

SLU COMM DEPT

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DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNICATION

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Department NEWSLETTER

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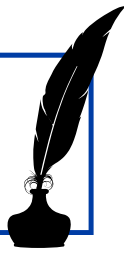


SLUComm

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SLU
COMM
DEPT



letter from THE CHAIR



DAN KOZLOWSKI

Welcome to our Fall 2023 Communication Department newsletter!

Inside you'll find spotlights of two awesome alums. We're proud of our students and what they accomplish, and we're grateful they chose our program to earn their master's degree. You can also read about Professor Medrine Nyambura, Dr. Ashley Walter, and Dr. William Aungst, three new awesome faculty members who joined us this year.

Our program continues to thrive. Drawing on SLU's Jesuit values, we strive to provide students opportunities for professional development as communication scholars and practitioners. We attract students from a wide range of backgrounds and with a wide range of interests, and we encourage students in their time here to tailor the program in ways that fit their individual goals.

We always love to hear from our former students. Shoot us an email to let us know about your milestones and achievements!

Take care, and keep being awesome.

Dan

Happy Holidays!





CONFERENCE

news

Merris Barber
presenting her
research at the
National
Communication
Association's
Annual
Convention



ANNUAL CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

Faculty members, current graduate students, and alumni of our MA program participated in numerous academic conferences this year.

Congratulations to all on your outstanding work!

National Communication Association (NCA)'s 109th Annual Convention

Dr. Hillary Ash participated in a panel discussion, *A Personal Journey: Gendered Freedom and the Academy*, sponsored by the Women's Caucus.

Graduate student **Merris Barber** presented her paper, *Wild Women Don't Have the Blues: Black Women's Blues Music and Communicating Strength*, sponsored by the African American Communication and Culture Division.

Alum **Koyena Biswas** co-presented a short course at NCA entitled *Qualitative Inquiry for Social Justice*, Chaired by **Dr. Tim Huffman**.

Dr. Charnell Peters co-presented a paper, *Identity Veiling: Theorizing Identity Negotiation Post-Intimate Partner Violence*, sponsored by the Interpersonal Communication Division. Dr. Peters also participated in a panel discussion, *Freedom from Allonormativity: A Roundtable Discussion Centering Asexualities and Aromanticisms in Communication Research, Teaching, and Praxis*, sponsored by the Caucus on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns. She also participated in an interactive panel session, *Creating Spaces of Freedom Through Mentorship and Community-Building* sponsored by the International and Intercultural Communication Division.



CONFERENCE

news

Dr. Rudy Pett co-presented two papers, *"I'm not coming back!": A Person-Centered Approach to Adult Children's Reasons for Parent-Child Estrangement*, sponsored by the Family Communication Division, and *A Latent Profile Analysis of Relational Maintenance Behaviors in Romantic Relationships* in the Interpersonal Communication Division.

Dr. Karla Scott presented during a panel discussion sponsored by the Women's Caucus, *Womentoring / Womxntoring - Mental Health and Mentoring: How to Grab Your Own Air Mask First Amid Turbulence*.

106th Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC)

Dr. Kelsey Mesmer co-presented *Journalists' Handling of Scientific Uncertainty During the COVID-19 Pandemic* in the High-Density Refereed Research Paper Session. Dr. Mesmer also presented *Socializing Students to Accept Hostility? A Survey of How Journalism Instructors Talk about Hostility*, which received the Second Place Faculty Paper award in the Scholastic Journalism Division. Dr. Mesmer also presented *Resilience in the Face of Hostility: Applying the Communication Theory of Resilience to Journalism Practice*, which was awarded the Top Paper Award in the Division of Newspaper and Online News Division.

Central States Communication Association (CSCA) 2023 Annual Convention

Dr. Tim Huffman served on the panel *A Model of Faculty Serving Communities in Need Through Community Initiatives* sponsored by the Activism, Communication Ethics, and Social Justice Interest Group.

Dr. Amber Johnson, graduate of our BA and MA programs in Communication, presented the keynote address: *Critical Futures: Re-Imagining Academia's Relevance*. Dr. Johnson was awarded the Outstanding Book in Performance Studies and Autoethnography from the Performance Studies and Autoethnography Interest Group at CSCA. They also served as the Chair of the panel *Healing Justice and Humanizing Equity in the Capitalist Race for Diversity: A Conversation*, sponsored by The Institute for Healing Justice and Equity, which was co-founded by Dr. Johnson during their time as a faculty member in our Department. We congratulate Dr. Johnson on their new position as Assistant Vice Chancellor and Chief of Staff Division for Equity & Inclusion at University of California, Berkeley!

Dr. Kelsey Mesmer served on two panels at CSCA: *Intersections of Media Literacy Scholarship, Pedagogy, and Citizenship* sponsored by the Media Studies Interest Group and *Transitions in the Communication Professor Career*, sponsored by the Strategic and Applied Communication Interest Group.

Alum **Kathleen Barry Murphy** presented *The Intersections of Sport and Public Health: Apologia, Athlete Image Repair and the Case of Novak Djokovic*, sponsored by the Sports Communication Interest Group.

Alum **Dr. Kerry Wilson** presented *Black Motherhood and Black Lives Matter: Examining the Stories of Sybrina Fulton & Lesley McSpadden* and served as a panel member on *Navigating Mental Health and the Academy: Reflections from the FLC* at CSCA.



SPOTLIGHT Faculty



MEDRINE NYAMBURA

Introducing Professor Medrine Nyambura

Journey to SLU as a Communication Professor

I knew I wanted to teach, but I never thought of teaching conventionally and never thought I'd teach at a college. But then in my undergrad, I had two female professors, and I say that because they were the minority. But they taught me my core media production classes, and they were both really young. I remember they were both under the age of 30, with multiple degrees; they were producers and they were doing all these amazing things. I was like, "My God, I want to be like those girls." Then I moved to the U.S. to do my Master's, and my mentor told me, "You're going to make a good professor." And I remember laughing because I like to make things and produce things.

Why SLU?

Academia can be very structured and I was worried about that. Then SLU came up and there are three reasons why I wanted to work here. One was the freedom to really research things I care about. I've always been an activist deep down, so their care about social justice and community involvement is very important to me. The second thing was actually my faith, I had really prayed for a job where I wouldn't have to explain my faith. But then it was like, "Hey, we welcome you and your faith." The third reason was I lived in Ohio for a couple of years, and I wanted to go to a city and I had never heard of Saint Louis before, ever. But then I came before any interviews had been done. I just came to see the city. And was like, "Okay, I could live in Saint Louis. This looks like a place where I could live".

Outside of SLU

I think I'd have to live here probably for a decade to explore all the restaurants. I think the food is just so good. The second thing that I really like about Saint Louis is diversity, beyond racial diversity is cultural diversity. I was an international student, and now I'm an international professor, the first one in the department. It's a lot of pressure, but I walk around and hear accents so I don't feel so secluded anymore. And it is easier. When I came to Saint Louis, I walk into a store and people look like me. Suddenly, I feel comfortable, I feel settled because I've seen people who look like me. So that made all the difference.

What advice do you have for graduate students studying Communication?

What's hard about grad school isn't everything about what happens in classes, okay? It's everything else that's really hard. And then I'll also sneak in for international students specifically. Again, I'm the first international professor, so my heart is very heavy for international students. I genuinely care a lot and I would say it's going to be twice as hard, not because of you, but because it takes a lot of courage to uproot your life, to move to another country. But that courage will be rewarded.

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SPOTLIGHT Faculty



ASHLEY WALTER

Introducing Dr. Ashley Walter

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If something new catches your eye, write it down. Keep the new idea, but move forward with the idea you committed to.”

Journey to SLU as a Communication Professor

It started in Pittsburgh. I was in my mid-twenties. I was working for a newspaper and I really liked it, but I had reached a point where I wanted to do something a bit more intellectually challenging and I really had to kind of dig deep. And I did some soul searching like, “What do I want to do?” And I realized I wanted to be a professor. I always kind of thought that, but it was hard to actualize that and say it out loud. So then I went to my master's thinking that I would be a teacher, and I really didn't know what research was, and to know what it took to be a good researcher. I really fell in love with research then, and so, I got my Ph.D. at Penn State, and then I did a postdoctoral teaching fellowship at Utah State. When I was in Utah, I saw this job at Saint Louis University pop up, and I was like, “It would be really nice to live in a city. I'll apply.”

I came here for the interview and it was so good. I just loved it.

Why SLU?

At first, I was excited that this was a school in the city, which was just kind of a small thing. And then part of the application you have to look at the website and you look to see what your potential future colleagues might be doing. And everyone was doing such interesting work. I loved that there was a master's program here and I would work with graduate students, and the mission being so community-focused was really exciting to me. The social justice aspects of it as well. And then when I came here, interviews are typically an intimidating space, and I was intimidated, but it was so warm and welcoming.

And I just kept thinking “I would love to work with these people.”

Outside of SLU

I am a musician, I play guitar and I sing, and I found a very warm, welcoming, and friendly group of women who are also musicians in the city. That's been really nice. Also, I recently joined a volunteer organization called the St Louis Media History Foundation, and I'm a board member there and I'm very excited to get involved with that. It's about preserving local media history, which is the specialty.

I love St Louis. I love it here.

What advice do you have for graduate students studying Communication?

For those graduate students who are interested in the Ph.D., I would say to pick a thesis topic early and just stick to it. There's always going to be shiny new topics, but don't switch topics. If something new catches your eye, write it down. Keep the new idea, but move forward with the idea you committed to.

Because I think there's just plenty of time in the life of a researcher and I think that it's easy to get backtracked by new ideas. Save the bigger questions for your dissertation someday. And I think sometimes we focus too much on marketability as graduate students where you're like, “I'm going to research or do a project on this trendy idea,” instead of following our passions.



SPOTLIGHT *Faculty*



WILLIAM AUNGST

Introducing Dr. William Aungst

Journey to SLU as a Communication Professor

I studied film years ago, and I had this really great experience the first time that I ever finished a film. It was shown at a festival, and I remember standing there and thinking, "All of this is really fascinating". Like, the power of media, right? So I initially started with media studies in graduate school (my undergrad was in theology and religious studies). So I got into studying media and communication and then I took in my master's program my first rhetoric course. And that kind of changed the course of my research interest. I then went to graduate school to study rhetoric and philosophy of communication and got even more into the philosophy side of communication. I've had experience teaching in both larger schools and smaller schools and I really knew as soon as I saw SLU and came here that this was it; this is great.

Why SLU?

I have always known about SLU because there are great researchers here. Walter J. Ong, who is a big name in communication studies, was here at SLU for many years. And it's just kind of always been on my radar. While I do enjoy college town for some things, I was very excited to be in a city once again. So coming here for the interview, just right away I thought this was a great department, a great fit. The social justice, civic engagement, part of the mission of the university, and the atmosphere here was really enticing to me, too, because a lot of my work deals with civic engagement. So I felt I could continue with some of the work that I've been doing on accessibility and disability issues in my previous institution.

Outside of SLU

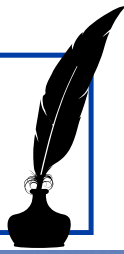
I think my greatest passion is art in a lot of different forms. Conceptual, contemporary art is a great passion of mine. So I go to the St. Louis Contemporary Art Museum and then the St. Louis Art Museum pretty regularly, most times once a week. And then I really enjoy experimental music. So those are two big, big passions of mine.

What advice do you have for graduate students studying Communication?

Always follow any kind of interest that you see. Sometimes it's necessary to stay focused on the project in front of you. Understandably, that could be your thesis, that could be your dissertation. But to always explore any kind of interesting theory, topic, or scholar that comes up, and then don't be afraid of interdisciplinary work. Reach out to see how communication enters a conversation with historians or philosophers. If you find that you're exhausted because you've been working on this same research area for a while, just take a break and read something else. Follow up on a lead that peaked your interest a while ago, just kind of refreshed.

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Always explore any kind of interesting theory, topic, or scholar that comes up, and then don't be afraid of interdisciplinary work.”



RODNEY PRUITT

Tell us a little bit about yourself!

I am originally from St Louis, but I am currently living in Chicago, working as a senior communications manager at National Equity Fund, which is a nonprofit that helps vindicate low-tech funds and also does a lot of other preservation and creation of affordable housing. We help fund affordable and supportive housing developments throughout the country.

Tell us about your career now.

I started I started at National Equity Fund in January 2022. I had been working on the agency side for four years, about seven years of my life in agencies. So actually another SLU alum, George, who works as kind of a recruiter for a company, reached out to me about the position because his boss knew the person looking to fill the position. So, my friend George, whom I met at SLU, connected me with Stephanie, who is now my manager. We had a couple of conversations. Before I knew it, the job was offered. As the senior communications manager, my job is to help the company get exposure, so to lead external and internal communications, our social media, our press executive visibility, and helping the folks in our organization, including our CEO, with speechwriting. So it kind of runs the gamut of communications, both internal and external. Public relations, a little bit of content and web copy, do a little bit of everything.

How has your Communication Graduate degree been useful at your current job?

Let's take it back to undergrad, you learn about tactics, event management, influencer management, and social media. You learn about all of those types of things. I think in grad school, one of the things that is often emphasized more is the thought behind those tactics, thinking about what Dr. Trees would say, the famous, **"So what? What is the point?"** I think that once you get out of the graduate program, you naturally carry that into any position that you are going to have. Therefore, I think when you think about, "Okay, well, what's the correct PR tactic for this? Like, what do we want to do? Why? So what?" It is always a question in the back of my mind, and it helps me be a more thoughtful and impactful communicator within my organization.

What was your favorite part of the Communication Graduate program?

I think my favorite thing about the master's program goes back to the questioning thing. I knew that I was a good writer and I was really hoping to hone my skills in the graduate program. However, I think one of the areas that I was missing was just really questioning things and diving deep into why things were happening, why things mattered. I think the encouragement that you get from the faculty really helps to promote strategic thinking and impactful thinking. And I think that's an underlying thing in the way that the faculty taught their classes, because they're teaching to ask these questions in a way that, "Okay, so what and how that's going to better humanity, how that's going to make you and your team better communicators, how are you going to more thoughtfully communicate with your public?"

What advice would you give to current students in the program?

I would give two main pieces of advice. One would be to be open to new experiences, new ways to approach things, new ways to think. I had a plan when I went to graduate school. I thought I was going to get my master's. I thought I was going to go on to enroll in a PhD program. I still think about it every now and then. Then I met a guy who worked at FleishmanHillard, which was the first agency that I worked at. He was like, "You know, I heard you're a good writer from one of your professors. You should look at joining our organization." So after I graduated, that was the first organization that I joined. So I would say; always be open. It is good to have your plan, but be flexible with it. Going off of that, the reason I met him was because I took advantage and took the opportunity to go to one of the networking events that the advisory board would bring in. Definitely go to those type of events, those networking events, because you never know whom you will meet there. It is a great way to make connections in all areas of communications.



GARRYN MARLEN

Tell us a little bit about yourself!

I live in Columbia, Illinois, about 20 minutes from downtown St. Louis. My husband and I just celebrated our seven-year wedding anniversary over the summer, and we are proud parents of our five-year-old fur child. I love spending time with family and friends, and devoting time to nurturing both my physical well-being and spiritual growth is extremely important to me.

Tell us about your career now.

I am currently the Assistant Director of Marketing and Communications at Logan University, where I help manage internal communications, maintain Logan's brand through messaging and collateral, collaborate with departments on crafting and delivering information to the University and its constituents, and develop and advance the communications direction and strategies. I love that my days range anywhere from meeting with department heads to develop communication plans, to interviewing students and faculty for video segments. I really enjoy the range of creativity in my job.

How has your Communication Graduate degree been useful at your current job?

Earning my MA in Communication at SLU was one of the best decisions I have made in my career. The program not only equipped me with a deep understanding of communication theories but also pushed me outside of my comfort zone. Among the myriad of skills I acquired, one often underestimated gem is my ability to read for content. This skill was honed through exposure to diverse texts and the pressure of needing to gain an understanding of extensive information quickly. I am now able to discern and extract necessary information swiftly. I consistently apply this skill when I need to communicate complex concepts into easily digestible communication pieces.

What was your favorite part of the Communication Graduate program?

My favorite part of the Communication Graduate program was gaining a better understanding of the importance and significance of qualitative research, as I had previously felt that quantitative research was more significant. I learned that you could count how many times someone opens and closes their eye in a one-minute period, but if you don't know if they are blinking or twitching you don't have an understanding of what it means. Therefore, qualitative research serves such an important purpose!

What advice would you give to current students in the program?

My cohort was a diverse, brilliant and amazing group of individuals. I found myself wondering how I could possibly fit in. Please remember that imposter syndrome is normal and remind yourself that you bring a different and just as valuable perspective to the table. Lean on your friends, family and cohort! Graduate school can be extremely stressful, and relationships are vital to maintaining your wellbeing. Hang in there!

KNOW SOMEONE WHO WOULD BE A GOOD MATCH FOR OUR MA PROGRAM?

Our MA program is designed to provide a high-quality graduate education for individuals interested in becoming communication professionals, scholars, leaders, and activists through advanced knowledge of research, theory and practice. Our flexible program provides students opportunities for professional development as communication scholars and practitioners, drawing on SLU's Jesuit values. We encourage students to explore the role of communication in creating a more just society through their work as communication specialists.

If you aim to enhance your expertise as a scholar or communication specialist in the spirit of social justice, integrity, and ethics, SLU's MA program in Communication is for you. Coursework options allow students to deepen their understanding of communication theory and research within a variety of areas, including:

- Organizational Communication
- Intercultural Communication
- Interpersonal Communication
- Rhetoric and Public Dialogue
- Media Studies
- Strategic Communication
- Health Communication
- Social Justice Communication

Did you know?

Our MA program in Communication has three options for degree completion.

- **Applied Project** - Students with a professional focus engage in an in-depth application of communication theory and research in a professional setting. Students design a project applying knowledge and skills developed during graduate study to produce a professional project on behalf of an organization or field of practice.
- **Comprehensive Exam** - Students synthesize knowledge from across their coursework, with a focus on their area of specialization. Students have additional coursework opportunities that culminate in an exam demonstrating their knowledge.
- **Thesis** - Students create new knowledge in their area of specialization. Informed by research and theory, students conduct a study examining an issue of importance to them in the field of Communication.

Tuition assistance is available!

We offer **graduate assistantships** that provide students with a monthly stipend, health insurance, and free tuition. We offer teaching, research and professional assistantships. For working professionals, employers sometimes offer tuition remission to employees interested in continuing their education. Ask your employer for details! For those who do not qualify for graduate assistantships or employer support, our Department offers a limited number of tuition hours covered by our **Access Scholarship** to support students who would not otherwise be able to cover the cost of tuition.

Visit our website at tinyurl.com/slucomm to learn more or contact Jennifer Ohs, Graduate Program Coordinator at jennifer.ohs@slu.edu.



AWESOME 1ST YEAR STUDENTS



GLORIA AKUA ANNAN, JOSEPH CALLAHAN, ANNA BAUGHER, ANNALY IZURIETA,
GURWINDER KAUR, ANDREIA MARCELO, HADASSH AMOAKO

Internship Opportunities

St. Louis Public Radio is looking for a new set of interns for the Spring semester! To know more: [St. Louis Public Radio Internship](#)

Saint Louis City soccer team is looking for interns for next Summer! Check it out in: [Saint Louis City Internship!](#)

Saint Louis Community Foundation is looking for an intern for the Spring semester! To know more: [St. Louis Community Foundations](#)

Got Internships?

Saint Louis University students studying Communication are eager for real-world experience. We offer students course credit for interning with organizations in a wide range of industries that offer them hands-on experience. Internships may be any semester, including the summer, and students average 10-15 hours of work per week. Employers report that they benefit from our students' communication skills and ability to apply the knowledge they learn in class to their work. If you have internships to offer or would like more information, please contact Professor Keli Jackson at keli.jackson@slu.edu.

