of the Year in 2024.



Jackie Alexander, BA, '09, was installed as the 33rd president of the College Media Association and the first president of color in the organization's 70-year history. She serves as the director of student media at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

2010s

Alex Virden, MMC, '12, won the Product Marketing Alliance's Positioning & Messaging Maestro of the Year, which celebrates mastering the art and science behind crafting sharper positioning and stickier messaging that pops. Alex has also been named a Community Top Voice by LinkedIn, which is held by 5 percent of product marketing professionals.

Byron Thomas, BA, '15, was sworn into office as a member of the Cayce S.C. City Council. Thomas currently serves as the director of outreach for U.S. Congressman Joe Wilson and is the founder and director of the Gamecock Pageant organization.

Matt Johnson, MLIS, '17, serves as a branch librarian for Spartanburg County Public Libraries in Spartanburg, S.C.



Zoe Nicholson, BA, '19, serves as the managing editor of *The Free Times* in Columbia, S.C.

Kelly Hughes, BA, '23, is the podcast host of a new series, "Explore Lake Murray Country: Your Guide to Come Alive in the Jewel of South Carolina." In this series, Hughes interviews knowledgeable and inspirational people from the region — sharing their stories with locals and visitors alike.

SENIOR JUSTIN MITCHELL'S CAREER AMBITIONS BOLSTERED BY SCBA SCHOLARSHIP



Our alumni engagement coordinator, Danielle McNaughton, had the pleasure of sitting down with senior broadcast journalism major Justin Mitchell, an entrepreneur and future multimedia journalist and producer.

Since 2013, Mitchell has owned a production company, LAWKI Media. Mitchell's mission is to create positive and affirmative content for young people in his generation. Mitchell says, "The skills I'm learning at the School of Journalism and Mass Communications are preparing me to be able to create content and news that can be disseminated to everyone." LAWKI Media currently has a following of over 54K on Instagram.

During the Fall 2023 semester, Mitchell's entire focus was on producing news content in the SJMC's senior semester course. He was looking to secure an internship with a local news station for the spring.

DM: How has receiving a scholarship impacted you?

Receiving the South Carolina Broadcasters Association (SCBA) Scholarship in 2021 as a transfer student from Midlands Technical College has been a tremendous help. It has helped by allowing me to not have to worry about finances as much and it has given me motivation to keep going. Receiving the SCBA Scholarship has given me the confirmation that this is what I've wanted to do.

-Justin Mitchell

DM: Describe the process of obtaining a scholarship.

JM: I looked on the CIC website for college-specific scholarships. Through the student email sent by Assistant Dean for Student Success Rushondra James, I learned about additional scholarships including the SCBA Scholarship.

DM: Tell me about your career goals and current work.

JM: Post-graduation, my plan is to land a job at a local news station in downtown Columbia, as a multimedia journalist and producer. I aspire to give back to the community; this has always been a goal of mine to serve the community in which I live. I'm looking to tell the stories that aren't being told — the stories that people need to know to bring our community closer together.

Mitchell stressed the importance of reading your emails. You miss out on so many opportunities if you are not checking your email. Do your research, too. See who else has obtained scholarships before you — see what the process is like, look at that criteria and let that be the motivation for you to apply and know that you can do this. It is not about anybody else. It is about you. Put the work in. Do what you must do, show what you have and go for it!



STAY CONNECTED!

Submit your alumni notes online at bit.ly/cic-alumni-update.



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