

December 6, 2023

COMMUNITY

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

A NOTE FROM ASSOCIATE CHAIR ROBIN JENSEN

As we close out the year, Avery, Kim, and I want to let you know how much we appreciate everything you bring to the department's table both as individuals and as a collective. Of course, this includes big achievements such as securing major grant funding, publishing award-winning books and articles, and earning teaching accolades (the department's cup absolutely overflows with these triumphs). But this also involves the small ways that we work to support each other in these (sort-of, maybe) post-pandemic days. It involves everything from attending job talks and candidate dinners on a moment's notice to helping students prepare for upcoming conferences and fellowship opportunities. We see these kindnesses, and we feel lucky to work with those who are as intelligent and hardworking as they are generous and caring. This has been especially apparent over the past week as our community has grappled with the unexpected passing of our graduate student, Frankie Gigray. In the midst of this incredible loss, the department's members have come together to lift each other up and provide support in innumerable ways. This does not erase the pain, but it makes it possible to look forward to the future. In that spirit, may the new year bring us all peace, hope, and glad tidings of comfort and joy.

The College of Humanities and the Department of Communication Announce Partnership with the Great Salt Lake Collaborative



The University of Utah's College of Humanities and the Department of Communication are partnering with the award-winning Great Salt Lake Collaborative to give students hands-on, community-engaged journalism experience working with professional media organizations across northern Utah.

The groundbreaking collaborative includes a dozen local news organizations as well as science and education institutions. Founded in 2022, the GSLC has helped local news organizations to undertake more solutions-focused journalism about the crisis at the Great Salt Lake and then elevate that work to all Utahns via shared multi-platform publication. Since the collaborative was formed, partners have published more than 300 stories. And over the last two years, Utah lawmakers allocated \$1 billion toward water issues, including to protect and preserve the lake.

The project and capstone class will launch in January 2024 under the guidance of Department of Communication assistant professor Marcie Young Cancio, who also serves as Amplify Utah's executive director.



PBS Utah, in partnership with Amplify Utah, is proud to announce a historical cross-campus collaborative bringing together student-led newsrooms from four public Utah universities and colleges. Student journalists participating in this first-ever Utah College Media Collaborative will produce multimedia content looking broadly and in-depth at stories around guns at school -- timely as ever with the Marshall Project this month reporting that mass shootings, including on college campuses, are happening more often.

Students from the University of Utah, Utah State University, Weber State University and Salt Lake Community College were selected from a pool of applicants based on their skillset, experience and dedication to the mission of the collaborative, which is to embark on this training and work together to produce in-depth and unbiased reporting, representing multiple perspectives.

Each team will produce packages with a core area of focus. Journalists from University of Utah's U Student Media and The Utah Daily Chronicle team will produce video, USU's The Statesman will do audio pieces, Weber State's The Signpost will create social/digital and contribute Spanish translation, and SLCC's The Globe will write an in-depth feature series. Students will also participate in a training administered by representatives from PBS Utah and Amplify Utah that will provide resources and tools for producing content from conceptualization to completion.

NEWS

Graduate Student Caleb Okereke Awarded Joanna Ploeger Memorial Essay Award

Graduate student Caleb Okereke was awarded the Association for Rhetoric, Science, Technology, and Medicine's (ARSTM) Joanna Ploeger Memorial Essay Award for his paper, 'Africa's greatest curse: Parallels between racist coverage of COVID-19 and the 1900s sleeping sickness in Africa' at the 2023 National Communication Association (NCA) conference. Reviewers of the essay said that 'relevance of this topic can't be overstated' because it 'gives a critical examination of the work of colonialism and its iterations on different platforms. [The essay] offers a deeper dive into the use of rhetoric in supporting colonialism and advocating for white supremacy.'



NCA AND WSCA AWARDS

AWARDED TO DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION GRADUATE STUDENTS



- Ellie Estrada | Western States Communication Association Performance Studies Top Student Paper Award
- Damon Darling | The President's Spotlight Panel for The Organization of Feminist Research on Gender and Communication Award (OFGRC)
- Ellie Pelayo | Western States Communication Association Performance Studies Top Paper Award
- Marissa Medina | Western States Communication Association Intercultural Division Top Paper
- Kinny Torre | Western States Communication Association Rhetoric, Culture, and Advocacy Top Paper Award



- Damon Darling | National Communication Association John T. Warren Top Student Paper in Ethnography, Top Student Paper in Organizational Communication, Top Four Paper in the GLBTQ Division

Increasing Dialogue Across Differences

This fall, University of Utah professors and leaders partnered with the nonpartisan nonprofit Unify America and 104 other universities across the country to share the 5th biannual Unify Challenge College Bowl with college students. Over seven nights, thousands of student participants across 40 states joined the virtual Unify Challenge to share perspectives across differences and strengthen their civic muscles.

The University of Utah was one of the nationwide leaders of the experience with 98 student participants from COMM 3150 and COMM 1270.

Here's how the Unify Challenge College Bowl works: Two college students—total strangers from different schools with different political leanings, geographical locations, or backgrounds—are matched into a one-on-one guided video conversation to talk about pressing issues and goals for the country.

“We set out to build a program that could offer low-risk, but high-impact experiential learning, while also cultivating the leadership skills that college students—and our nation—need for the future,” explains Michelle Sobel, President of Unify America, whose organization is leveraging technology and games to reduce political polarization and teach collaborative problem-solving skills.

An anonymous University of Utah student shared this reflection at the end of the experience: “It was really cool to talk to someone in a different state and community that views the world very similar but also in ways that are different than mine,” and another said, “A very good way to get to know someone on the opposite side of the political scale. We shared personal experiences to get more in-depth about all the topics.”

Among participants from the University of Utah, 54% say they feel more hopeful about the future of democracy after participating and 65% said they were more likely to share their point of view on political or current events in class or on campus.



COMM 3150 also participated in a dialogue booth project this semester where students encouraged conversations by hosting booths on diverse topics.

CRASH COURSE

COMM 3070 Gender and Communication
with Logan Gomez

This course examines gender as a social practice that shapes personal and collective identities and relationships. Anchored in a critical antiracist and feminist perspectives, we address gender as a dynamic and performative practice that is complex, contradictory, and shifts in various contexts. As such, this course treats gender as something we do through (and with) communication, rather than as something we are or have. Across this course we focus on both the expansive possibilities and limitations of communicating about gender.

Given the nature of our course, students should expect to be intellectually and emotionally challenged by the course materials and discussions. Together, we address the ever-expanding complexities of gender and struggle with social justice-oriented concepts including but not limited to: power, intersectionality, patriarchy, feminism, voice, agency, ideology, hegemony, and context. We will strive to practice self-reflexivity as we engage with gendered experiences outside of our own, struggle with our preconceived worldviews, and confront oppressive ideologies and practices. Our foremost goal in this course is to expand our perceptions, perspectives, and knowledge about gender.

This course gives students the opportunity to encounter gendered differences that they may not experience, or notice, in their everyday lives. We focus on the histories, personal experiences, and scholarly research on and about trans and nonbinary people, intersex people, and cisgender people. As we learn about the various intersections of identities, power, and oppression, students also build a vocabulary to more confidently communicate the sociopolitical forces that impact gender identities at the intersections of race, class, ability, sexuality, and age. Our current Fall 2023 class has created a radically supportive environment that allows each student the space to encounter unfamiliar content, theories, and experiences that relate to gender and communication.

As I explain to my students regularly, my hope is that they leave my course feeling more equipped to communicate about the complexities, contradictions, and possibilities of/about gender. One of our main goals is to learn about the multitudes of gender so that we might make space for people who identify differently than us. It is not only important that we learn how to communicate about gender but that we learn how to understand and radically accept others who communicate their gender to us. This course pushes students to question what they've been told about gender and redefine how they relate to their gender at this current stage of their life. Most importantly, this course pushes students to be in solidarity with others who are facing various forms of oppression due to their gender and other intersectional identities.