

Letter From the Director

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Faculty Profile: Gene Burd

In the 24-year history of the program, no one has taught more Senior Fellows classes, with more intriguing topics, than journalism professor Gene Burd.

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Senior Fellow Wins Research Honor

Graduating senior Alejandro Diaz-Wahl was named UT-Austin Undergraduate Researcher of the Month in February for a project that started in his Senior Fellows class.

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Dana Cloud Wins Teaching Award

Regular Senior Fellows teacher Dana Cloud was recognized as a “master teacher” by the Western States Communication Association.

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Senior and Alumni Spotlights

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Lessons from Life’s Laboratory

Diana Dawson’s Senior Fellows class, part of a series called “Communicating the Human Side of Social Issues,” takes students into neighborhoods and community centers to examine how immigration is lived in Austin.

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Alumna Earns Oscar Nomination

Senior Fellows and RTF alumna Gigi Causey got a 2012 Academy Award nomination for her short film “Time Freak.”

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Sharon Jarvis Inducted into Academy of Distinguished Teachers

Communication Studies professor Sharon Jarvis, slated to teach a Senior Fellows seminar on campaign communication in Fall 2012, was inducted into the prestigious Academy of Distinguished Teachers at The University of Texas at Austin.

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Letter from the Director



In his inspiring interview in this issue of Backstories, Senior Fellows teacher Gene Burd explains what hangs in the balance as we blindly rush to stay ahead of the new media curve: the “human touch.”

Indeed, the pace of change is so dizzying one can't help but wonder how it's changing us.

The Internet has made the world smaller and more connected, but it's also given us innovative ways to ignore each other. This is why Senior Fellows is as relevant as ever. In this issue of Backstories, our alumni, students and faculty all bear witness to the value of discussion-oriented seminars with engaged peers and passionate teachers. The human touch, as Burd has demonstrated for so many years, is what Senior Fellows is all about.

Alumnus Charles Mead (Bachelor of Journalism, 1994) explains this well in his interview with current Senior Fellows student Sameer Bhuchar. He says that being “thrust into an atmosphere where challenging a premise [is] expected ... is what we are all hoping the college experience gives us. We want the ability to think for ourselves and be able to branch out on our own and really begin to decide who we are and what we stand for.”

For nearly 25 years, Senior Fellows has been providing that atmosphere. Face-to-face critical dialogue has an intangible value that can't be replicated on screens or Twitter feeds. And this will be as true in the 21st century as it was in ancient Greece, from whence came Plato's “Symposium,” the inspiration for our introductory seminar.

I can't wait to teach Symposium in the fall to our incoming students. We had a spike in applications this year, and based on our interviews, we have an amazing group of students eager to test their critical voices. As excited as I am to welcome them, I lament bidding farewell to my first Symposium class, most of whom are graduating in May. (It's been real, and I hope you keep in touch!)

It's reassuring to know our graduating class has experienced a great program over the past two

years, with great speakers, great teachers and great classes. You can read about one of those classes in the Backstories article “Lessons from Life's Laboratory,” written by one of those teachers, Diana Dawson. She provides a look into her series “Communicating the Human Side of Social Issues,” an experiential-learning seminar that brings students into contact with the people who are living the issues they're learning about in class.

Senior Fellows faculty have an impressive track record as teachers over the years, and this year was no exception. Frequent Senior Fellows teacher Dana Cloud won a teaching award, as did Sharon Jarvis, who's offering a Senior Fellows seminar on campaign communication to coincide with the fall election season. As for accolades, it's probably most satisfying to report that one of our top students, Alejandro Diaz-Wahl, was honored with a university-wide undergraduate research award for a project that started in his Senior Fellows seminar with Talia Stroud last spring.

One of the unexpected benefits of directing Senior Fellows has been hearing the stories of our growing list of alumni. This issue profiles remarkable alumni like Charles Mead, Paul Leonard and Fanienne Darling-Wolf, as well as soon-to-be alumni like Alejandro Diaz-Wahl, Kelsey McGonigle and Alden Paras, all of whom are graduating this year. Thanks to all of you for your contributions to Senior Fellows and for keeping the conversation fresh and illuminating.

As for the rest of you, I hope you take a moment to send us a hello, post a comment, or tell us what you've been up to. You can email me or a past professor, or you can join our Facebook page. Also, we're thinking about hosting a reunion of some kind in spring of next year and would appreciate your thoughts as we begin planning. If you have a moment, please take a brief survey to help us figure it out. Just click on the button above.

Warmest regards,
Dave Junker

Lessons from Life's Laboratory: Diana Dawson Takes Senior Fellows to the Streets



By Diana Dawson,
Instructor, Journalism

Diana Dawson has taught three courses grouped under the classification, "Communicating the Human Side of Social Issues." These classes take students out into the Austin community to see how the issues they're learning about are being lived

by real people, often those who are the most vulnerable, marginalized and voiceless in our society.

On the walls of the Workers Defense Project at 5604 Manor Road in Austin are posters of Dolores Huerta and signs touting "Legalizacion Ahora!" Fists pump in the air as everyone chants "el mismo derechos!" Senior Fellows students are wedged into folding chairs beside construction workers, maids and restaurant cooks who have been fighting for wages they were owed but had not been paid.

Only a 14-minute drive on Manor Road separates The College of Communication from this East Austin community center and the traditional classroom from "life's laboratory."



Senior Sameer Bhuchar works with a future Senior Fellow at Any Baby Can, a child and family resource center in Austin. (photo: Kayla Freeman)

In my Senior Fellows classes, like this one on immigration in East Austin, students get to see for themselves what life beyond campus is like for people living today's issues. When I was a social issues reporter for



Senior Eliana Ramirez helps out at Any Baby Can.

newspapers, I had wholeheartedly embraced the mission to shine a light in corners of the community that readers might not see without me. That's where I'd found the soul of journalism. I'd interviewed a man digging in the trash for his next meal, followed a crack addict who wanted to stay clean through her pregnancy and told the stories of teens foraging for survival on the streets.

When I began teaching, I wondered how that experience could be taught in the classroom. That's when I realized that the Senior Fellows program allows both professors and students to color outside the lines, transforming the "what if's" to "why not's."

As I brainstormed with Bob Jensen, who was Senior Fellows director at the time, we realized that getting students out of the classroom would be a meaningful way to examine various topics in depth. So we created the umbrella title, "Communicating the Human Side of Social Issues," deciding to offer these classes in a three-hour block that would give us time to travel "field-trip" style to corners of the community students passed but never really saw.

For two semesters, I took students into East Austin, where we learned about longtime residents who were paying the price of gentrification. They met people who had lived there before it was hip, who had formed a community, but were now seeing family and friends forced out by higher taxes. Those folks told them that the shiny new businesses might look good from the street, but the tacos and lattes sold there were unaffordable. As the students dived into independent projects, they discovered that most of the jobs provided by sprucing up the area went to people living outside the ZIP code.

This semester, we've begun looking at the experience of immigrants living in Austin and already have come

to a much deeper understanding of the difference that a piece of paper can make in someone's life. Senior Fellows have met other students on this campus who study as hard as they do but under current laws face a future no brighter than washing dishes at a local restaurant. They've heard about women forced to work as sex slaves to repay those who helped them relocate to America to seek a better life.

At the Workers Defense Project, students met a father of three who has worked 13 years installing sheetrock. When he complained that the contractor refused to pay him the \$1,700 he was owed, his boss threatened to call police, who would contact immigration.

"I want to come back and help here," one of the students said, as she left the table. "I need to do something."

We've added community service to our coursework this semester. Everyone will devote some time to a project benefitting an immigrant community. Some are working in free clinics, tutoring children and adults trying to learn English, or capturing the story of a mission statement for a nonprofit.

Immigration is a complicated issue, and students are encouraged to find their own political positions on immigration policy and reform.

But in our efforts to bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world, we're hoping students become well-informed citizens and responsible communication professionals with a better understanding of those living the issues we all debate.

Faculty Profile: Gene Burd, Senior Fellows Socratic Trickster

By Dave Junker, Senior Fellows Director

Nearing 80 -- with 40 of those years spent at The University of Texas at Austin -- legendary journalism professor Gene Burd has an energy that belies his "chronological" age. And nowhere is this more apparent than when he's in the classroom -- or out of it -- with Senior Fellows students.

While Burd's contributions to the College of Communication and journalism education are well known, less so is his legacy as a Senior Fellows teacher. In the 24-year history of the honors program, no one



has taught more often (seven times) or more seminar topics (five, tied with Dana Cloud). He can also lay claim to having the most unusual courses, with the most unique names, doing the most unconventional things.

"Gene really shines in Senior Fellows classes," says former Senior Fellows director Robert Jensen.

"He's quirky, and the students love him. In Senior Fellows, he's in his element."

Burd clearly revels in his role as teacher, which might be described as equal parts Socratic guide and Zen trickster. "I love those fringe areas," he tells me, "to raise questions and think about things we haven't thought about."

Recounting the times he took Senior Fellows students on field trips to the Austin power plant and area parking lots, Burd says students

naturally didn't know what to think at first. But as he delights in explaining, the refrains of "what does this mean?" inevitably gave way to "Gee! I

never thought of that." His trip to the power plant was part of his class, "ElectriCity, LuminoCity, and Urban Communication" (2009, 2010), which he says forced students to think seriously, and often for the first time, about the "role of light" in media technology.

"When I first registered for Dr. Burd's class, ElectriCity, I had no idea what I was getting into," says Senior Fellows alumna Lena Proft, who graduated in 2011 with degrees in communication studies and government. "The class covered so many interesting topics that I had never considered before." Proft says Burd's approach fostered students' own curiosity, so that "in a sense, [students themselves] became groundbreakers."

Burd's class trip to the parking lot was for "CARmunication: The Car as Communication and Culture" (2006). The point was to "give students a feeling of place for understanding the content," he says. For example, the point of their visit to the parking

"Gene really shines in Senior Fellows classes; he's quirky and the students love him."

lot was to impress on students the car's impact on our ability to connect across great distances, the car's impact on the spaces in which we live, and the car's place in the stories we tell about ourselves. "People are conceived and born in cars," he reminds me. "It's a world of its own. Think of the technology that goes along with it: the car radio, the car as a medium of advertising."

His other Senior Fellows courses include "Communication and Community" (1994), "The Marriage of Sports, Media and the Metropolis" (2000) and "City and Country Music as Communication" (2003, 2005). Just as there's a clear motive behind his unconventional field trips, there's a clear theme in all his classes. "It's all right there" in the title of his first Senior Fellows seminar, "Communication and Community," he explains.

What's also evident in these courses is his interest in how the city intensifies the relationships between communication and physical space. He traces this interest to when he moved with his family from the Missouri Ozarks to Los Angeles when he was 13, during the Great Depression. "To go from a place that was just absolute rural, I mean country, and to move to a place like Los Angeles: Man, you talk about radical change," he says emphatically.

There's an autobiographical component to his classes, which anyone who meets him well attest is one of the things that makes him so indelible as a person. "The thing I enjoyed most about Dr. Burd was his amazing memory," recalls Proft, his former student. "He told us intriguing stories involving his first encounters with various forms of electricity. My favorite was his first encounter with a stoplight. He was mystified as to why so many people let the simple color of a light control their actions."

When I ask him if new media is collapsing physical distance, and diminishing geography's importance on communication, I get an emphatic, but nuanced no. He says we've never paid enough attention to geography. But, ironically, "it's the new technology" that is forcing us to see the intractability of space. "Geography is holding on," he asserts. "Physical space is not going to disappear."

His life-long focus on the relationship between communication and communities has made him appreciate the "wonderfully terrible" changes new media has introduced. Considering what we now have access to, the dusty and remote artifacts we can now summon with a click, "it's just magical," he admits.

"We're so obsessed with the technology, but what we're missing is the sociology, and it's moving so fast that there's no time for history. The future is already history before you get there, and we're wrestling with our sense of time and place."

--Gene Burd

"It just makes you tingle. The Internet is the most important thing since Gutenberg. Period. It gives great control to individuals and takes it away from the high priests. It's a threat to the establishment, just like printing was a threat to the church."

Despite the personal joys and social rewards of the Internet, Burd laments the loss of a "human touch" in online communication. "We're so obsessed with the technology, but what we're missing is the sociology," he says with rhythmic emphasis. "What's happening to communication spaces is disturbing. Privacy is a big issue, as well: we can get out to that big world but it can get in, too. And it's moving so fast that there's no time for history. The future is already history before you get there, and we're wrestling with our sense of time and place."

Happily, discussions with Burd never lack memorable turns of phrase, or the intangible human touch. Springing catlike on his toes, raising his eyebrows higher than you thought possible, lowering his voice like a blues singer, Burd embraces the full range of human expression in the service of a thought. Burd's sensibility might be called poetic. That, in fact, is the way he thinks of himself, which is certainly appropriate when you write poetry, which he does.

"When I tell fellow journalists that I'm a poet they say 'oh, it's too subjective,'" he says, stretching out the last word derisively. "But if you're a poet and live the poetic life, have a poetic mind, it infiltrates everything you do." He's grateful to Senior Fellows students for being even "more receptive than graduate students" to his poetic turn of mind and more willing to step across sometimes arbitrary boundaries.

His poetic approach is no doubt another reason he's been able to compel so many students throughout

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the years to see something new in the ordinary. “In our age of specialization -- which I think is important -- sometimes students go into a class and it’s kind of walled off,” he says, carving out the shape of a wall with his hands. “There’s a wall here and a wall there, and they miss these unstudied cracks and crevices.”

When I ask him about his next great Senior Fellows idea, I’m not disappointed. He says he’s playing around with the idea of the “odors of cities.”

“When I’ve talked about the significance of smells to some of my students, they asked me what I’m talking about,” he laughs. “I say, of course, smells. Have you ever smelled Pittsburgh?”

While he’s not asking me directly, I can’t help but imagine myself as one of his students over the years. Pressed by his sage provocations, I’m a little unsure of the question itself, but quite certain it will be worth pursuing.

Senior Fellow Alejandro Diaz-Wahl Wins Undergraduate Research Honor

From: Palo Alto, California

Vitals: B.A., Communications Studies (2012)

Guilty Pleasure: Attending Master Pancake Theater at the Alamo Drafthouse



By Marc Speir

Based on his study that covers incivility in politics, Senior Fellows student Alejandro Diaz-Wahl received UT’s Undergraduate Researcher of the Month award for February.

The Senate of College Councils’ Undergraduate Research Committee

bestows the award based on a candidate’s passion, commitment and overall quality of research project.

Diaz-Wahl is a senior in the Department of Communication Studies and a native of Palo Alto,

Calif. He began his research during a Senior Fellows class in media and public opinion during the fall of 2011 and later extended it into an independent research course. His topic addresses online communication and the level of civility people exhibit when discussing politics on news websites.

Diaz-Wahl said that previous research focused more on face-to-face interactions, but he was able to use similar methods to code audiences into liberal and conservative camps and gather data for analysis. He said the online presence of political discourse intrigued him and he originally expected people to be more civil in communicating ideas on websites that were more evenly split between those on the left and right.

“I found that online, there really is no major pattern across the board,” Diaz-Wahl said. “I did discover that sites that are more 50-50 amongst conservatives and liberal audiences tended to have more incidences of rudeness than sites with more homogeneous audiences like Fox News or The New York Times.”

The 21 year old plans to submit his paper to the UT Undergraduate Research Journal for acceptance and start a career after graduation. Diaz-Wahl holds a second major in Arabic and is interested in the translation of documents, but he also may pursue law school.

“In Alejandro’s case, he won this award because he’s an ambitious and terrific student,” said Talia Jomini Stroud, assistant professor in the Department of Communication Studies who taught the Senior Fellows course in which Diaz-Wahl started his research. “He didn’t need that much direction. My biggest advice for other students (starting research) is to find the puzzle or mystery of something we don’t know the answer to.”

Diaz-Wahl was recognized for his achievement at the Senate’s general assembly on Thursday, March 22.

“It’s been fun and enlightening to work with professors I really like on a topic that interests me,” said Diaz-Wahl. “I’m very grateful for the program.”

Alumna Gigi Causey Earns Oscar Nomination

Senior Fellows and Radio-Television-Film alumna Gigi Causey, and her husband Andrew Bowler, were nominated for a Best Live Action Short Film Oscar at the 84th Academy Awards.

While they dressed up and prepared a speech for the event, the duo also wanted their friends and family to



see their unscripted reaction to the nominations. Clad in pajamas, the couple recorded themselves viewing the nominations list at 5:30 a.m. in late January.

Their ebullient reaction upon learning “Time Freak” had received

a nomination for Best Live Action Short Film went viral, even landing a spot on Good Morning America’s “Play of the Day” segment.

“Time Freak” is an 11-minute comedy about a time machine and the power of nagging regret. Consumed with remorse, a neurotic inventor creates a time machine and gets lost traveling in his past. The inventor becomes so consumed with perfecting every minute detail of the previous day that he is unable to realize he has the power to do great things.

Debating in 2010 at the American Film Institute Fest, “Time Freak” won the Grand Jury Prize for Best Narrative Short at the Seattle International Film Festival in June of 2011.

The jury called it “A hilarious, original take on time travel that reminds us all to embrace the moment.”

“Time Freak” also received the Audience Choice Award for Best Short Comedy at the TriMedia Festival; Best Comedy Short award at the Route 66 Film Festival; Jury Award for Best Short at the Stony Brook Film Festival; and Best Science Fiction award at the Poppy Jasper Film Festival.

Following the Academy Awards show, more than 200 theatres began screening the short films nominated for Best Live Action, Best Animation and Best Documentary. For more details and a list of theatres, visit <http://theoscarshorts.shortcuts.tv/locations.php>.

The films have also been released on iTunes and are available through cable’s Movies On Demand (MOD), Comcast, Time Warner Cable, Brighthouse, Cablevision and Cox Communications.

Dana Cloud Wins Communication Teaching Award

The Western States Communication Association’s (WSCA) Communication and Instruction interest group recently presented Dana L. Cloud, associate professor of Communication Studies, with its “master teacher” award.

Cloud is one of two recipients who were chosen based on a nomination process. The award recognizes professors who have had a profound and positive effect on undergraduate and graduate students.

Cloud received her Ph.D. in rhetorical studies from the University of Iowa in 1992. Since then, she has served on the faculty of the UT Department of Communication Studies, where she teaches in the areas of social movements, gender and communication, rhetorical criticism, public sphere theory, Marxist theory and feminist theory.



Cloud’s research interests lie in the areas of rhetoric and social movements, critique of representations of race and gender in the mass media and the defense of historical materialist theory and method in communication studies.

Sharon Jarvis Inducted into Prestigious Academy of Distinguished Teachers

Communication Studies Associate Professor Sharon Jarvis, along with six other faculty members from across campus, was inducted into the prestigious Academy of Distinguished Teachers at The University of Texas at Austin Thursday.

The banquet highlighted the accomplishments of
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faculty members from across the university who have been recognized by their peers and students for their contributions to education, particularly at the undergraduate level. With this year's selections the academy has 126 members.

“Among the many ways we reward good teaching on the Forty Acres, none is more special to me than the induction of new members to the Academy of Distinguished Teachers,” said President Bill Powers, who was inducted into the academy in 1997 as a law professor.

Jarvis teaches and conducts research on political communication, persuasion and research methods, and has published books and articles at the intersection of language use, politics and persuasion.

She has received numerous teaching awards and honors, including the Texas Exes Outstanding Professor for the College of Communication, the Eyes of Texas Teaching Award and the Outstanding Professor in the College of Communication. In 2005, she was the second assistant professor in the history of the university to receive the Friar Centennial Teaching Fellowship, the largest undergraduate teaching honor at The University of Texas at Austin.

The inductees were named by Provost Steven Leslie in June, and each will receive a permanent academic salary increase of \$7,000 and be designated as a Distinguished Teaching Professor. Individuals are selected from the Academy of Distinguished Teachers to serve on an advisory group to the provost on teaching excellence. They also provide institutional leadership and guidance for the distinctive undergraduate experience available in the university's research environment.

The other new members are Jay L. Banner, professor, Department of Geological Sciences, Jackson School of Geosciences; Michael W. Downer, professor, Department of Physics, College of Natural Sciences; Charles Holahan, professor, Department of Psychology, College of Liberal Arts; Beth Maloch, associate professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education; Yale N. Patt, professor, the Ernest Cockrell, Jr. Centennial Chair in Engineering, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Cockrell School of Engineering; and Marjorie C.

Woods, professor, Department of English, College of Liberal Arts.

Established in February 1995, the Academy of Distinguished Teachers was one of the first associations of its kind in the nation. New members of the academy are selected each year through a rigorous evaluation process. Deans of colleges and schools annually nominate faculty for membership, and a committee that includes members of the academy, students and other faculty review the nominations and recommend a slate of honorees to the provost, who makes the selections.

Senior and Alumni Spotlights

Alumni Profile: Fabienne Darling-Wolf

Vitals: Associate Professor, Temple University

Degrees: Bachelor of Journalism ('92), M.A., Mass Communications ('94)

Proudest Accomplishment: Doing research she considers important and meaningful.



Interviewed by Angie Morris, M.A., Advertising (2012)

Fabienne Darling-Wolf graduated from Senior Fellows in 1992. Inspired by teachers like Julie Newton, Bob Jensen and James Tankard, she went on to earn a Ph.D. in Mass Communications. For the past 12 years, she has worked

at Temple University, where she is an associate professor in the Department of Journalism.

Why did you remain at UT for your master's studies?

My partner was finishing up his bachelor's degree in Architecture at UT, so it seemed like a logical choice for me. I also wanted to continue to work with some of the faculty I had met through the Senior Fellows Program (Julie Newton and Bob Jensen ended up being

my master's thesis readers). I eventually applied and got accepted into the Ph.D. program at UT as well. But even though I was tempted to stay, I decided it was probably better not to get all of my degrees from the same institution.

What do you do as a professor?

I currently teach undergraduate courses — mostly juniors and seniors — in international news, gender issues in the media, ethical issues in journalism, journalism history, and publication design. I also teach qualitative research methods and communication theory at the graduate level. I spend a lot of my time supervising doctoral students. I am currently chairing seven doctoral committees and serving on an additional six. I enjoy working with graduate students and that is one reason I chose to come to Temple. I liked the fact that it had a strong doctoral program. I also do research on global media, and that is why I have been traveling to Japan and France so much — I conduct ethnographic research with media consumers in two different field sites, one in Japan, one in France. I typically go there in the summers. I am finishing up a book on transnational media and global popular culture to be published with the University of Michigan Press. Then, of course, I do all the other stuff — administration, conferences — that academics do.

What has been the most challenging thing about being a professor?

I would say finding the right balance between my personal and professional lives. My oldest daughter was born just a few months before I started the position and I had a second one while on tenure track, so it was a bit intense there for a few years. My colleagues were extremely supportive, but I was the only woman with small children in the department and it was a little lonely at times. Things have changed somewhat now (including in my department) and it makes me happy that more of our graduate students choose to have children while in grad school or as junior faculty and figure out how to manage it. Even now, though, I find it difficult not to get over-involved in my work -- it's just not the kind of job that you can leave at the door when leaving the building.

Are there other experiences – professional or otherwise – you've had since leaving UT that you're

proud of?

Professionally, I am proud of the book that I'm about to publish and, more generally, of my ability to publish research that I enjoy doing and that allows me to create really meaningful relationships with people in different places. Actually, I'm probably most proud of the fact that I have always done the kind of research that I thought was important and meaningful, even if it was difficult at times — fieldwork is expensive, it takes time — and regardless of whether or not I felt it was the kind of thing that would bring me the most recognition. That's not easy to do in the “publish or perish” world of academia where there is a lot of pressure to crank out articles that will count toward tenure and/or promotion. Ultimately, I found that if I really care about the research I'm doing, it will get published, so in the end publishing was never a problem. I think I'm a pretty good mentor, too.

What were some of your favorite Senior Fellows classes and teachers?

I don't know where to start. For me, it was the first time being in a “grad-school-like” environment and I just loved it. Even though this is now more than 20 years ago, I remember every detail of Julie Newton's “People and their images” and of Jim Tankard's “New Journalism” classes (I still have the book on my shelf). I also often think of a class on orality. I can't remember the name of the teacher because we all had nicknames in the class — his nickname was “white rabbit” and I don't think he's at UT any more. It really made me think about how the ability to write things down changes the way we think and the way societies function. It was my first exposure to the idea of technological determinism. I also remember that the teacher analyzed conversations (including his children's) and one day his kids asked him whether “everything had to be a study.” I often think of that because I find myself drawing research inspirations from my kids all the time and I know they have the same kind of reaction.

What was your favorite Senior Fellows memory or assignment?

There was a guest lecture one day by Herb Simon that I thought was fascinating and I took all these notes and was so inspired. That was my first introduction

to Temple University where Herb taught for many years (he retired in 2007). Later, he would become my colleague but I never told him that he lectured in one of my undergrad classes!

How has the Senior Fellows program helped you or your career?

I never stopped doing this stuff. I guess my senior fellows teachers inspired me to become one of them.

How have you seen your communications field change since you began your career?

Well, the whole digital communication revolution happened. But in many respects, the core elements of what it means to be a good communicator haven't changed that much. You still need to be able to write. You still need to be able to think critically and assess whether or not you can trust your sources (online and otherwise). You still need to be sensitive to cultural issues. From a technological point of view there is more to learn, but the core skills still have to be there.

Alumni Profile: Paul Leonard

Vitals: Producer, Teacher for UTLA

Degrees: B.A. English, B.S. Radio-Television-Film ('91), MFA from Peter Stark Producer Program ('93)

Favorite Senior Fellows Class: Symposium with Rod Hart



By Kate Van Winkle, Public Relations (2012)

“The cylons were created by man. They rebelled. They evolved. There are many copies. And they have a plan.”

Sci-Fi fans may recognize those words from one of this generation's most notable television series, “Battlestar Gallactica.” Few, however,

probably know that those words are the work of Senior Fellows alumnus Paul Leonard.

A 1991 graduate of The College of Communication at The University of Texas at Austin, Leonard holds both a B.S. in Radio-Television-Film and a B.A. in English,

as well as an M.F.A. from the University of Southern California's Peter Stark Producer Program. Today, he works as a freelance producer on the new Syfy channel series “Defiance.”

“I oversee all things post-production, including editing, visual effects, music, sound design, etc.,” says Leonard. “I just started on this show, but I've been handling this level of responsibility in post-production since 1996.”

Based in Los Angeles for more than 20 years, Leonard brings his industry expertise to the UTLA program, where he now teaches students about post-production and editing techniques in Los Angeles.

He says he developed his production skills working as the manager of Texas Student Television (TSTV) while he was an undergraduate. The critical thinking skills that helped him develop into a teacher, he says, he owes in part to his time in the Senior Fellows program.

“It helped me be more articulate in my arguments and be more comfortable expressing myself in a well educated room,” says Leonard.

After earning his M.F.A. from the University of Southern California, he developed projects like “Assassination Games” with Jean-Claude Van Damme and worked for five years on the sci-fi hit “Battlestar Gallactica,” where he has made a number of creative contributions beyond his pay grade and contributed to the overall creative direction of the show.

During his impressive career in the industry, Leonard has watched the field of communications change from film to high-definition tape to file-based formats. He has seen the industry struggle to adjust to Web content and the budget implications inherent in its meteoric rise. “Visual-effects technology for television “has grown by leaps and bounds,” he says.

For students hoping to be part of the highly competitive communications industry, these changes can seem daunting. But Leonard offers simple advice to those about to graduate.

“Decide what you want to do or what field you're interested in and be passionate about pursuing it. If you want to write, direct, or produce videos and/or feature films, then just start doing it and quit making excuses,” says Leonard.

“I saw an interview with Meryl Streep lately where she repeated her husband's mantra, ‘start by starting.’”

Alumni Profile: Charles Mead

From: Communication Director, Boy Scouts of Central Texas

UT degree: B.A., Journalism ('94)

Challenging Career Moment: Doing TV news in Chicago during 9/11.

Senior Fellows Moment: Challenging the professor about the meaning of a photograph.



Interviewed by Sameer Bhuchar, Journalism, Senior Fellows (2012)

Senior Fellows alumnus Charles Mead (1994) is the communications director for the Boy Scouts of America's Central Texas chapters. He visited with Sameer Bhuchar, a fellow journalism major and soon-to-be alumnus of

Senior Fellows, sharing some key moments from his time in the program and his career in broadcast journalism and public relations.

Where do you live now and how long have you lived there?

I live in Austin and I have been here for six years. Prior to that, though, I did plenty of travelling around the country while I was still in TV, which involved my first TV job with KXAN here in Austin, and then working for a series of FOX-owned and operated-stations in Kansas City, Chicago and Houston. Houston was my last TV market and then for professional and personal reasons I decided I needed to change, and I was lucky enough to find the opportunity that I have now.

What is your job title and duties?

I'm the communications director for the Boy Scouts of America region called the Capital Area Council. So I'm essentially in charge of all the marketing and PR that takes place for scouts in Central Texas. I've been in this position since roughly 2005.

What has been the most challenging thing about your current position?

Well, I think overall, and this probably applies to both industries I've worked in, it's dealing with the growth of media that has taken place over the last 15 or so years now. The world from a communications standpoint doesn't look anything like it did when I first left UT and started working. Now there are so many different channels, so many audiences that you have to try to first just identify. Then you have to figure out how it is you're going to communicate to them. Speaking from my television background, that issue is figuring out what the best role is for local TV journalism as well as what stories should be covered and how to cover them. That extends into my career choice now where it's so difficult to try and find the most effective ways to communicate the key messages, the key initiatives of your organization and to figure out who you need to be talking to in the first place and what are the best ways to reach them. And once you figure that out, you have the challenge of deciding — and this especially applies to my work now dealing with a nonprofit — how you marshal resources and get the funds and personnel necessary to do the best job you can.

Yes, I've also noticed that problem. From a journalism standpoint, there always is that consideration of how can I maximize my visibility but still deliver quality stories.

Exactly. Let's just use the journalism example. It is hard enough, doing that job, regardless of all these other considerations. Add on to the fact that you are put into a situation where you've got to, in some instances, tailor the way in which you tell a story maybe two, three, four different ways. And who is going to do that? It's a world where there is such a demand for digital content and interactive content. I saw an example where stations are now using Google Plus groups to interact live with their audience an hour before a newscast to get them engaged enough to watch. It's a good idea, but the question becomes who is going to support it and still be able to run a news operation where you can deliver a thorough product? These initiatives can provide for an extremely rich experience, but how do you reconcile that with the fact that the only thing that has been consistent in journalism over the last 15 years is that newsrooms are cutting budgets and shrinking staffs?

Are there other experiences – professional or otherwise – you've had since leaving UT that you're

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proud of?

From the TV world, it was a unique -- and I certainly hope a once-in-a-lifetime experience of being in the newsroom in Chicago on Sept. 11, 2001, watching everything unfold. I was put in the real time situation of trying to really put all the pieces together of exactly what is happening and figuring out the best ways to tell that story in an environment that is going to be wall-to-wall life for 24 hours, for several days, and do it with some context that gives people an idea of exactly what is happening. I'm certainly proud of the work I did that day as both a producer, as a writer, and in some cases even there as an executive supervisor as well. I was proud to be a part of team that was asking all the right questions there when it was happening and making the best possible decisions that I could and living up to my responsibility as a media member. I think that was an experience I'll always carry with me, and it was probably the most emotionally charged experience I have from working in television. Also my wife was working in Chicago in a building that was called the Aon Center at that time. It was built nearly identical, almost eerily so, to resemble the façade of the World Trade Centers. So obviously you had rumors starting to fly that day, and of course you start to pick up on those things. And there was one in particular where the word was that there was another plane headed to Chicago that had lost contact with controllers and it was headed to that Aon building. So your job only becomes that much more difficult, because you have those kinds of considerations and challenges in front of you, so you're forced to fall back on the training you have and try to do the best job you can, but at a certain point your humanity kicks in. It was an odd, odd moment when I had to pick up the phone and tell my wife 'here is what I know, and you need to go home for the day.'

In my current job, I have been connected back to the essence of what I love the most, which is telling stories. My job allows me to constantly tell stories about people who are doing really tremendous things in their community, about kids who are setting goals for themselves and accomplishing them and growing up into citizens. Those things are just absolutely an encouragement and it recharges my batteries seemingly every day.

What were some of your favorite Senior Fellows classes and teachers?

It was "The Social Function of Photography." The class dealt with iconic images and the main points of discussion throughout the class looked at how important images are and their underlying messages. We learned that the images you put out there, whether it be in art or in journalism, all carry a message and you have to be aware of that. I remember that class distinctly because it was the first time while I was at Texas where I felt empowered enough to raise my hand and challenge an assertion made by a professor [J.B. Colson]. One time in particular, there was an image on a slide show, and it showed a boat near water. The professor was saying that the image was a classic icon of the idea of birth, and I couldn't quite wrap my head around why that might be, and decided for whatever reason that I would challenge that. I said 'get out of here, that seems to be a bit of a reach.' I suppose that now with a little more experience and sage, I can look at water and understand how it's obviously critical to life. Going back I can say that maybe I hadn't thought as deeply as I should have about that subject and its potential. But I think in being a student for life, which I believe all good journalists are, you continue to mull over things, and the more context you have, the better decisions you make. That was one of those moments made possible specifically by my involvement in a Senior Fellows class, because I was thrust into an atmosphere where challenging a premise was expected. And I think ultimately that is what we are all hoping the college experience gives us. We want the ability to think for ourselves and be able to branch out on our own and really begin to decide who we are and what we stand for.

When was the last time you visited UT?

Besides off and on for a few football games, I haven't done a specific campus visit for anything in a while. I did take my daughter to Explore UT two years ago and she enjoyed that. I am excited to see the new Belo Center's facilities. I hope it gives the students that much more hands on experience with digital media.

Do you have any advice for current Senior Fellow students?

I guess the best thing I can say is just slow down. Try to soak in and enjoy this chance to think. The world is so fast paced, and there are so many demands placed upon us professionally, to make ends meet, to pay the

mortgage. I wish I gave myself more time to marinate, stop, and really soak up the world around me. So while you have that time there, take it, and enjoy and use it, because it's only going to become more and more precious as you get older.

Senior Profile: Kelsey McGonigle

Vitals: Public Relations major, born in Washington, D.C., grew up in Dallas

Dream Job: Communication for the performing arts

Favorite Class: Talia Stroud's "Politics and Public Opinion"

Accolades: Under her direction Tower PR was recognized by the university for its public service.



Interviewed by Dave Junker,
Senior Fellows Director

Kelsey McGonigle is a public relations major pursuing a Business Foundations Certificate. She's also the director of Texas Tower PR, a student-run public relations agency that works with Austin non-profits. She will graduate in May.

So, you say that your parents were both writers and professional communicators. Now that you're old enough to reflect on your past, do you see their influence on your own path?

Yes, absolutely. My dad works as a reporter for The Dallas Morning News and my mom was a freelance writer and editor who now works in communications at UT Dallas. She would mark up my writing as a kid. My whole family is very expressive and has a great sense of humor.

Do you have a dream job?

Doing communication for a theatre or performing arts venue. I've been involved in theatre more or less since grade school, and I've been working at Texas Performing Arts as a student at UT. I would love to have a job that suited both my interest in PR and my

interest in the arts.

As a kid, did you perform?

Oh, yeah! It let me get out all this extra energy. I don't act now, but I think you can see the actress in me. I do better in classes when I get to talk things out and flesh ideas out in a way that's true to myself. I like Senior Fellows for that reason.

If you were in control of Senior Fellows, what would you like to see more of?

Texas singer-songwriter Bruce Robison was great. More singers and songwriters. Adele, I think, should be at the top of the list (laughs). Having more guests who have a lot to do with the communications culture we live in but who don't necessarily fit the traditional role of a "professional communicator."

Although we can't bring in Adele, one of your favorite singers, I can ask you a couple questions about her. What's your favorite Adele song?

I can appreciate how "Someone Like You" strikes a chord in everyone.

Do you think Adele has staying power? Is there something that makes her better or distinct from other female pop singers?

That voice is gold. I hope she is around for a while.

Do you have a favorite Senior Fellows class?

Talia Stroud's class [Politics and Public Opinion, Spring 2011]. I remember when we talked about the "spiral of silence" and having my mind blown. It's one of the benefits of taking classes out of your comfort zone. This environment allows you to take such classes without being overwhelmed.

Do you have a favorite reading from your Senior Fellows career?

"Let the Great World Spin" [Symposium 2010]. I just passed it along to my mom.

What will you remember five years from now about "Let the Great World Spin" or our discussions about it?

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What I will hold on to from our discussions about “Let the Great World Spin” is that we all have our own unique perspectives about shared cultural events, and that it is well worth it to hear other people’s take on them.

Senior Profile: Alden Paras

Vitals: B.A. Public Relations, Dec. 2011, born and raised in Houston

Plans: Attend law school, fall 2012

Fantasy Senior Fellows Class: “The Social Communication of Pink Floyd”



Interviewed by Dave Junker, Senior Fellows Director

Alden Paras graduated in December and plans to attend law school in the fall. He contributed to Senior Fellows in a number of ways, including introducing me to the longboard, a relatively new style of skateboard meant for cruising at high speeds.

For those advancing in age,

like me, they have the added benefit of being a lot harder to fall off of.

I’m proud to say I’ve only had one good fall on my skateboard, just some scrapes on my back. Can you see yourself continuing to skateboard, or do you think there comes a time when you just should just grow up not risk it?

That’s awesome! I’m glad to hear that [laughs]. As long as time allows, I don’t think I’ll ever give it up. For me, a few bumps and scrapes are worth the joy of riding along with just a deck and some wheels under your feet. Besides, after the cuts heal, it’s even sort of like a badge that proves you dared to do something.

Congratulations on getting into law school. Why do you want to go? What do you hope to do some day?

Thank you. Right now I’m still waiting on several decision letters, but I am most eager to attend Tulane

University Law School and study corporate law. I particularly hope to concentrate on the junction between company practices and human rights. It isn’t an area of corporate law most people think of, but it’s just as important.

What was your most memorable Senior Fellows class?

“From Moses to Elmer Fudd: Speech Disorders and Their Representations” [taught by Valerie Stahl]. It explored a range of communication disorders. One class period, we were learning about a disorder known as Wernicke’s aphasia. To illustrate its affect on verbal communication, Professor Stahl gave us a list of random phrases and challenged us to explain a situation to a partner using only those phrases. It was funny because no one could understand what the other was trying to explain, but it was also a unique, hands-on learning experience.

Do you have a Senior Fellows “moment” from that or another class?

My first semester in the program, I took Diana Dawson’s class on the gentrification process in East Austin. I just thought it would be an interesting course, but the impact of public policy, such as the spike in property taxes in the low-income residential areas that surround new developments, became real to me when our class had the opportunity to speak with Austinites impacted by these developments, as well as to the developers themselves. It was like a huge chain reaction. Getting to listen to both sides of the topic, I saw how each decision made by building developers has an effect on their many different publics, intentional or not.

I know you like Pink Floyd because you wrote about “The Wall” in your admission essay. If you were asked to propose a Senior Fellows class on Pink Floyd, or popular music more generally, what would you call it and what would it be about?

If I had the chance to propose a new Senior Fellows class, I would call it “The Social Communication of Pink Floyd,” or something like that. There are many great artists out there worth creating a course around, but Pink Floyd is just such a great example of a group that channels social critiques through its music with a deeply humanistic point-of-view. The class would

analyze some of their albums, including “Dark Side of the Moon,” “Wish You Were Here,” “Animals” and “The Wall.” And it wouldn’t be a real Pink Floyd class if it didn’t also screen one of my favorite movies, “The Wall,” by the end of the course, where the symbolism and visual imagery of the film could be collectively interpreted.