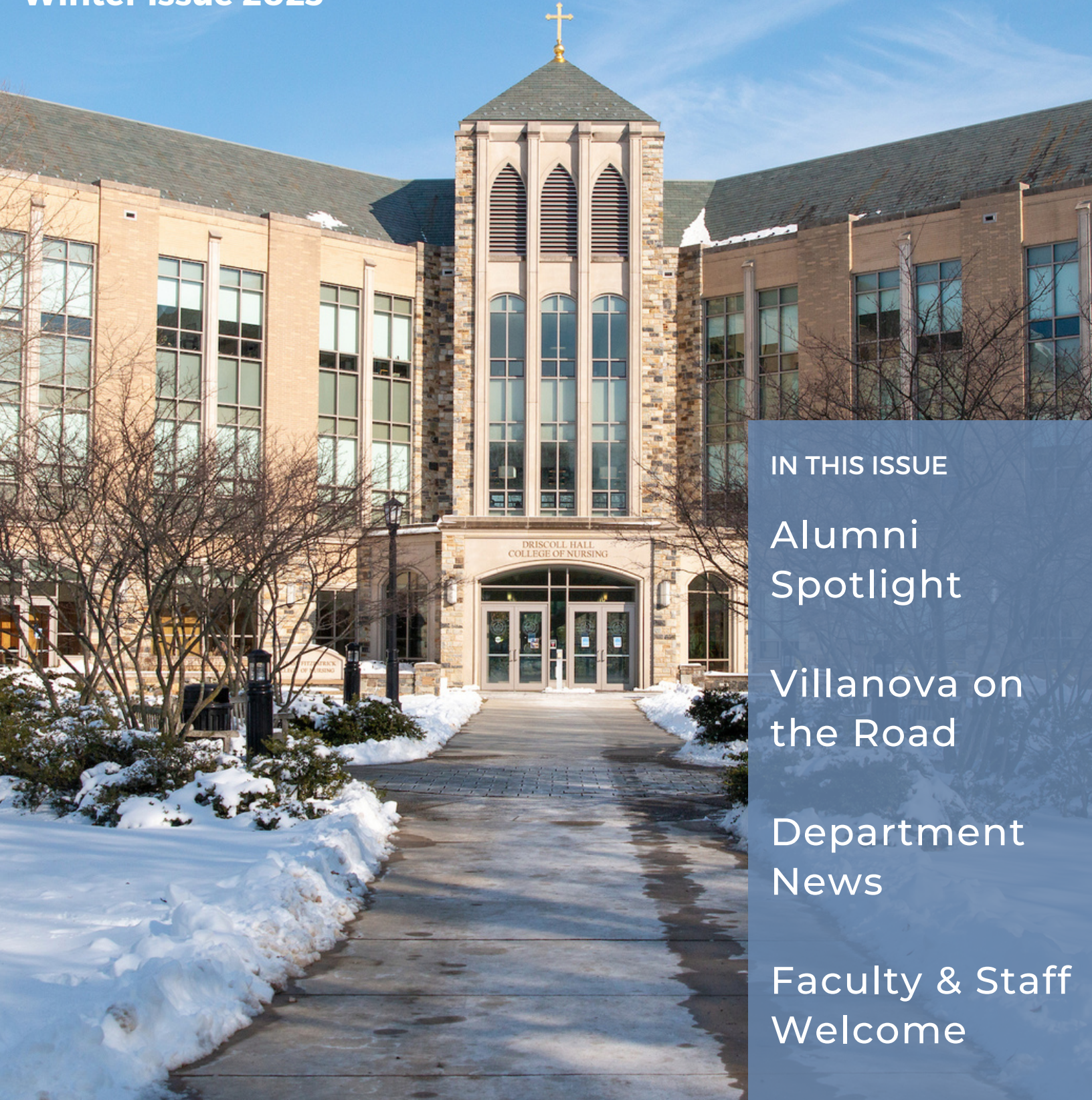


THE VILLANOVA COMMUNICATIONS ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

# VCAN

Winter Issue 2023



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# Catching Up With Micki Burdick '18

By Heather Heffernan and Anna Jankowski

Villanova Communication alum Micki Burdick '18, who uses she/they pronouns, never imagined herself working in healthcare, but today they have a full-time job in the OBGYN department at Penn Medicine. They are a project manager doing qualitative research funded by the National Institute of Health (NIH) and their day-to-day never looks the same. Burdick is passionate about improving the healthcare outcomes for Black women and birthing people of color. We caught up with her recently to learn more about her research and how her time at Villanova impacted her career trajectory.



**"PEOPLE NEED THE HUMANITIES IS WHAT I LEARNED. PEOPLE NEED COMMUNICATIONS STUDIES, SPECIFICALLY UNDERGRADS."**

"The research I do at Penn Medicine is influenced by our current political moment," said Burdick. "But I also love the city of Philadelphia. I feel like it's home. However, Black women and birthing people die from childbirth and have complications from childbirth so much here. It's a big problem across the nation, but really, really bad specifically in Philadelphia. It's sad, but it's also what inspires me to want to make it better. It's been a really good experience that my research is valued in this space."

Burdick is very interested in advocating and addressing this problem as they grew up in a relatively conservative household. In addition to their position at Penn Medicine, Burdick is a doctoral candidate and Fellow in Communication, Culture and Engagement at the University of Iowa. Her dissertation work focuses on reproductive justice, specifically the conservative language surrounding reproduction and its impact on healthcare in the United States.



**“I've always been someone who wants to do something good for other people with whatever I'm doing. I feel like even if I'm just entering data or if I'm just writing, I still feel empowered that I'm doing something that contributes to something bigger.”**

*Burdick in the Villanova Room during the class of 2018's graduation ceremony.*

The research Burdick conducts at Penn Medicine directly impacts the dissertation she is currently writing. “Thinking critically about health outcomes and social determinants of health has been really helpful to frame my own research and mindset around those concepts,” said Burdick. “I grew up pretty conservative and I'm kind of the opposite of that now. I was lucky at Villanova to be around a lot of radical thinkers, which isn't always the case for a religious community. Specifically, my thesis advisor Dr. Billie Murray really made me think critically about a lot of things and helped lead me to where I am today.”

Burdick expressed extreme gratitude for the lessons they learned at Villanova both inside and outside of the classroom. She briefly taught classes at the University of Iowa, which she found to be a very insightful experience.

“I think it would benefit a lot of people to take classes in critical theory just to think about the world and what's going on in the world,” Burdick continued. “I've come across a lot of people who don't ever have to think about that and it's valuable for everyone to think about.”

Burdick was a first-generation student who found a strong support system at Villanova that encouraged her to pursue her academic goals.

“I felt that I was very prepared for a PhD program because of Villanova, which is great,” said Burdick. “The communications program is an awesome critical cultural studies program. I really appreciated that; especially working now. I'm working in an academic setting in multiple ways, but also in a medical setting. Communication studies is actually pretty applicable to a lot of different fields.”

We asked about some of the most influential people she encountered during her time as a graduate student at Villanova.

“I'd like to thank Dr. Murray and Dr. Crable, who have always been mentors as well. When I was at Villanova, I also had an assistantship in the Graduate Studies Department. All of the wonderful women I worked with there were the best. They're the reason I didn't spiral into depression when I was writing my thesis, so I love them. I'd like to like to shout them out, because they're great.”

Villanova gave Burdick a sense of confidence to take the next steps in their career. The relationships they created with professors at Villanova positively impacted and prepared them for new career opportunities. Their career following their time at Villanova has given them the opportunity to do good for others.



# Villanova at the Agency's Inaugural Trip

By Regan Carlin and Brynne McNelis



*Dr. Cowen pictured with Villanova at the Agency participants (Skye Archibald '23, Alexander Birle '24, Cameron Castelli '23, Fiona Doherty '23, Allison Dyer '23, Sofia Fazal '23 MA, Ryan Fitzsimmons '24, Ava Giaquinto '23, Olivia Naioti '23, Anna O'Keefe '23, Gavin O'Reilly '22, Carolyn Reilly '23, Cristian Rodriguez '22, Marisa Weber '24, and Grace Yang '23) and Nova alums Cat Duff '09 and Ré Kleinbard '16.*

The Villanova at the Agency immersion program is held in New York City, the epicenter of the advertising and public relations industry. In May, the program's inaugural cohort of 15 students, chosen through a competitive application process, met with Villanova alums who hold executive positions in their organizations. Students gained first-hand insight into current business trends and learned how to establish a successful career in public relations and advertising through on-site visits. In addition, the program offers an introduction to an expansive, professional network with Villanova's well-known alumni and friends.

The development, planning and launch of the inaugural event was a team effort across multiple offices: the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) Dean's office, the Career Center, and Alumni Relations. However, the idea for the program originated from Assistant Dean of External Relations, Rebecca Rebalsky. Working alongside Rebalsky, Bill Cowen, EdD, teaching

professor and program coordinator for the public relations and advertising specialization, served as the faculty advisor. Villanova at the Agency is the fourth student immersion program across all academic colleges, with two being housed in the Communication Department.

**"It was the inaugural year but it turned out to be absolutely beyond our expectations," said Dr. Cowen.**

During the 2022 spring semester, over 30 applicants applied, and 15 were selected to participate in the cohort. On May 16, Dr. Cowen and the group of students traveled to Manhattan to experience four days of networking and learning about several PR and advertising organizations. These agencies represented global, full-service firms, boutique agencies, as well as communication teams at large corporations. Participating organizations included Havas Media, Verizon, Hunter PR, Edelman,

Coyne PR, Meta, MikeWorldWide and NASDAQ.

At each organization, students heard a presentation about what the firm offers and engaged in discussions about current business trends. Some organizations hosted a Q&A session with Villanova alumni on staff. While each firm conducted their visits differently, at the conclusion of the formal programs students were always invited to network, chat, and create connections with the presenters.

"We had the opportunity to speak with some Villanova graduates, many of whom had similar experiences to us," said Ally Dyer '23, a Villanova at the Agency participant. "These shared experiences provided the groundwork for relaxed and enjoyable networking and allowed us to feel supported and encouraged through the process." Many students could feel the impact of not only this event, but the strength of the Villanova community that extends beyond campus.

“Villanova at the Agency gave me confidence and excitement about my career choice and reassured me of the support I would have in that journey from the greater Villanova community,” added Dyer.

The program culminated with a reception attended by alumni representing classes from 1990 through 2020 who work in the PR and advertising industries. Held at PR agency MikeWorldWide, the reception’s keynote speaker, Carreen Winters ’90, addressed the importance of leveraging your Nova Network. The reception provided the opportunity for all students to further their connections made during the individual agency visits.

To close out the trip, the group was invited to take part in the NASDAQ stock opening in Times Square. Upon the opening of the market, the Villanova University logo was displayed on the enormous NASDAQ monitor in the center of Times Square.

This monumental moment solidified the success of the inaugural trip and set the tone for years to come.

Dr. Cowen is hoping to build upon the energy from this year for the second annual Villanova at the Agency trip.



*Villanova is featured on the NASDAQ monitor in Times Square.*



*University President the Rev. Peter M. Donohue, OSA, PhD, traveled to NYC to make a special guest appearance at the closing reception, pictured left with Dr. Bill Cowen.*

## Agency Focus: Coyne PR

Coyne PR, a full-service PR agency, was selected as one of the agency visits during the Villanova at the Agency program. Coyne PR works closely with consumer-facing brands in the hospitality, beauty, healthcare, automotive, and food and beverage industries. The firm was recently awarded the 2021 Best Midsize Agency to Work for in North America by Provoke Media and PRWeek’s 2020 Best Place to Work. Additionally, Tom Coyne, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Coyne PR, was named CEO of the Year by PRNEWS.

Villanova students were able to learn more about the company and listen to advice from two Villanova alumni who currently work at Coyne PR. Account Executive Taylor Gray ’20 shared her experience in the job market, her transition from college to a career and how important it is to keep your alumni network close, especially the incredible Nova Network.

“It was really an incredible experience to be able to work with and share what I have learned in my first two years out of school and demonstrate the things that I learned in the Comm program at Villanova,” said Gray.

*The inaugural cohort of students opening the NASDAQ in Times Square with Villanova Alumni.*





# Summer in Greece Reaches 20th Anniversary Alongside Inaugural Need-Based Scholarship

By Erin Dwyer and Madison Martinez

This summer, 14 students embarked on the 20th annual trip to Greece as a part of the Communication Department's summer study abroad program. This study abroad program, created by Susan Mackey-Kallis, PhD, and Heidi Rose, PhD, in the late 90s, is a five-week program that allows students to gain important insights into the role of rhetoric and performance in ancient and contemporary contexts through hands-on learning experiences in Greece. After a two-year break due to COVID-19, the trip was finally able to resume and, for the first time, offered a need-based scholarship donated by Christ Economos.

While trying to choose the perfect backdrop for this classical studies-based trip, Greece immediately came to mind. There was another added benefit in that Dr. Mackey-Kallis' husband is Greek and she had spent a lot of time there visiting significant archaeological sites.

This summer, students took courses on Rhetoric and Myth in Ancient Greece taught by Dr. Mackey-Kallis and Performance of Ancient Greek Literature taught by Dr. Rose. They traveled across the country, visiting places like Athens, Santorini and Crete.

Students were able to immerse themselves in their education as well as the amazing culture, language and scenery around them. "Going abroad to Greece was incredible because we got a chance to look at Ancient Greek culture and literature, and then we got to see the locales where these stories were based," said Cole Scheuring '23, a student on the trip. "Being able to experience these stories where they happened was extraordinarily enriching." Scheuring explained that his professors' in-depth knowledge of the country, culture and language as well as the welcoming locals allowed him to leave feeling like he experienced Greece rather than just visited.

One of Dr. Mackey-Kallis's favorite parts of the trip was a hike in Santorini. Known for its beautiful sunsets, crystal clear water and breathtaking hikes, Santorini is a volcanic island in the shape of a crescent. "It's the most magical hike, you feel like you are walking on the edge of the world," said Dr. Mackey-Kallis. She emphasized that the best part of the program is the connections students form with one another. "Fifteen to 18 total strangers show up to the airport and by the end many of them are best friends forever."

"Knowing that the roots of rhetoric could be found in visiting some of those archaeological sites, and connecting the idea of books with the actual places where the ideas were born was an impetus to developing the program," explained Mackey-Kallis.



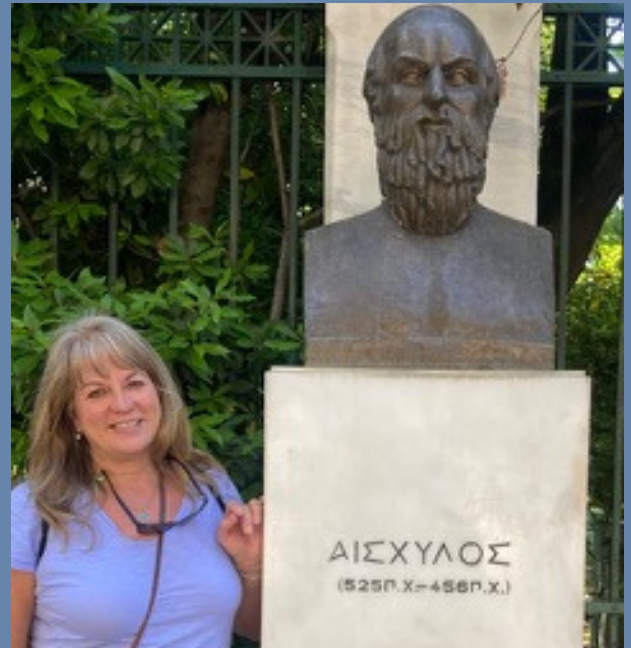
Scenic view in Santorini.

Reaching the 20th anniversary was a huge milestone for the program; however, Drs. Mackey-Kallis and Rose predicted it would be a hit when the program launched. For the first few summers both professors led the trip. In order to ensure the longevity of the program, they eventually adapted the program to rotate through different professors from the Communication Department each summer. "Faculty can be brought in and socialized, both of them teach a class, and each year there would be a new faculty that participated," said Dr. Mackey-Kallis. This keeps the program fun and exciting for both the faculty and students. Over time the program's courses have evolved along with the historical landmarks the faculty and students visit. Each new professor brings a fresh perspective and has added to the rotating list of courses offered.

Now, thanks to the program's new benefactor, Christ Economos, the program is accessible to more students. Economos is a retired accountant and father of a Villanova 2020 alum. Looking for a way to get involved at Villanova, he was put in touch with Dr. Rose and after hearing more about the program they both realized it was the perfect match.

Economos comes from a Greek heritage, can speak, read and write in Greek and has a strong interest in classical studies. He visited Greece every summer for the 20 years leading up to the pandemic and plans on returning soon. Many of the places that the students and faculty visit, Economos has visited as well. He has felt the immersive power of these historical landmarks and the way they can enhance rhetoric and classical studies. "When I learned about this program I was like man, I wish I could have had this when I was in college," said Economos.

Many universities have eliminated their classical studies specialty which disappoints Economos. When he heard about the Summer in Greece program and all it has to offer, he wanted to give other students the opportunity and experiences he wished he could have had while in school. With a need-based scholarship, Economos wants to make sure that the cost of the trip is not a barrier to interested students. Thanks to his contribution, this summer three students were awarded the scholarship and were able to experience all that Greece has to offer.



*Dr. Mackey-Kallis, Professor of Communication, in Athens.*



*Backrow from left: Kristian Williamson '24, Cole Scheuring '23, Michael Hahn '24, Anna Jankowski '23, Sarah Wisniewski '23, Logan Hirkey '25, and Felicia Basciano '23. Front row from left: Meghan Rivardo '23, Skylar Musick '24, and Cynthia Choo '23.*



# Communication Students Committed to Social Justice Complete Documentary Filming From Villanova to Kenya

By Shannon Foley and Caroline Kelly

Villanova University's Communication Department offers two classes on social justice documentary filmmaking. One course works domestically around Villanova's campus and the Greater Philadelphia Area, while the other travels internationally to destinations that have included Puerto Rico, Kenya and Ghana. The Social Justice Documentary (SJD) program gives students the opportunity to write, shoot and create award-winning movies on events of worldwide significance under the direction of talented Villanova faculty.

The objective of the SJD program is to give students the chance to create documentaries that highlight a current social justice topic over the course of the academic year. The documentary classes require commitment and passion, as they are two-semester courses where students receive six credits in the fall and three credits in the spring. The fall semester is focused on planning, scouting and filming, with editing and finalizing the documentary done in the spring semester.

## Professor Tania Romero Named Director of the Domestic Social Justice Documentary Class

Turning the focus toward local communities, this course delivers a space for students to learn about the diverse genres, ethical standards and technical practices of documentary filmmaking. This year, Tania Romero, MA, MPhil, was named director of the course. Born and raised in Nicaragua, Romero has extensive experience not only in documentary filmmaking but also in teaching the craft to diverse student cohorts. While living in Texas and over the last 19 years, she has conducted several documentary filmmaking workshops, taught media production to high school students and taught at the Art Institute of Austin. She continues to mentor BIPOC students in remote programs for Reel Works, New York.



*Director of the documentary "Say What You See" Andrew Mister in pre-production.*



*Interview with Thomas Reid for the documentary in production "Say What You See"*

Romero demonstrates her natural ability as a storyteller through her films. Growing up, she always considered herself an artist-philosopher. Her filmmaking practice has been informed with autodidactic methods and self-determination.

“Coming from an immigrant household, I had certain traditional options for choosing which career to go into,” said Romero. “Although my parents nurtured my identity as an artist, filmmaking wasn’t considered a viable career path. I always considered myself a filmmaker and DIYer, so I taught myself how to do the things I know.”

Rather than attending film school, she learned in the most authentic way possible: by making her own films. Romero has an active role in every step of the filmmaking process. She writes, edits, directs, produces and spends much of her time behind the camera. “I see the importance of being a Latina behind the lens and having authorship of my own craft and stories,” said Romero. “For me, it’s really important to have that agency as a storyteller and never forget my cultural roots. I also want my filmmaking practice to be of service to my community.” She uses her platform to tell socially-minded stories primarily focused on women and gender, immigrants’ rights and border policies.

When asked about the creation and production of her class’s social justice film, Romero shared that she approaches students as filmmakers. She wants them to fully understand the documentary process because it is likely not the last time they will employ these skills, especially if they want to continue their journeys as media producers beyond Villanova.

After brainstorming and conducting research, students agreed that the topic for this year’s documentary will be audio description, a subject they all feel passionate about. Audio description is a narration service that makes visual images in theater, television, film or other art forms accessible to people who are blind or visually impaired.

Catherine Hamilton '23 shared that as a double major in Communication and Peace and Justice, she was immediately interested in enrolling in this course. “Besides coming to understand the importance of every step in the filmmaking process, I’ve learned so much more about the topic we chose,” said Hamilton. “When you think about how curb ramps in sidewalks were initially installed to provide accessibility to people with disabilities, but now have benefits for other groups, such as parents with strollers, the same can be said for audio descriptions. They are tools that serve to help the visually impaired, yet so many other groups can benefit.”



*The team with Christa Bialka, EdD, Director of the Department of Education and Counseling and Associate Professor of Special Education.*

“This class is really geared towards preparing students for a future in the video production field,” said Romero. “I want them to be empowered with the skills to keep making films and use these as a tool to make change wherever they go.”



Romero shared that while most of these students have no prior production experience, they have all stepped up to their roles, have found their flow and are discovering their own purpose in the process of making this film. She anticipates the final product will also reflect the students' care and dedication. Those interested in seeing the documentary can expect the screening to take place on Villanova's campus sometime between late April and early May.

### International Course Travels to Siaya, Kenya alongside Professor Lewis

The international Social Justice Documentary class offers a unique opportunity for students to produce and film a documentary in a location abroad that tells a story to evoke positive social change.



*Documentary class students with local Siaya residents*

"There are other avenues of learning available that we haven't really tapped into as a society," said Lewis. "This course allows students to really spread their wings and be uncomfortable, which actually brings them to be more comfortable with who they are."

Filmmaking is delegated to two groups, with one in charge of the main documentary, while the other acts as the multimedia team. The documentary team tells the central social impact story that is affecting the community they are filming. The multimedia team typically films behind the scenes, capturing the making of the documentary, and promotes the film on social media.

Hezekiah Lewis, MFA, has been the instructor of this course for over two decades and has been producing international documentaries for over 12 years. Though the location changes from year to year, his mission remains the same: to build sustainable relationships with the people that are willing to tell their stories and to help students in the class achieve self-growth through the filmmaking process. By leading this international SJD course, Lewis can offer students a unique learning experience that is hard to find elsewhere.

This year, Lewis and his students traveled to Siaya, Kenya for two weeks in October. Throughout their time there, they traveled to various locations in the area to form relationships with the locals and learn more about their lives. Though most of the days were spent filming for the documentary, Lewis and the students involved were able to make connections with the residents of Siaya and experience their culture.

One thing that Lewis noticed immediately was how hospitable the Siaya residents were toward himself and his students. "It was an amazing experience to feel welcomed," Lewis said. "We didn't even speak the same language, but we could tell through reading body language that everyone was really excited that we were there."

Nick Bacani '23 acted as a cinematographer on the documentary team. "This was truly one of the most eye-opening experiences I've ever had," said Bacani. "I loved having the opportunity to bring my passion for filmmaking into something so impactful and meaningful. I can't wait until the stories we filmed are shared with the rest of the world."

The focus of the upcoming documentary will be women's empowerment. Though it will follow two women with very different stories, the film will demonstrate how they are equally fundamental in the movement for change in Siaya. The women, Trezzer and Duren, are trailblazers in the advocacy and mentorship of young women and girls in the area. They are both dedicated to providing education and sanitary products to Siaya, two obstacles that the community is currently fighting to overcome.

After filming and learning more about Siaya, the multimedia team decided to make their own documentary, something that has never been done before in this course. This additional documentary will be focused on a local school in Siaya for the deaf and hard of hearing. Both documentaries will premiere at the end of the upcoming spring semester. Fundraising efforts leading up to the documentaries' releases will go towards the Siaya Muungano Network and other organizations dedicated to promoting social justice and challenging inequalities in the area.



*Cinematographer Nick Bacani '23  
filming Trezzer making dinner*

*Documentary staff and Siaya  
locals at Siaya Muungano  
Network*





# “Parakeet”: Alum’s Novel Gets Stage Adaptation

By Ally Dyer and Race DePenti

Teachers inspire students every day at Villanova University, but few recognize the times when students inspire their teachers. Student inspiration took flight this fall, as the Villanova Communication Department debuted a performance of “Parakeet.” Directed by Department Chair Heidi Rose, PhD, “Parakeet” was adapted from Villanova alum Marie-Helene Bertino’s ‘99 original novel of the same name. Dr. Rose and Bertino have a long history, as Bertino was a performing arts student over twenty years ago. At the time, Dr. Rose filled Bertino’s mind with inspiration and wonder. And now, several years later, Bertino has been able to return the favor.

“Marie was my student a million years ago,” said Dr. Rose. “It was my early years at Villanova. I remember knowing that, whatever she did, she was going to do special things in the world.” Bertino was a student in some of Dr. Rose’s first performance studies courses in the department as well as a group Dr. Rose founded that traveled across Villanova’s campus and around Philadelphia using performance to educate about AIDS and HIV.

As Dr. Rose predicted, Bertino’s time at Villanova would launch her into great success. She has published three books, with a fourth currently in the works. One of her most successful novels, “Parakeet,” navigates the difficulties of womanhood and the desire for guidance through life. Bertino found inspiration for the novel in the passing of her grandmother, wishing she could hear “her singular, irreverent advice during watershed moments in my life.” In the story, Bertino thought about how much some women give up to be brides and mothers and wanted to write something funny and honest and unexpected about the trauma of weddings, female best friendship and the beauty of sibling friendship.



**Performances of “Parakeet” ran in late September and early October**

“Parakeet” follows a soon-to-be bride who is struggling with her place in life. Suddenly, she is visited by a parakeet. This is no ordinary parakeet, however. The bird holds the soul of her deceased grandmother who points her toward people from her past. Driven by the advice of her grandmother, the bride rekindles lost relationships and begins to find her place in life.

Dr. Rose’s imagination ran wild after reading Bertino’s third book. “When ‘Parakeet’ was published in the beginning of 2020, I read it ... it was right at the beginning of the pandemic. Right at the beginning of lockdown. I really loved it. It really resonated with me,” said Dr. Rose.

**I’m delighted to have a chance to reunite with a former student in this way and to give a chance for my current students to bring to life characters from the work of someone they actually get to meet,”** added Dr. Rose. **“To be able to have her there and start a dialogue with my students, that doesn’t happen often.”**



**Actors Anna Jankowski '23, playing the parakeet, and Ryan Henry '22, playing the bride.**

Bertino not only visited campus to see the adaptation on opening night but held a master class for a small group of communication students. “Dr. Rose's interest in adapting ‘Parakeet’ for the stage was a gift, the measure of which I'm only beginning to understand,” said Bertino. “I hope Dr. Rose and ‘Parakeet’s’ actors have had a thrilling and life changing experience. I hope the novel brought them even a little of the joy it has brought me. I'm very grateful.”

Anna Jankowski '23 played the role of the Bride's grandmother, who appears to her in the form of a parakeet. “I read the book over the summer and really loved the way Marie depicted trauma and dream logic,” said Jankowski.

Jankowski felt challenged and freed through the process of bringing the character to life on stage. By the performance, the cast knew they had created something special and meaningful. Bertino and Dr. Rose's work put the audience through a wide range of emotions. From hysterical laughter to heartfelt applause, the audience was deeply affected by “Parakeet.”

“Each night we found the audience laughing at different things or moments in the play. Some audiences definitely understood the material more than others, but it was always interesting to see how audiences would interact with the tough themes in the play. That is what is really beautiful about a play is that it's different every time it's performed, and no two nights were exactly the same,” added Jankowski.

Seeing the growth of the department since her time on campus, the significant influence of new professors' perspectives and the continued inspiration of students has furthered her passion and gratitude for Villanova's performance studies. “I am tremendously grateful to any teacher at Villanova who is helping art and young artists,” said Bertino.

Just as Dr. Rose inspired Bertino so many years ago, both have now inspired a new generation of Villanovans to experiment with their art and emotion to create something beautiful.



**“Parakeet” cast and crew. Backrow from left: Anya Speaker '23, Emily Krass '23, Katie Tuberosa '25, Grace Dwyer '24, Kristian Williamson '24, Anna Jankowski '23, Liz Bojduk '24, Griff Scially '23, and Kiana Carbone '23. Front row from left: Carly Isselman '25, Jackie Carroll '23, Julia Stanisci '23, Angel Fisher, Ryan Henry '22, and Sarah Wisniewski '23**



# Scholarship for First-Generation Students Selects 2022 Recipient

By Sara Campbell and Izzy Stone

In September, the Communication Department proudly announced this year's recipient of the Maria DiStefano Scholarship for First-Generation Communication Majors: Chelsea Le '24. The scholarship is awarded to first-generation students in honor of beloved administrative assistant of over 25 years, Maria DiStefano.

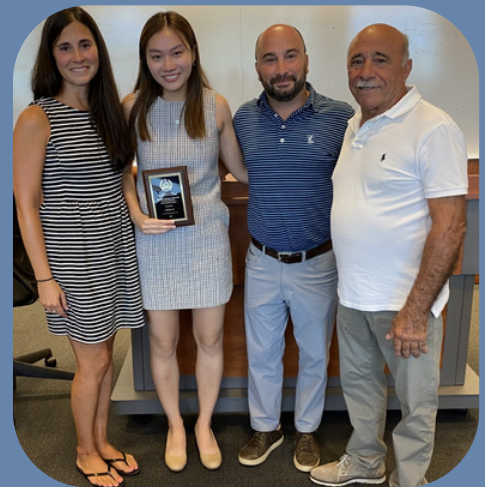
DiStefano was described as embodying "kindness, resilience, effort, commitment, loyalty and support" for not only her students, but the Villanova community. As an Italian immigrant whose two children were both first-generation college students at Villanova, DiStefano was passionate about supporting other first-generation students.

In her name and honor, the Maria DiStefano Scholarship for First Generation Communication Majors was founded to support Villanova-related expenses for an exemplary student who reflects "Maria's kindness, compassion, commitment and loyalty." After a competitive application process, a faculty committee chose Le as the 2022 recipient. Le is an active and dedicated communication student who navigated her college application process on her own, which led her to Villanova.

"When it came time to apply to colleges, my parents were unfamiliar with the entire process. Thus, it was my responsibility to figure out how to finance my education, what the difference between a subsidized and unsubsidized student loan was and how to fill out financial aid applications," said Le.

Le is a Digital Media Fellow for CalMatters, a nonpartisan and nonprofit California news organization, and was matched as a Dow Jones News Fund Fellow. She is also a development and communications intern for the Urban Justice Center, a nonprofit legal services and advocacy organization serving the New York City area. Her work exemplifies a commitment to social justice initiatives and creating a world better understood through communication.

After meeting DiStefano's family and hearing their story, Le felt great empathy. "It was the same one I had gone through," said Le. Her parents immigrated to the United States to give her the opportunity to pursue an education they were unable to have. "To leave my family in California and attend Villanova was a pivotal and difficult decision in my life, but I have been met with nothing but love and support from the Communication Department," she added.



*Le '24 (second from left) was presented the scholarship by DiStefano's family, from left: Nicole Sypherd, Anthony DiStefano, and Raffaele DiStefano.*

Taking a leap of faith and pursuing Villanova, Le has developed a profound sense of initiative and gratitude as a first-generation student. "Because I've had to be so self-reliant, it's allowed me to pursue new experiences and not be afraid of uncertainty and discomfort. I also live with gratitude for the people who have mentored me and for the support I've received throughout my college experience," said Le.

The scholarship has a lot of potential, and Heidi Rose, PhD, department chair, sees it growing in the future. "I would love to see the fund grow into an endowed scholarship, which would lock in the ability to grant a \$5,000 scholarship annually in perpetuity," said Dr. Rose. This would grant amazing opportunities for first-generation students and ease the cost burden of higher education for many more students to come.

Villanova is committed to providing opportunity and community to first-generation students.

"A big step is naming and identifying the honor of being a first-gen student, because doing so helps bring first-gen students together and helps everyone at Villanova recognize what it means to be the first in one's family to go to college," said Dr. Rose.

Le agrees, and has a reminder for all future first-generation students. "Don't be afraid to ask for help. It's so easy to keep everything to yourself and struggle silently, but there are people who care about you and will support you." Villanova's Communication Department, as well as other University offices, offer a grounding support system that helps first-generation students in the challenging college process. With Villanova's deep belief in community, Villanovans are encouraged to provide support to any student that needs it and work together to uplift first-generation students throughout their college experience.



*From left: Heidi Rose, PhD, Maria DiStefano, Terry Nance, PhD, and Loretta Chiaverini.*



# Let's Vote Nova Coalition Turns Out the Midterm Vote

By Emma Cabana and Harriette Overend

On November 8, many college students voted thanks to Villanova's civic engagement initiative. Let's Vote Nova exists to educate students on voter registration, improve access to voting and ensure no student is disenfranchised.

Between the confusion of in-person voting locations, out-of-state eligibility and registration deadlines, voting can be challenging for students. Many understand the importance, but need help navigating the system, especially when it's their first time being eligible to vote. Luckily for Villanova students, this process was made simpler by the on-campus campaign, Let's Vote Nova (#LetsVoteNova on social).

"Volunteering with Let's Vote Nova has made me realize just how difficult it is to be civically engaged," said Slyvia Aalund '23, a campaign volunteer. "I think a lot of times we get down on young people for not voting, not turning out, having lots of loud opinions online but maybe not coming to the polls when it matters. I kind of just realized that there's a lot of barriers in place especially for college students."



From left: Allie Levin, PhD, Lily Claire Gesson '23, Slyvia Aalund '23, Ryan O'Sullivan '23, and Julianna Cleere '23.

"Even getting one person to vote is huge. I'm super proud of what the students have been able to do. And for the passion they've shown in getting people to vote," said Dr. Levin.

Let's Vote Nova is reducing those barriers for students to help them through the voting process. For example, Villanova's campus falls within four districts, leading to four different polling places. A student living in one dorm freshman year may have to re-register as a junior living on a different part of campus and report to a new polling location. Let's Vote Nova not only assists students navigating registration, but provides buses to and from each off-campus polling location.

The campus coalition, started in 2019, was created to promote voter education, voter registration and voter mobilization. The group is a collaborative effort by the Villanova Student Government Association, the Office of Student Involvement, and the Office of Government Relations, and this year, a Media and Politics class taught by Allie Levin, PhD.

Working alongside Student Involvement, Dr. Levin trained her students to understand what it means to register voters and the complexity of voting registration. The students volunteered by tabling and reaching out to student organizations to get students to register on campus.

"When I've taught this course in the past, I really wished students could get out there and help people to vote," said Dr. Levin. "Making that happen this semester during the 2022 midterms exceeded my expectations and left both myself and my students with a great sense of pride and fulfillment."

Villanova's mission statement calls for a community of people who seek to nurture a concern for the common good and who share an enthusiasm for the challenge of responsible and productive citizenship.



*From left: Sarah Wisniewski '23, Colin Beazley '24, Hally Ammons, Assistant Director of Government & Community Relations at Villanova), Jeremy Weinstein '23, Jake Webster '24.*

Let's Vote Nova speaks to this greater mission by encouraging students to make voting a habit, even in midterm or local elections.

Let's Vote Nova believes students are best positioned to help fellow students become more informed about the importance of voting. "Let's Vote Nova helped many students get to the polls on Election Day," said Dr. Levin. "It was an inspiring day filled with new and returning Villanova voters exercising their right to vote. My Media and Politics students brought their knowledge, enthusiasm and dedication to their efforts – with tremendous success!"





## New book from Billie Murray, PhD, Explores Strategies for Combating Hate

*“Combating Hate: A Framework for Direct Action” is available from The Pennsylvania State University Press Rhetoric and Democratic Deliberation Series*

The United States has a hate problem. In recent years, hate speech has led not only to deep division in our politics but also to violence, murder and even insurrection. And yet, established constitutional jurisprudence holds that proper response to hateful expression is not government regulation, but “more speech.” So how can ordinary citizens stand up to hate groups when the state will not? What does “more speech” look like in our contemporary moment?



In *Combating Hate*, Billie Murray proposes answers to these questions. As a scholar-activist at public protests against the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis and Westboro Baptist Church, Murray researched firsthand the limitations of the ‘more speech’ approach as well as the myriad of tactics used by activists. Murray argues that while more speech tactics can be effective in some contexts, what is also needed in this ongoing struggle are combative tactics that embody a radically different strategy for combating hate—one that explodes the myth of content neutrality and reveals hate speech to be a tactic of fascist organizing with very real, highly anti-democratic consequences.

## National Communication Association (NCA) Conference Student Presentations

The department was proudly represented by several current and former undergraduate and master’s students at this year’s NCA meeting in New Orleans, LA.

### MARISSA LUCA ’23 MA

- Unblinking Eyes and Cracking Bones: Body Horror as Critique of Violence Against Women in *Ringu* and *Ju On: The Grudge*
- Fractions, Factions, and Fandoms: Sub-Divisions and Identification in YA Media Franchises

### CHRISTOPHER DILULLO ’22

- Media on Media: How Media Trade Publications View Streaming Services Compared With Legacy Media

### GAVIN O’REILLY ’22 MA

- To Rescue the Rest: A Pentadic Criticism of *Oddworld’s* Themes of Genocide
- Riding Along the Edge: Rodney Mullen and Burke’s “Earned Inheritance” in Skate Culture

### MICHAEL BILOTTA ’22 MA

- Death, apathy, and the pursuit of a dinner reservation: a Burkean analysis of *American Psycho* as a burlesque work

### VICTORIA CARUSO ’22 (DR. DRON M. MANDHANA, CO-AUTHOR)

- Increasing Student Engagement by Inducing Flow Experiences in Class Activities

# Student Internship Spotlight

A look at where a few of our students spent their summer!

## **ERICA BRUNSON '23**

**DALLAS MAVERICKS, SOCIAL MEDIA INTERN**

My experience exceeded all my expectations because I was surrounded by motivating women who challenged me to dive into a department I have never been exposed to before.

## **LOGHAN HIRKEY '25**

**STATE REPRESENTATIVE KAREN BOBACK'S OFFICE**

I helped constituents with state related issues from all over the district.

## **CAROLINE KELLY '23**

**NEW YORK METS, CONSUMER PRODUCTS INTERN**

I focused on overseeing retail and memorabilia, and the marketing of these programs. Specifically, I assisted in growing the marketing efforts of the New York Mets Amazin' Memorabilia business after the unveiling of the state-of-the-art Amazin' Memorabilia Store in Citi Field for the 2022 season.

## **LUCAS J. LOVEKIN '23**

**CAMPBELL'S, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS INTERN**

I coordinated legislative tracking efforts, maintained relationships with trade associations and members of Congress, and orchestrated the company's Get out the Vote operation.

## **LYDIA MCFARLANE '23**

**RESOLVE PHILADELPHIA, EDITORIAL INTERN**

I spent the summer learning the ins and outs of journalism while also getting to know how nonprofit newsrooms are run and how they engage with their surrounding community.

## **GABRIELLA RAFUL '25**

**PRESS COMMUNICATIONS LLC, PROMOTIONS ASSISTANT**

I was able to learn what the day-to-day life of working as a jockey at a radio station or in the promo department was like by sitting in on broadcasts, helping out with live broadcasts, and doing voice overs for PSAs that played live on the radio stations.

## **COLE SCHEURING '24**

**NATIONAL SOCIETY OF LEADERSHIP AND SUCCESS**

As Student President, I am working on behalf of a national leadership society to establish a chapter of their organization on Villanova's campus, where I am tasked with recruiting an executive board, advisors & student members.

## **Calling all Villanova Communication alumni! Lambda Pi Eta Communication Career Day**

You are cordially invited to be one of Lambda Pi Eta's featured alumni for our virtual and in-person Career Days this spring. As part of our featured panel, we hope that students will have the opportunity to meet you face-to-face and gain inspiration about your journey from Villanova to your current career position. The in-person session will be held on **Friday, March 24 from 2-6pm**, and the virtual session will be held on **Sunday, March 26 from 1-4pm**. If you are interested in participating, please contact Fiona Doherty, [fdoherty@villanova.edu](mailto:fdoherty@villanova.edu).



# New Faculty and Staff Spotlight: Megan E. Cardwell, PhD

By Ally Jones and Emily Devlin



The Communication Department is excited to welcome a new faculty member: Assistant Professor Megan E. Cardwell, PhD. Dr. Cardwell teaches in the interpersonal and intercultural communication area and her research focuses on multi-ethnic and multi-racial identity groups, race and racism(s).

Dr. Cardwell is a Liverpool, New York native and received her bachelor's degree in Communication at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. She pursued her master's in Communication Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and went on to receive her doctorate in Communication Studies with a concentration in ethnic studies.

Dr. Cardwell's story does not follow the conventional path to academia, as it was intertwined with her strong, fulfilling and loving relationship with her twin sister, Marissa Oliver, PhD. As both sisters were preparing to complete their undergraduate degrees at two separate institutions, Dr. Oliver found a unique opportunity to perform network analysis and research for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and encouraged Dr. Cardwell to pursue graduate school with her.

Dr. Cardwell was hesitant, but as her sister said, "What do you have to lose?" Having been apart during college, this was a perfect opportunity for the twins to rekindle their bond by attending the same school and living together. Dr. Cardwell eventually joined communication studies focusing her work on multi-ethnic, multi-racial identity groups.

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*Dr. Cardwell said of her twin sister, Dr. Oliver:  
"We are best friends and she was a major driving factor when it came to grad school."*

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Prior to switching majors as an undergraduate, Dr. Cardwell was on her way to pursuing a degree in ceramics. Her passion for art and artistic expression is still present throughout her work and studies. Dr. Cardwell believes that even though not everyone appreciates art, it is a powerful means of communication. Scholars can have a great work ethic and be driven but are not always creative in the dissemination of their work, which can shape people's understandings. She incorporates art into her research, and her students are encouraged to be creative in all aspects of their work, including podcasts, written tasks and self-portrait drawings. Dr. Cardwell integrates literature and art into her teaching using a variety of techniques.

"We understand things through art, but it's not a known practice or methodological approach. Another part is being creative, seeing connections and combining different literature, there's a balance between both," said Dr. Cardwell.

Throughout her academic career, Dr. Cardwell realized that she felt very passionately about critical interpersonal studies, specifically critical race theory and family narrative. Her personal interracial experiences growing up drove her to incorporate family into her studies. Her research focuses on the development and expression of ethnic-racial identity in (multi)ethnic-racial populations, as well as the discourses that support and impede such identity development and expression.

Dr. Cardwell pointed to an article that she feels is her proudest achievement as a scholar. "Charting a Path: Race, Research, and Practice in Interpersonal Communication Studies" is a powerful critique that discusses critical race theory. Although she felt nervous about presenting it because it had a strong perspective, she felt hopeful that it might be a turning point in her career. The piece received a top paper award from the National Communication Association (NCA) and was presented at the 108th National Convention in New Orleans this past November, a proud achievement for Dr. Cardwell. She feels hopeful about her future and plans to continue to educate herself and students on interpersonal communication through critical race theory and family narrative.



*Dr. Cardwell's doctoral hooding ceremony at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.*



# New Faculty and Staff Spotlight: Caleb Lucky '20

By Christine Doherty and Michael Perretta



*Caleb Lucky '20, the new studio production manager for the Villanova Department of Communication.*

The Villanova Department of Communication officially welcomed T. Caleb Lucky '20 to its staff this year as studio production manager. The position asks Lucky to wear many hats. He is responsible for coordinating the department's studio spaces, maintaining media production and staging equipment, supporting shows and shoots (often on nights and weekends) and assisting the international section of the Social Justice Documentary (SJD) course.

Growing up, Lucky developed a unique infatuation with music. It opened a new world for him where he could be creative and expressive with his thoughts. His love for music soon turned into a passion for film.

Originally from Yeadon, Pennsylvania, Lucky wanted to stay close to home and chose to attend Villanova University. As an undergraduate, he was involved with filmmaking and video production. He participated in the making of the documentary "Sankofa" in 2018, which put the Villanova media production program on the map. The film was awarded a Student Academy Award and selected for seven international film festivals. Lucky graduated with a bachelor's in Communication in 2020.

After graduation, Lucky started doing some freelance film work until he was appointed the new studio production manager at Villanova. Lucky transitioned smoothly into the position since he was already familiar with the department and the expectations for the job. His work is a balancing act because the needs of the position change from day to day. On any given day he might be supporting the documentary program, other film and media production courses or live performances.

Becoming a member of the staff illustrated how much of a family the department is. Lucky has received a great deal of support from other staff members. He bonded with the students and staff instantly because of his lively personality and ability to connect with his students on a personal level to help them achieve their goals.



*In his role, Lucky supports students preparing for presentations and performances.*

“It is about how we can come together to make each other's lives smoother in the department,” said Lucky.

While Lucky has many responsibilities in the studio, a large focus for him is the SJD program. The international section of this course takes a group of students to a different country each year to shed light on social issues affecting different communities. Lucky hopes the students not only create an impactful film, but that team becomes allies and builds initiatives wherever they go. “The privilege and the power that we have as Americans is much heavier when you leave these borders,” said Lucky.

Lucky collaborates closely with Hezekiah Lewis, MFA, director of the media production program and Lucky's undergraduate mentor. Lewis has known Lucky for years and is excited to see where the future will take Lucky and Villanova because of his gift for film production.

“Caleb has been a huge support with the students, and he has allowed these students to find themselves on a deeper level,” said Lewis.

When Heidi Rose, PhD, chair of the Communication Department, discovered Lucky applied for the newly created position, she knew he was the perfect fit. “The needs of this position changed and what we came to understand was that we needed someone to be a studio production manager,” said Dr. Rose. “He had really found his calling in the social justice program and realized he wanted to do film connected to social justice,” added Dr. Rose. Lucky has been vital to the media production program due to his personal experience and magnificent work ethic.

Dr. Rose added that this position is a great stepping stone for a future career in media production and wonderful way for Lucky to build his media production portfolio. “His talent is undeniable, and the faculty and staff could not be more supportive to have Caleb as one of their own,” added Dr. Rose.





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