

VCAN 2021

Newsletter of the Villanova Communication Alumni Network





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Communication Department

COVID Update

By: Kelsey Chodorow

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread, the Communication Department has taken a day-to-day approach to keep its students safe while attempting to maintain a normal semester. In the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Communication Department met finishing the Spring semester with emergency and crisis management. This included continuous meetings with the faculty and dean in order to get students and faculty comfortable with an immediate virtual start. The goal was to make the transition to online teaching and learning as smooth as possible. However, this has changed. As the university has been living with the virus, faculty and students have transitioned from crisis management to innovative thinking.

Commencement was one of the first obstacles that the department came across. While previously Commencement was an in-person celebration with students and their families, last year's event was a little different. Every faculty member created an original haiku



for the seniors and filmed themselves presenting the haikus. The haikus were compiled into a video message along with messages from Communication seniors. This was sent out to all faculty members and seniors of the 2020 class. The compiled video was a unique way for Communication faculty and seniors to say goodbye in a virtual setting. The department hopes to retain aspects of this past year's COVID commencement and establish them as tradition in the following years.

Moving forward to the summer, the department of Communication found new ways to connect with students despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Through virtual group sessions, the department provided a support network while school was not in session. There were a variety of sessions related to anti-racism initiatives, initiated by the death of George Floyd, as an opportunity for students and faculty to explore, discuss, and learn about these difficult topics. These sessions also created an inclusive and actively anti-racist environment at Villanova in the department.



Looking at this past semester, more than half of Communication classes were online, and the rest were a mix of in-person classes and hybrid modalities. While most professors and students have found the isolation of COVID-19 to be challenging, the pandemic has enabled new ways of teaching and learning. According to Dr. Heidi Rose, Professor and Chair of the Communication Department, the driver of this past year in the department was to "facilitate as much face-to-face contact as possible in a virtual environment and find innovative ways to teach classes while maintaining a sense of community."

Faculty collaborated to share ideas for the semester to cultivate a better experience and learning environment. Discussions included which courses worked best for online teaching and which did not, students and their different needs, how to stay flexible, and how to maximize in-person learning.

Overall, Communication classes have adjusted well to the demands and have found creative ways to keep students engaged while preserving the course material. Professors have made the most of this strange semester by tailoring or adding assignments connected to course material

that involve interacting with the bizarre current campus. This allows students to make course material relevant to their experiences and provides an opportunity to understand how the material fits into students' lives. Some faculty have even moved their entire course to different platforms such as Microsoft Teams, creating an easier experience for students to find work and assignments and ask questions. Professors were more responsive to students and available for students virtually. In order to do this, professors held additional office hours and time before and after class to get to know students. This allowed for more student-faculty interaction in a completely virtual environment. Advisors also made themselves available and open to discussing all matters with their students, providing support and guidance for their advisees. Beyond faculty, various groups on campus, such as Lambda Pi Eta, the Communication Honors Society, and PRSSA, Public Relations Student Society for America, created virtual events to keep students engaged with each other, faculty, and alumni.

Lastly, Jarryd Kainz played a large role in the success of the semester. After one of the department's beloved administrative assistants, Maria DiStefano, passed suddenly, Jarryd Kainz stepped into the position. Despite beginning in a virtual environment in September, he has played an integral role in making the full online transition for new majors, current students, and faculty as smooth as possible.

So far, the spring semester looks very similar to the fall. While most events will still be held virtually, there are more in-person and hybrid classes in the spring to slowly bring back a sense of normalcy. The Communication department will continue to adapt depending on how the pandemic evolves.



Jarryd Kainz

FACULTY PROFILE: DR. ALLYSON VOLINSKY LEVIN

By: Kelly McMahon

I had the opportunity to sit down with Dr. Allyson Volinsky Levin who joined the Villanova Communication Department in August of 2019. Dr. Levin and I discussed how she got to be where she is in the Communication field and what led her to Villanova.

Upon first starting college at the nearby University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Levin was an excited psychology major. When I asked her how that turned into Communication, she said when she was first buying her Psychology textbooks at the bookstore, she spotted a textbook about children and the media. Right away, she knew she wanted to read the book and her love for psychology was combined with a love for communication. She later continued her studies and earned a master's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies in Human Development and a master's degree in Communication, both from the University of Pennsylvania. Later on, Dr. Levin discovered she had an interest in

health communication and returned once again to the University of Pennsylvania to complete her doctorate at the Annenberg School for Communication in 2019. Dr. Levin has always been intrigued by how Communication can answer the questions of how children are affected by media which combines her interests in both Communication and developmental psychology. She also became interested in health Communication and how to make it more effective.

After her time at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Levin decided to continue her career in the academic world as a professor. When I asked Dr. Levin what drove her to become a teacher, she said that as an undergrad she had a lot of inspiring professors who were always generous with their time (which could be why she is always so generous with hers now!) She added that she saw how powerful the impact of professors and community can be on a student and wanted to have a positive impact on students herself.



Going along with this, when I asked Dr. Levin about her favorite part about the Villanova Communication Department, she said "the people." Though this is only her second year at Villanova, students, faculty, and staff have provided an "academic home" for her here. Dr. Levin shared that Villanova has a drive for excellence but also a lot of warmth and caring, making it an amazing and fun place to work. One of Dr. Levin's favorite concepts to teach in her Communication classes is the "War of the Worlds" radio play. She uses a podcast to explain the concept to students and then connects it in class to false news and how misinformation is so prevalent in today's world and media. At first thought, the 1938 radio play may not seem relevant today, but she explains that in reality, the play can teach us about the power of the media.

During her time as an



undergraduate, Dr. Levin conducted research on political incivility. During this time, she studied how news networks covered politicians after they said or acted against norms. Dr. Levin would look at how certain news networks covered the stories differently. She later moved on to research in health communication and collected data for "The Real Cost" Youth E-Cigarette Prevention Campaign. During the data collection period, Dr. Levin and her PhD colleagues identified promising campaign themes to prevent youth initiation of electronic cigarette use. Dr. Levin had the honor of presenting the data she collected to the Food and Drug Administration and various ad agencies. The data collected ended up being used in "The Real Cost" campaign which was a very proud moment for Dr. Levin.

Currently, Dr. Levin is still continuing to conduct research, now with student Chris DiLullo. Dr. Levin and Chris are working on a content analysis of TikTok Doctors. This includes physicians discussing COVID-19, COVID-19 vaccinations, women's health, and health in general on the TikTok platform. Dr. Levin and Chris recognized that TikTok is a mainstream wealth of information for young people and many doctors are using the platform to spread health knowledge. This is a unique opportunity for health communication and for Dr. Levin and Chris to study the impact of TikTok. Right now, living through the coronavirus pandemic, health communication has never been more important, according to Dr. Levin. She also added that the pandemic provides a lot of challenges, but health communication has a lot to say and

can help to make sense of what we are living through. Dr. Levin is looking forward to seeing where the research leads and is grateful to participate in research with one of her students.



Dr. Levin and other members of the Communication Department faculty

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: EMILY COX CLAS '21

BY MARGOT VARRICCHIO

Emily Cox, '21, a Communication major with a specialization in Public Relations and Advertising and minors in Political Science and Honors, has a heart that beats and a mind that thinks by virtue of being alive. However, she finally found what makes both of those organs 'tick' during her four years at Villanova University, 2,500 miles away from her hometown of San Francisco.

Although Emily recalls her college experience as one with numerous ups-and-downs, she was able to explore and find her passions at her 'new home,' through her courses and extracurriculars. Emily translated her high school journalism experience at St. Ignatius College Preparatory into her college passion project, working on *The Villanovan*, Villanova's weekly student newspaper. In high school, Emily acted as both a member of St. Ignatius' monthly newspaper's production & design team, helping the editors-in-chief with layout and production, and subsequently became editor-in-chief, as well as the production & design editor of the school's literary magazine, *The Quill*. Now as the editor-in-chief of *The Villanovan* in the time of COVID-19, Cox is changing what it means to be a student journalist.



Emily oversees the writing, production, social media, internal and external communication, and overall brand of *The Villanovan* on campus and within the community. Although Emily recalls her initial excitement about joining the publication and her previous roles in the writing and organization, such as news staff writer and news editor, her love for *The Villanovan* has not dwindled in her four years.

“Now as editor-in-chief, I still feel the same passion I felt when I first joined,” Emily reminisced. “There is something powerful and exciting about having the ability to keep my school community connected and informed.”



For her 2020 term as editor-in-chief, Emily spearheaded the progressive project of transiting *The Villanovan* to a larger digital footprint. To that end, Emily works closely with her digital editor, Ariana Megerian '22 CLAS, to produce social media content and fortify *The Villanovan's* digital presence. This expansion project could not have come at a more opportune time, since COVID-19 has forced much of college life online.

Emily acutely notices how COVID-19 has changed the college landscape, and she incorporates this awareness into her reporting. She notes that she is “always aware of the general health of campus, as well as how COVID-19 is impacting every aspect of other students' lives: living, academics, social life, clubs, dining, athletics, and more.”

“There is never a dull day,” she said. “I am always on social media, connecting with faculty and staff, conducting interviews, reading about Villanova news, and keeping up with news at other colleges.”

However, Emily's time at *The Villanovan* is nearly over. Editor-in-chief applications closed for 2021, and Emily's name is not in the running due to her impending graduation. She notes that she is excited to train the incoming editors and use the rest of the semester to make *The Villanovan* the best student publication possible.

"I would hope that at the end of the semester I can look back and say that we executed our mission of keeping the entire campus community informed and connected," Emily said. "Every week, we made sure that we had the most up-to-date information about COVID-19's impact on the University, news about the election, news surrounding athletics, opinion editorials that represented a wide variety of student voices, and pieces that still reminded us that college life is something to value."

As for her college experience, Emily is thankful to have an in-person senior year even in the 'new normal' of COVID-19, since many of her friends were unable to return to their respective colleges, due to the virtual format of the University of California public college system. Since she is also aware of how precious her on-campus time is, Emily pursues her activities with more fervor than ever.

In addition to her responsibilities with *The Villanovan*, she also serves as member of the Community First Student Committee, promoting safe COVID-19 conditions for students, and Career Day Chair for Lambda Pi Eta, the Communication honor society, and as a member of the Kappa Delta sorority.

"I have made the most of every day at Villanova, knowing that after last March, it can all be taken away in an instant."



Cox as an NBC intern

Despite Emily's obvious zeal for the University community, she is also looking forward to the future. She intends to work in either the technology or entertainment industry post-graduation, because of her previous work experiences as a production and studio operations intern with NBC Sports, a video production assistant for Villanova Athletics, as well as a talent brand intern for Snowflake, a tech software start-up that went public in September of 2020.

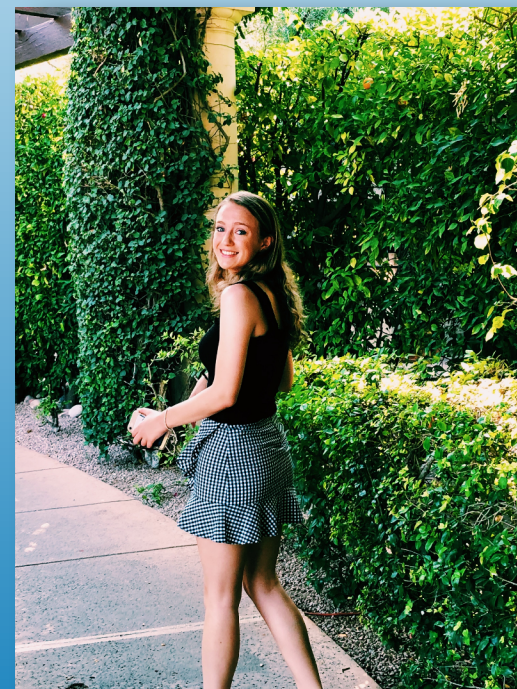
Emily's intern experience included anything but coffee and doughnut runs for colleagues. Starting her sophomore year, Emily worked with the University's teams in Jack Nevin Field House and The Pavilion to film and record Villanova sports events. She continued this experience in the subsequent summer at NBC Sports Bay Area, working in live television. Emily's role at NBC included cutting footage for the shows and serving as a co-pilot for many of the San Francisco Giants and Oakland Athletics pregame and postgame shows. As for her work with Snowflake, she planned social media calendars and campaigns, created and designed posts, built out LinkedIn campaigns and pages for the company, and helped develop, write for, and design Snowflake's new career website.

In all of these positions, Emily noted how her Communication courses prepared her for her "on-the-job" work. Although her internships were in different industries, entertainment and technology, they both recalled the work ethic, communication skills, and critical thinking instilled in her by the Villanova Communication Department. Emily also noted that the translation of knowledge works in the reverse direction, too.

"I have also been able to bring knowledge I have learned on the job into the classroom, which has bettered my performance and provided me with new ideas, new skills, and new topics of discussion I can bring to the table."

However, Emily sees her future as undetermined and full of unexpected opportunities. She appreciates how Communication is a flexible major, since it can be applied to numerous industries and fields.

Emily notes, "My dream job is to be editor-in-chief of a magazine or newspaper, but who knows if that is a direction I will head in upon graduation. I feel like I have the world at my fingertips."





As my hour with Emily came to a close, I selfishly asked her for advice. I too am a Communication major with a specialization in Public Relations and Advertising, and wanted to know if there was a 'secret key' to her success. Sad to say, there is not.

Emily noted instead, "I have been so fortunate to explore my passions at the University. As a freshman, I felt lost and unsure of my place not only on campus but in the world. Through courses and extracurricular activities, I have been able to find what makes my heart beat and mind think."

"College has been a time of ups and downs, highs and lows, but I know I am on the right path in life and the people I have met at Villanova have brought me here. That's all you can ask for: to find the things and people that you are passionate about. The success comes from there."

DR. KSIAZEK RELEASES NEW BOOK

BY CHRIS DILULLO

Dr. Thomas Ksiazek has a lot of familiarity with academic writing, as the Villanova Communication professor has published many articles in academic journals. However, Dr. Ksiazek's latest endeavor has been into uncharted territory: writing and publishing a book. Developed out of the content of previously-published academic articles, Dr. Ksiazek's new book, *User Comments and Moderation in Digital Journalism*, published by Routledge last year, is a continuation of the research Dr. Ksiazek has already done on media audiences. *User Comments and Moderation in Digital Journalism* focuses on the new age of media audiences and media consumption, taking a look at the development of society and how users interact with media today. Dr. Ksiazek cited considerations of a healthy democracy as motivating the development of the book's topic and wanted to explore how user comments factor into how we share ideas and communicate today.

"A lot of my research was focused on, broadly, there's a lot of critique of user comment communities as being sort of uncivil or hostile. There's a lot of hate speech, profanity, obscenity, and it's widely accepted that it's sort of a swamp, what goes on there. And it's unfortunate because it's really an opportunity for the public to engage in conversations about the important issues and events of the day...but it didn't seem like that was happening. I focused a lot of my research on how news organizations can encourage more productive conversation," Dr. Ksiazek said.

User Comments and Moderation in Digital Journalism is part of a larger book series entitled *Disruptions in Digital Journalism*, which looks at the phenomena in the modern world that have disrupted traditional journalism. The editor of the series targeted Dr. Ksiazek as someone



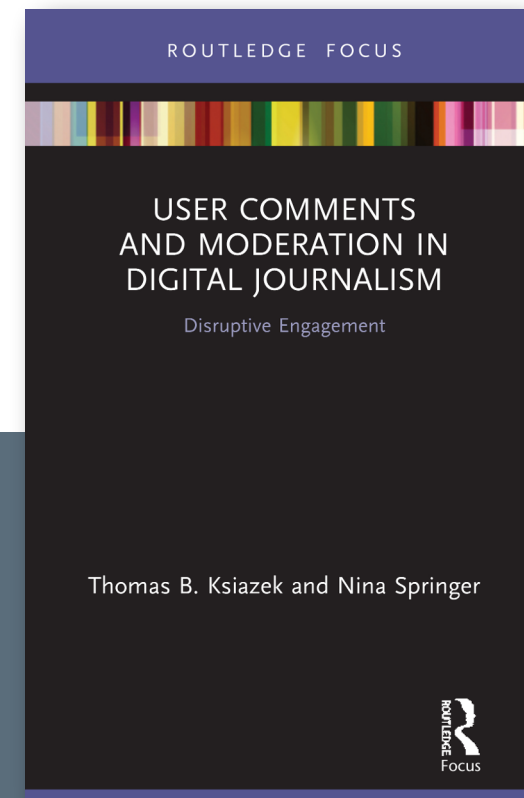
in this research area and approached him with the concept of publishing a book on this topic. However, even before writing the book, Dr. Ksiazek held several conversations with colleagues and his doctoral advisor to get a sense of how to tackle a project of this size and magnitude. Ultimately, Dr. Ksiazek returned to his dissertation and drew from the experience of working on that project, the only one of comparable length and scope. Dr. Ksiazek also brought on a co-author to help in the development of the project, Nina Springer, who offered a strong working relationship with Dr. Ksiazek and a perspective on the influence of this phenomenon in international markets.

Dr. Ksiazek also emphasized this work as being a product of a decade of research supported by Villanova through research grants and the work of undergraduate and graduate students. Dr. Ksiazek cited published articles with graduate students Kevin Lessard '12 and Andrew Zivic '13 as well as research work with graduate student Maria Nelson and undergraduate research assistants Caroline Hroncich '15 and Nicole Villegas '15 as representative of a Villanova teacher-scholar mentality that engages professors in research with students whenever possible.

“At Villanova, we talk about ourselves as teacher-scholars, and what that means is a commitment to merging our teaching and research interests. The basis of this book is really ten years of research that I’ve been doing that’s all been informed by discussions with students in classes so a lot of this research is informed by my teaching. At the same time, I make a conscious effort to bring my research into the classroom,” Dr. Ksiazek said.

With *User Comments and Moderation in Digital Journalism* now published, Dr. Ksiazek finds it as a fitting cap to a decade of media audience research and is ready to switch gears. While Dr. Ksiazek is still focusing on media audiences, his next project will focus on concerns about trust and misinformation in the news.

“What we’re planning is this multi-country study, so I’ve identified collaborators in India and South Korea as well as the U.S. We’re going to speak to journalists, audience members, and we’re also going to speak to what we call ‘news intermediaries,’ which is sort of this new concept to capture things like fact-checking websites and social media platforms that aren’t traditionally seen as news outlets but they are places where people get news. What we’re going to try to do is just get a better understanding of what are the most pressing concerns about this distrust of the news,” Dr. Ksiazek said.



Faculty Profile: Dr. Evan Schares

“Everyone has experiences and insights that they can bring to the classroom.”

-Evan Schares

Written by: Jaylene Joseph CLAS '22



What truly makes a good teacher? Is it experience, attitude, or even a combination of both? For Evan Schares, Ph.D, it is about taking time to bring your students to the forefront and letting them have a voice of their own.

“We all have background and experience that can make our conversations better...and students are itching to voice theirs.”

Dr. Schares's first teaching assignment was at his alma mater, Louisiana State University. The students were around his age, and rather than try to force them to respect him, Dr. Schares found the best way to teach people was to hear from them. To Dr. Schares, the student experience should be emphasized in the classroom, especially in terms of Performance and Communication. Being able to take personal experience and transferring it into events throughout the world helps to enrich one's performance rather than hinder it.

“Race, gender, nationality, etc. complicate the way performances land and fall...they can also agitate the people to fight for a humane world.”

“The beauty of performance studies is that it is a contested concept; its unknown future is what makes it so great.”

Coming from over 1,000 miles away to teach at Villanova did not change his philosophies either. In terms of culture and geography, things are immensely different. But one thing that has stayed the same is the students' desire to learn and grow. Even amidst the pandemic, Dr. Schares wants to emphasize the importance of taking time to vocalize who you are in the classroom and finding a connection between what you learn and who you are. He believes that since performance is ever evolving, your past can help to foster this development.



Dr. Schares directs an undergraduate performance ensemble that has performed at the Freedom School



Loretta Chiaverini and the late Maria DiStefano

THE BELOVED MARIA DISTEFANO

BY SOPHIA PEDRO

Maria Di Stefano was part of the Villanova family for over 25 years, working as an administrative assistant in the Communication Department. She was devoted to Sister Luisa, who also served the University for many years. However, in addition to being an exemplary member of the Villanova staff, she was a loving wife, mother, grandmother, and friend.

Loretta Chiaverini is also an administrative assistant in the Communication Department and was one of Maria's closest friends. They worked together for 28 years. Loretta shared that "Maria was like a sister to me, people would refer to us as the dynamic duo: Lucy and Ethel, Thelma and Louise, always getting into something." Loretta credits the success



they had working together to always having each other's backs and the natural chemistry they shared as friends and colleagues.

Loretta and Maria were not only deeply connected on a professional level, but also within their personal lives. After being friends for 28 years, naturally, their families came together and Loretta speaks so fondly of meeting Maria's Italian family and friends, and how fond Maria was of them. Many of the qualities Maria radiated and held close to her were those instilled at a young age by her father, whom she idolized.

Loretta explained that “one of the most important things to Maria was being a good listener” and ensuring that the people around her felt respected and their “secrets” kept sacred. Loretta valued these qualities in Maria. It is these qualities that pushed her to become a better listener and emulate Maria in her own life.

One of Maria and Loretta’s work-study students, Anthony Grasso '23, also spoke so highly of Maria, as she was like a grandmother figure in his life. He added that “she always greeted you with a hug and said goodbye with a hug.” Both Loretta and Anthony can attest to feeling her presence in the office still “whether it’s through the music, her laugh, her sense of humor, or her beautiful smile.”

When asked to describe Maria in three words, Loretta provided many more, as Maria could not be summed up in just three.

However, Loretta felt that “loving, charismatic, and beautiful inside and out” were three very defining traits of who Maria truly was. In addition to these, Loretta spoke of Maria’s immense generosity:

“I have a whole drawer full of beautiful things she brought me from Italy; she went back every year. She was so generous with her family and friends; if she bought something for somebody, she put a lot of thought into that, she would scout around until she found the perfect thing.”



Maria's generosity not only extended to her close friends and family, but also to her students. When speaking about the legacy she believed Maria would leave on the department, Loretta shared that "there was no one that cared more for the students. You can get the job done and do what you have to do, but she really cared. She would come in and say, 'I didn't sleep all night because I'm worried about Mary Jones not graduating, what am I going to do?'"

Her kind-hearted, selfless, and fun-loving spirit is not only how Maria's family will remember her, but also those who only got to experience her for even just a short time. One of Maria's work-study students, Anthony, shared that he had only known Maria for seven months, "and even though it was such a short amount of time, it felt like so much longer, and the impact she had will certainly last forever."

Because of the impact Maria had on the department and the numerous people she touched with her care and compassion, her legacy will certainly live on. However, to ensure this, a scholarship fund has been created by Villanova in her name and honor. The scholarship is to be set aside for a first-generation student with the intention of studying Communication.



Her presence and kind soul will live on not only within her family, but also here in the Communication Department, in the students who receive her scholarship, and within the Villanova community.

The last time Loretta saw Maria was when she went over to her house in need of yeast to bake bread. Maria said she would leave it outside her door because she was very cautious about the coronavirus pandemic. However, she ended up inviting Loretta into her backyard.

"The last time I saw her, we went out in her garden and we were standing six feet apart." It was a peaceful and loving final moment they shared in the garden amidst the craziness of our world.

Maria and Loretta were professional friends but also personal friends. "She'll be with me for always", said a strong-willed but solemn Loretta about her life-long colleague and friend, Maria Di

Stefano. She will be missed dearly and her memory will live on in the Communication department, and in Loretta, forever.

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