25 Years of Small Seminars and Big Ideas

If an honors program can be reduced to a single tag line, “small seminars, big ideas” might just do the trick. While our College is a leader in teaching new and old media, Senior Fellows continues to give our best and brightest a forum to discuss the critical issues of the day and of all time.

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Keeping the Message Alive: Student Interviews Eliza Gilkyson for Class on Woody Guthrie

For her Symposium paper, Journalism major Sarah Grace Sweeney interviewed heralded folk singer Eliza Gilkyson about how she became such a poignant social critic working in the folk tradition.

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Donna DeCesare’s New Book, “Children in a World of Gangs”

Donna DeCesare’s new book, “Unsettled/Desasosiego: Children in a World of Gangs/Los niños en un mundo de las pandillas,” is the culmination of 30 years of photographing gang members and their families. Through striking images DeCesare uncovers the effects of decades of war and gang violence on the lives of youths in Central America and in refugee communities in the United States.

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Belo Center for New Media Wins Merit Award

Any student will tell you the Belo center for New Media is a great place to be. The American Institute of Architects seems to agree, awarding the BMC its top prize for “Merit Design.”

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Letter from the Director: 25 Years of Small Seminars and Big Ideas

By Dave Junker, Director of Senior Fellows

There’s never been a bad time to be in Senior Fellows. But one could make a case for this being the best time.

It’s as if we’re celebrating our 25-year anniversary in a brand new state-of-the-art building, and Roderick P. Hart, Dean of the College of Communication and founder of Senior Fellows, was stepping back into the classroom to teach a special topics course in the fall.

If it sounds like it’s too good to be true, that’s only because it really is that good. We are turning 25 this fall, the impressive Belo Center for New Media is our new home and Dean Hart is teaching a Senior Fellows seminar.

His class is called “American Voices,” and it draws on his long career as one of the nation’s leading communication scholars to examine the questions, “What’s unique about American speech, American film, American advertising, American politics, the American press?” Judging by the number of students trying to get into the class, I’m clearly not the only one feeling downright giddy about it.

“If it sounds too good to be true, that’s only because it really is that good.”

The energy is palpable all around. Another measure is the high number of students applying for admission in 2013-14. This spring, 80 students applied for only 30 slots. That’s nearly double the number of students who applied two years ago.

While this makes for an agonizing selection process, it affirms the relevance of our mission and the quality of our programming. At a time when higher education is becoming more virtual, data-driven, and impersonal, Senior Fellows provides the intimate, timeless and indispensable learning experiences it always has. And Senior Fellows students and faculty continue to like it that way.

The heart of this learning experience, since the program first took shape in 1988, is our seminar classes, and 2012-13 was a banner year for them. I owe a special thanks to the following faculty – some of the best in the nation in their fields - for teaching these great classes:

• Sharon Jarvis and Ashley Muddiman (Communication Studies), “Campaign Communication”


• Nancy Schiesari (Radio-Television-Film), “Art and Cinema”

• Joshua Gunn (Communication Studies), “Is Communication (Science) Fiction?”

• Tracy Dahlby (Journalism), “Storytelling in Digital Times”

I know from our students how meaningful these classes were. Apart from having talented faculty, this comes as a result of the time and effort that our faculty put into them. I see this effort in myriad ways, from the time faculty put into planning their courses, to the thought and resourcefulness that goes into recruiting guest speakers and coordinating special outings and events. Some examples:

For “Art and Cinema,” a class that examined the many ways modern art movements have shaped film making, Nancy Schiesari took her students to the Blanton Museum for a guided tour and special lecture. For “Is Communication (Science) Fiction,” Joshua Gunn recruited Professor Thomas Frentz, a communication and science fiction scholar from the University of Arkansas, to give a talk on the ways science fiction tests our assumptions about communication. Professor Gunn also invited students to his house for a dinner
party honoring their guest, an experience not many undergraduates enjoy.

Tracy Dahlby recruited a host of great guests for his class “Storytelling in Digital Times,” including songwriter Darden Smith and philosophy professor Paul Woodruff. Perhaps most memorable was the visit by Gioia Timpanelli, a world-renowned storyteller, who gave an intimate storytelling session to the class and a formal lecture on storytelling that was open to the public.

UT Austin Classics Professor Thomas G. Palaima attended Timpanelli’s storytelling session and was so moved by it that he wrote a commentary for the Austin American-Statesman.

It’s no wonder that students are looking forward to next year’s classes and programming. In addition to Dean Hart’s return, we have veteran Senior Fellows teachers Karin Wilkins from Radio-Television-Film and Gene Burd from Journalism joining the 2013-14 roster. And joining us for the first time will be Advertising and Public Relations Lecturer Tamara Bell as well as longtime Journalism Professor Donna DeCesare (who recently wrote a book on her experience photographing the lives of children exposed to war - you can read about in this issue of Backstories).

We wrapped up a great year with a reception at the Texas Union. We had a great turnout and a wonderful time was had by all. Though most of the time was reserved for conversation, I had the honor of announcing the winner of the Top Paper in Symposium award, which went to Communication Studies major Kaytiann Severin for her application of interpersonal communication theory to political discourse.

Congratulations on a job well done!

At the reception, I also announced that Senior Fellows will be getting its own room in the Belo Center for New Media, a space where Senior Fellows can socialize, study together and plan social activities. This is part of an effort to build community to a greater degree within Senior Fellows. A driving force of this effort are students Sterling Whittemore, Meg Weiss and Allison Heinrich, who volunteered to serve on the inaugural Senior Fellows Student Advisory Council, which will serve to provide input on a range of matters from academic programming to social activities.

In this issue of Backstories, you’ll see some examples of what all the buzz is about. Among the highlights are interviews with graduating seniors Gracelin Baskaran and Nicole Bernard as well and two more with fascinating alumni Gayle Rosenstein Klein and Joe Januszewski, proving that Senior Fellows do big things in the classroom and even bigger things when they leave it. You can also read a feature on singer-songwriter Eliza Gilkyson -- written by student Sarah Grace Sweeney -- and an article about Donna DeCesare's powerful new book.

Please let us know if you have any comments, questions or “big ideas” from those “small seminars” you took when you were in Senior Fellows. We’d love to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Dave

New Book of Photojournalism by Professor DeCesare Wins Praise

Donna DeCesare's new book, “Unsettled/Desasosiego: Children in a World of Gangs/Los niños en un mundo de las pandillas,” is the culmination of 30 years of photographing gang members and their families. Through striking images DeCesare uncovers the effects of decades of war and gang violence on the lives of youths in Central America and in refugee communities in the United States.

In the fall, DeCesare will be teaching a Senior Fellows seminar, Archive Detectives: Telling Stories About The Past Through Archival Research, building on her experience as a photojournalist and her training as a scholar to investigate the visual resources available to us at the world-class libraries on campus.

A photojournalist and associate professor in the School of Journalism in the College of Communication, DeCesare began covering Central America during the civil wars of the 1980s, focusing on the disrupted lives of children and youths. She continued her photography project in Central American refugee communities in
Keeping the Message Alive

By Sarah Grace Sweeney

Eliza Gilkyson is a member of the Texas Music Hall of Fame and was nominated for a Grammy award for her 2004 album “Land of Milk and Honey.” In 2012 she won Best Folk Artist at the Austin Music Awards, and in late spring she will release her 20th album, “The Nocturne Diaries.” She is well known for having a voice both powerful and nuanced and for writing songs that balance timelessness and universality with politics and social urgency. Not surprisingly, she has also been a key member of the Woody Guthrie Tribute Tour spearheaded by fellow Austin folkie Jimmy LaFave.

All of these things made her the obvious first choice of interview subjects when third-year journalism student Sarah Grace Sweeney was told that she could try some original reporting for her final paper in Symposium, the topic of which was Woody Guthrie and American Culture. As a self-confessed “Bob Dylan fanatic,” Sweeney was interested in how Gilkyson, like Guthrie and Dylan before her, cultivated a strong individual and political voice in the American folk tradition. What follows is Sweeney’s feature based on her interview with Gilkyson at her home in Austin.

Time flew by during my interview with Eliza Gilkyson. She told me about discovering Woody Guthrie and how enamored she had become with his life and with his music. She called him a real role model. She talked about being an older woman on tour and how she refuses to go under the knife to keep looking young. While I tried to take notes, I felt myself becoming enchanted by her presence and her story, turning her into my own folk music role model. Though she laments the lack of truly devoted protest musicians present today, Gilkyson still believes in the power of music to reach people. And there’s nothing I admire about Eliza Gilkyson more than that.

“You really have to make great art,” Gilkyson says, sitting on her couch in her South Austin home. Whether through a microphone on stage or during a low-key discussion in her living room, Gilkyson is convincing.
share her perspective.

Though her Grammy-nominated music and Texas Music Hall of Fame status betray a mature artist confident in her beliefs, she spent years figuring it all out. Whether through a microphone on stage or during a low-key discussion in her living room, Gilkyson is convincing.

She was born in 1950 and grew up in Los Angeles, Calif., where she experienced the brief West Coast folk movement and fell in love with it. Terry Gilkyson, Eliza’s father, moved to California to become a songwriter, selling bottled water until he could make ends meet. His first hit came in 1950 with the song “The Cry of the Wild Goose,” sung by Frankie Laine. Terry continued to write songs for singers like Dean Martin, Doris Day and Harry Belafonte. Gilkyson described her father’s work as a very 1950s version of a songwriter, going to an office in a suit and tie instead of strumming an acoustic guitar on the couch.

Terry started a folk pop band around 1956 called The Easy Riders. He was joined by brothers Carson and Van Dyke Parks, who went on to collaborate with Brian Wilson and write many of the songs for the Beach Boy’s landmark album “Smile.”

Gilkyson says she was completely infatuated with the Parks brothers and it was Carson who actually taught her to play the guitar. She saw their success develop and yearned for it herself.

“I always knew,” she says, reflecting on her desire for a musical career. “I didn’t have anything else. I was just completely bewitched. I wanted it and expected it.”

But with “teen angst” on her mind, this was not the spark of her political consciousness as a songwriter. And though her father had clear left-leaning politics, Hollywood was not about political folk music. It was about selling records, and Terry followed that route.

While there is almost no scholarly documentation of the influence Terry Gilkyson had on folk music, Gilkyson says the inner-circle of folk musicians is well aware of his impact. “He is sort of known in folk history as being one of the people who brought folk into pop music because he was one of the first folk artists to have hits in the pop music world,” Gilkyson says.

The brief folk scene Terry helped foment was very different from the East Coast folk experience, Gilkyson explains. Terry was never blacklisted for his tunes and when he worked with a more political band, The Weavers, the chemistry wasn’t there. Both parties wanted to stay true to their roots, she says, and for The Weavers that meant being more politically outspoken, something Terry wasn’t.

While Terry was writing songs, Gilkyson recollects becoming more infatuated with music. She had a mature voice and by age 13, she was recording many of the demos for her father’s songs.

“My dad would put me in the studio with my friends who were musicians and we would do his songs, and the way he would pay me [he] would give me an extra hour to do my own thing, so we would always tack on a few songs of mine,” Gilkyson says. “So I got really comfortable in the studio.”

In 1969, Gilkyson had her first contract with RCA records. She described it as being bogged down with internal politics and never going anywhere. “Typical Eliza story,” she smiles. But Gilkyson did go somewhere, to New Mexico of all the places. After her mother died, Gilkyson and her family needed to disconnect. Moving to New Mexico, she says, “really closed the door on Los Angeles which was really kind of closing the door on my career too.”

When asked if that was what she even truly wanted, though, she thought about it and said no. “What I thought was that it will find me if that’s what’s going to happen, and I wanted it but I didn’t want to go chase it,” she says. “I felt like it would come to me if that was what was supposed to be and that was the way we thought in those days. And actually I think there is a beauty in that perspective but I also think that the practicality goes out the window. You really do have to pursue what you want and I didn’t have that hunger to pursue things at all costs.”

Gilkyson calls her time in New Mexico her “hippie days.” She met her first husband in New Mexico and had her first child Cisco there when she was 19 years old, followed by her daughter Delia two years later. They lived without running water or electricity. She had two pairs of shoes and maybe three shirts. “It was rustic,” she says with a laugh.

Gilkyson recorded homespun records in New Mexico and played what little bar and club circuit that there...
was. But it was not enough. Speaking of her years in New Mexico as deeply important and introspective, she says that after working through her personal issues, she wanted to sing about the problems of others and of the world.

That’s when, in 1998, she decided to try Austin.

“There was no work, no music scene [in New Mexico],” she says. “There were no clubs. No infrastructure, no fan base. It was just impossible. And you look down at Austin [where] everything was happening.”

Austin is where Gilkyson became a political folk artist. “I had done enough self-inventory that I was done with that self-possession,” she says. “You start to look outside of yourself and see the inequalities of existence and you start to question your place in all of that. I think it’s like pulling a thread. Your whole sense of yourself and how the world is run comes unraveled and you can’t put it back together again. It’s a dismantling process that’s very daunting and confronting.”

Gilkyson landed a record deal with Red House Records, where she would put out some of her best albums, including the Grammy nominated “Land of Milk and Honey.” Though her opposition to the War in Iraq had politicized her thinking, it was not easy for Gilkyson to open up about her politics as an artist, afraid of what it meant and the responsibility it demanded. She admired musicians like Joan Baez for their well-developed opinions, but Gilkyson says she didn’t feel like she was there yet.

“To me, to be political means you have to walk your talk but you also have to know what you’re talking about,” she tells me. “You have to understand how the power structures are controlling the world and you have to be able to track historically how power has maintained its hold and how patriarchy and white supremacy are tied into those things, and those are things I just didn’t care about. I felt like I was a free hippie living in the country so it wasn’t until later that I started to see things weren’t going to change unless we really analyzed and critiqued the structures of power.”

At the onset of the Iraq War, Gilkyson was one of very few musicians to speak up against it. In the book “Representations of Peace and Conflict,” Stephen Gibson and Simon Mollan write about the lack of organized musical protest similar to what occurred during the Vietnam War. Both the Vietnam War and the War in Iraq had active dissenters, but only Vietnam had an organized media response.

Gibson and Mollan cite Green Day, System of a Down and The Black Eyed Peas as popular musicians with Top 40 anti-war songs. But both “American Idiot” and “Elephunk,” the albums featuring Green Day and The Black Eyed Peas anti-war hits, did not come out until 2004. Gilkyson started singing her protests immediately, trying to stay true to the political roots of the folk genre. Her anti-war album, “The Land Milk and Honey,” came out a year before most other anti-war albums.

Gilkyson realizes she is lucky to be able to protest through her songs, though. She said that the reasons some musicians may not do so is because of the risks they pose.

“I think most people are just trying to keep their heads above water,” Eliza says. “And that’s the problem. We are on such a brink of economic collapse that everybody’s feeling like they’ve got to get their little toe hold or they’re not going to make it. It’s very hard to dedicate your life to a higher calling when you can’t feed your own family.”

Since her awakening as a political artist Gilkyson has continued to take action through her music. Yet her lyrics are subtle and nuanced, not preachy. “Hiway 9,” one of her songs about the war in Iraq sounds like a driving song, but it has a challenging message:

Well the white god said to the little man
‘We’re gonna fulfill scripture in the holy land
Between the Tigris and Euphrates it’s a lot like hell
Go on and liberate my people and their O-I-L

“I thought, ‘what can I do best to call attention to that?’ Because no one wants to have a message hammered over their heads,” Gilkyson says. “I felt that what my music [does] best, because it’s what I think I do best, is go to the heart of things and the place where you feel things and where you feel that you care.”

Gilkyson is aware that music is not always effective for getting a message across, but that most importantly music makes a person feel real emotions, something she worries we are losing as the human race because of our capitalist society.

“Everyday you have to unplug your connectors to accept the lifestyle that you live,” Gilkyson says. “That place that’s getting rock hard, that’s getting shut off, if music can open that and shed a little light into that world then I think we can feel safe enough to care.”

For more information about Eliza Gilkyson, visit elizagilkyson.com.
Senior and Alumni Spotlights

Senior Profile: Nicole Bernard

From: Schertz, Texas
Major: Advertising
Favorite Class: “Storytelling in Digital Times” by Tracy Dahlby

Like so many Senior Fellows, Nicole Bernard is a very active student outside of the classroom. She’s a member of the Orange Jackets and a cartoonist for The Daily Texan among lots of other things, and she will start work at Texas Instruments after graduating. Nicole talked with us about how she managed to do it all ... and do it all so well!

You’re graduating. That means you must have a secret to how you managed to do all those things and not burn yourself out?

In addition to being a Senior Fellow, I’ve participated in many different organizations and job opportunities on and off campus. Throughout my college career, I’ve been involved in Communication Council, Texas Orange Jackets and my internship at Proof Advertising (an agency downtown). At different times, I have also been a mentor at the Sanger Learning and Career Center, an executive staff member in Student Government, an Orientation Advisor, a FIG mentor, and a cartoonist at The Daily Texan. One of the reasons I was able to do so much in my time on campus was because I picked a few organizations that were heavily involved year-round, like Communication Council, and several other positions that were only involved during certain times of the year. Balancing is key to college in general, but choosing opportunities that gave me enough time to focus on studies kept me from burning out.

What is one of your proudest moments as a Longhorn?

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Belo Center Wins Merit Design Award

By Marc Speir

The Lawrence Group, an architecture firm and designer of the Belo Center for New Media, won the prestigious “merit design award” for the company’s work on the building from the Austin chapter of the American Institute of Architects’ annual Honor and Design Awards on April 11, 2013.

The Belo Center contains numerous innovative design and sustainability features, and received a coveted “gold certification” from the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) earlier this month.

“Our primary goal was to provide the best for The University of Texas, the UT Austin campus, and Dean Hart and the College of Communication,” said I. Earl Swisher, principal of the Lawrence Group. “It’s also nice to be recognized within your peer group.”

The process of choosing an architect began in 2008 when 15 major architectural firms were invited to submit proposals for building the Belo Center, the new building of the College of Communication.

The Lawrence Group was chosen from five finalists who were invited to campus to make a formal presentation. The building officially opened its doors for classes in August and was dedicated Nov. 1, 2012.

“We were the largest institutional project to win an award this year,” said Swisher. “The Austin AIA appreciated the planning and contextual nature of the building working within the UT master plan guidelines while maintaining a framework of design similar to that of the CMA and CMB. We were also cited for clarity of site plan organization, building massing, and our focus on environmental features.”

Located at the northeast corner of Dean Keeton and Guadalupe Streets, the $54.8 million Belo Center provides interactive classrooms and meeting space for more than 4,600 students in the College and houses the adjacent KUT Public Media Studios. The five-story, 120,000-square-foot building includes lecture halls, auditoria, student offices and meeting rooms, as well as spaces for film screenings and conferences for all college departments.
One of my proudest moments as a Longhorn has very little to do with me and everything to do with the great programs in place at this university. This year, I was a Freshman Interest Group mentor for the second time, and I had the pleasure of watching the freshmen in my group come into their own. To watch them become friends, make connections and find their own niches on campus reminds me just how amazing this university is and how many opportunities for growth it affords its students.

I think creating funny or political cartoons must take a lot of intellectual as well as creative energy. Does it come easy to you? What’s the hardest part?

Creating cartoons is a great hobby of mine, and I like to document life’s oddities in quick one-panel illustrations. It’s something that I’ve been doing since high school, and something that I enjoyed doing for a semester as a comic artist for The Daily Texan. Because I’ve been making comics for so long, finding inspirations and drawing the comics is easy. The most difficult part now that I do them only recreationally is to find time to keep up with it!

Do you have a favorite cartoonist? Any Longhorn alumni on your short list?

I actually don’t have a favorite cartoonist. I am, however, inspired by the street art I see here in Austin. There’s a certain freedom you see in graffiti and murals that I try to emulate in my cartoons, illustrations and graphic design.

You’re an excellent writer and analytical thinker. I think you could be successful at so many things. What attracts you to advertising?

What first attracted me to advertising was the design aspect of creating ads. I came into UT with a background in fine art and was looking for a way to turn my creativity into a career. Since becoming an advertising major, I fell in love with the analytic side of advertising and marketing. Coming up with creative strategies proved to be just as interesting to me as coming up with visual solutions to ideas, and in many ways I believe my passion for creativity helps me unlock creative alternatives and think outside the box.

What’s your dream job?

My ultimate goal would be to work my way up the ladder at a technology company and lead their marketing efforts on a global scale. I love the innovative potential that technology companies have, and I think it would be a great challenge to help define a company’s purpose and spread excitement about innovation to the rest of the world.

Can you name any specific Senior Fellows classes that had an impact on you? Or any texts, lectures or discussions that made you rethink the way you saw something?

This past semester, I took “Storytelling in Digital Times” with Tracy Dahlby. In the class we explored storytelling’s origins, future and impact on the world we live in today. The class really challenged me to redefine how I thought about storytelling, and the eclectic mix of speakers and storytellers we welcomed into our classroom helped me see how multifaceted and useful story is as a tool in our world.

What are your plans after graduating?

After graduation, I’ll start my first job at Texas Instruments. As a communications major with no prior experience working in technology, I’m excited for the opportunity to get my hands dirty in a new field!

Senior Profile: Gracelin Baskaran
From: Sterling Heights, Michigan
Major: Political Communications
Favorite Class: “Campaign Communication” by Sharon Jarvis and Ashley Muddiman

Senior Gracelin Baskaran is already an accomplished alumna of Senior Fellows, despite just having walked at spring commencement a few short weeks ago. The main reason is that she’ll be traveling to South Africa as the winner of a Fulbright scholarship.

What is one of your proudest moments as a Longhorn?

I transferred from the University of Michigan and as much of a Michigan Football fan as I am, transferring was the best decision I have ever made. My proudest moment as a Longhorn was finding out that I’ll be the first Longhorn to go to Sub-Saharan Africa on a
Fulbright in nearly 20 years. We're very proud of you! Can you explain more about what you'll be doing on your Fulbright?

After graduating, I will be travelling to South Africa on a Fulbright Fellowship to teach English and study the intersection of race and educational inequality. It's been a dream of mine since I was 9 years old to go to Africa and study and get involved with HIV/AIDS relief. I am SO excited!

You were an excellent student in Symposium because you're able to make deep connections beyond your own interests and field of study and talk about them with energy and enthusiasm. Of the many Woody Guthrie songs we listened to, were there any that struck a chord with you, or that you see reflected in other critical ways, whether the subject was a shipwreck or race relations or any other thing?

As someone who's interested in social structures and their tendency to reproduce themselves, I find Woody Guthrie's music interesting to examine. He offered dynamic insights into the plight of the less fortunate and the struggle of generational poverty. In his song “Dust Bowl Refugee,” Guthrie sings, “Yes, we ramble and we roam / And the highway that's our home, / It's a never-ending highway / For a dust bowl refugee / Yes we wander and we work / In your crops and in your fruit, / Like the whirlwinds on the desert / That's the dust bowl refugee.” He tells a story of the refugees, many of whom were minority immigrants just trying to make ends meet. But Guthrie was no stranger to struggle himself, dealing with a broken family, alcohol abuse and financial troubles. This allowed a man with a guitar to serve as a voice for many, telling their story and using music as a way to draw attention their struggles and improve their lives. Professor Tracy Dahlby brought in songwriter Darden Smith for his Senior Fellows class, “Storytelling in Digital Times.” Darden reminded me of Woody; Woody used music to tell a story of the refugee struggle while Darden uses music to tell the story of wounded, broken veterans. In both cases, they help create discourse and action by telling a story, thus breaking the cyclical nature of struggle.

Can you name any specific Senior Fellows classes that had an impact on you? Or any texts, lectures or discussions that made you rethink the way you saw something?

My favorite class in college was Dr. Jarvis's course on campaign communications. I hit a point in college when I began wondering why I was studying communications and what I was going to do with it. Her class changed everything for me. She taught me how to think critically about the events that surround us and reminded me that there are no such things as new events, simply old events happening to new people. By studying the rhetoric used in different political landscapes, we are better equipped as leaders and scholars to respond to whatever may come next.

What's your dream job?

I'm not exactly sure what my dream jobs is, but I know what I'm passionate about. I'm passionate about working to eradicate educational inequality and engaging in discourse surrounding public policy and race. Where does that leave me? Getting a doctorate and seeing where life takes me.

Do you have any final thoughts?

All in all, Senior Fellows has been an amazing program. While it has taught me many things, the most important takeaway for me is that the hardest things in life to talk about are the ones that need to be discussed the most. Inaction is not a form of action and all action begins with discourse.

Alumni Profile: Gayle Rosenstein Klein

Vitals: Principal at McKool Smith Law Firm

UT degrees: J.D. University of Texas School of Law (’96), B.A. Advertising (’93)

Favorite Class: “People and Their Images” by Julie Newton

I don't get to meet that many Senior Fellows alumni face-to-face. So it was a rare pleasure to accompany Gayle Rosenstein Klein on a tour of the Belo Center in April while she was here to attend the 101st anniversary...
of the Friar Society, the oldest honor society on campus, which Gayle was a member of while a student. Consistent with her Senior Fellows and School of Law pedigrees, Gayle embraces the challenges of her work as a trial lawyer in New York while staying connected to her roots on the Forty Acres. In the interview below, she discusses how she got there from here, how her communications background gave her useful skills in her law career and offers some sage advice for current students.

Would you say that your legal focus is business litigation involving complex financial disputes?

As a trial lawyer, I help people and companies resolve business conflicts. Although my practice is currently focused on the financial industry, over the years I have had the opportunity to represent clients from many different sectors: real estate, telecommunications, insurance, managed care, consumer products, airlines, and dietary supplements, to name a few. This exposure has helped me to gain insight and experience on the most effective ways to guide clients through a broad range of business and legal challenges.

Looking back at your time with Senior Fellows, could you have imagined then that you’d be doing what you are now?

I can answer this one “most certainly not.” I never seriously thought about being a lawyer until the fall semester of my senior year at UT, when I was facing graduation and had to decide what to do next. Something one of my Senior Fellows classmates said to me the prior semester made me think about taking the LSAT, so on a whim, I took the exam. I did well enough to get into a great law school (UT Austin). Problem solved.

Do you think law is a good option for Communications majors these days? Are there any particular fields of law you would advise students to consider?

Law - any area of litigation in particular - is definitely a great field for Communications majors. Communications majors become skilled in many of the core competencies of being an effective litigator: strong writing, presenting facts accurately, and strategic and persuasive communication.

During your visit we compared notes about the use of PowerPoint in the classroom and the court room. You mentioned that your undergraduate education in Advertising prepared you to use visual aids and other tools more effectively than some of your legal colleagues. How did your undergraduate education contribute to this?

My advertising coursework taught me how to convey themes simply and visually. I remember learning “use no more than nine words on a bill board.” Although I do tend to use more than nine words on a slide, I use PowerPoint in the court room (and the board room) to punctuate a particular argument, idea or theme, and not to spell it all out in great detail. That method allows people to listen to me and removes the temptation from me to simply read from the slide.

I think many of our students dream about what it would be like to live in New York some day. Maybe their views are shaped by their own visits there, maybe they’re shaped by the media. What are some things about living in New York that students should know?

New Yorkers get a bad rap in the media. People here are very friendly. Because many of the people who live in Manhattan are from elsewhere, it is a very easy city in which to make friends, build a network and get involved in various groups. And you can get pretty much any type of food delivered to your apartment!

Do you have a vivid memory of a Senior Fellows class or teacher, or a specific moment from a class that has stuck with you through the years? Another way of asking the question is, did you have any “Senior Fellows moments” or epiphanies that changed the way you saw things or challenged your assumptions in an important way?

I took “People and Their Images” with Julie Newton in 1992, in which we studied how different kinds of images affected our self-perceptions. It was interesting to compare my classmates’ perceptions of me to my own self-perceptions. One of the things that I have
You remind me of many of the amazingly intelligent and highly driven students that I meet in Senior Fellows. Is there any advice you can offer them as students and young adults preparing to enter the larger world?

Work hard, take risks and don’t be afraid to fail. You will learn a lot if you fail, and it can only enhance your sense of accomplishment when you succeed.

Alumni Profile: Joe Januszewski

Vitals: Executive Vice President, Business Partnerships and Development for the Texas Rangers

UT degree: B.A. Radio-Television-Film (‘93), M.Ed. Kinesiology (‘99)

Joe Januszewski has been an executive for some of the most respected organizations in professional sports, from baseball’s Boston Red Sox and Texas Rangers, to soccer’s Liverpool FC, one of the most herladed clubs of the English Premier League. In our interview, Joe talks about everything from his passion for sports and his admiration for how Professor Hart runs a classroom, to the advice he gave to Senior Fellows classmate Matthew McConaughey before he became a big star.

Your career and current position with the Rangers are certainly impressive. Did you know back when you were in college that you wanted to do what you’re doing now?

Not at all. My undergraduate program was in Radio-Television-Film specializing in Film Production. I worked on films since junior high earning summer money. I made a career shift in my mid-20s and went back to UT for a masters specializing in Sport Management. I have always been passionate about sports and as the industry grew into a field that required a higher level of business and people skills, I decided to give it a shot.

Were you a baseball fan growing up? Did you have a favorite team?

I was and continue to be a huge baseball fan. I was an Army brat and grew up in Germany and Utah. I played from T-ball into high school. Once the pitchers started breaking off curve balls, I knew my days as a ballplayer were limited. As neither of the areas I grew up in had a major league baseball team, I gravitated to one of the most successful teams of my childhood, the Cincinnati Reds. I still pull for them, though the Rangers are my team now.

In many ways baseball is the most American of sports. Yet it seems like football has begun taking over that status. Do you think there’s something about baseball that will always give it a special place in American culture? Is it part of your job to try to communicate that to people, business partners and media?

Baseball is deeply woven into the history of our country. More so than any other major professional sport. It is the oldest and in many ways the most important sporting cultural waypoint for Americans: from the 100-year-old tradition of the commander in chief throwing out the first pitch on opening day, to the beginning of the unraveling of Jim Crow and segregation, thanks to the courage of Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey.

Football certainly has become the most popular of TV sports in this country, but it is consumed in a significantly different manner. NFL games are appointment television with only 16 regular season events per team. Baseball has 10 times the number of events and as a result of the greater volume of games, has exponentially more exposure, impressions, gross-ratings points, etc. These are all ways one may choose to quantify popularity. Again, they are very different

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sports, but what Americans have shown is that they continue to have a strong appetite for consuming competitive sports.

Speaking of other sports, let’s talk about soccer. You were a key player in the Fenway Sports Group’s acquisition of Liverpool FC. What drew you to this soccer team in the English Premier League?

I have been a soccer fan all my life and a Liverpool FC supporter since I was at UT 20 plus years ago. The Liverpool FC acquisition was a dream deal to work on, not only for the experience of being a part of a major sports acquisition but because it involved the sports club I am most passionate about, giving the opportunity a very personal feel.

What do you think of the recent news that Manchester City and the Yankees will be co-owners of an MLS team in New York? Do you think it could be a turning point for MLS soccer because of the organizations backing things?

I think Man City and the Yankees paying a $100 million franchise fee for the next MLS club shows how far the league has come in less than 20 years. People are quick to downgrade the quality of the MLS in comparison to the top European leagues. However, it is informative to remember that the English Football Association is 150 years old. All the top continental leagues have been playing for more than a century. The growth and support of soccer we are seeing in this country is an exciting development for those of us who love the game. The greater the revenues the MLS and their soon-to-be 20 clubs can earn, the stronger the product they can put on the field.

My kids love soccer and they play a lot of FIFA 2012 on their Wii video game console. Do you think video games are playing a role in familiarizing American kids with the game and with European soccer and its star players?

There is no question the rise of the high-end video game experience (as opposed to the low-end experience I had as a kid playing the Atari 2600 and ColecoVision) must be credited as a factor in the increased interest and knowledge domestically of the beautiful game played abroad. However, I believe the single largest variable in its increasing popularity is the commitment by the major U.S. TV networks in securing TV rights and showing games live. Both Fox and ESPN deserve a huge amount of credit for their investment in the production value and air time dedicated to showing the World Cup, European Cup and the Barclays English Premier League. I knew things had taken a significant turn for the better when, in 2008, ESPN showed all of the Euro ‘08 matches live, a first for a tournament that had no U.S. participation.

How did your major and Senior Fellows prepare you for your life after college?

My undergraduate experience taught me the value of negotiation, as the film and Senior Fellows programs had an incredibly diverse population with different points-of-view on many topics. As such, I learned to be able to communicate my opinion and interests in a manner that was hopefully diplomatic yet convincing. When there are only two films that can be made for end-of-semester projects and 10 students putting forth their own scripts, the art and skill of negotiation can be extremely important!

Did you have a favorite or most memorable Senior Fellows class or teacher?

Dr. Rod Hart, before he was Dean Hart, headed up the program then, and as the instructor of Symposium he had developed a very smooth manner of running a classroom. All of our reading was from packets as we studied media and current events in his class. I remember reading about the first Gulf War, an incredibly controversial and sensitive subject and the dialogue in the classroom was healthy, informative and respectful, even though there was rarely consensus among the students regarding the subject matter.

Can you recall any “Senior Fellows moments,” moments of deep insight, an epiphany?

I recall telling Matthew McConaughey, who was a classmate in the RTF and SF programs, what a slacker he was for missing so much class due to the auditions he would go on. Seeing him on the cover of Vanity Fair in 1996 was an epiphany that he knew what he was doing!

If you could offer any advice to our graduating seniors or our current students, what would it be?
Stick to your convictions. Do not adopt a point of view on a subject just because it is popular or will satisfy your professor’s personal proclivities. Be original, be yourself, be open to new ideas but don’t chase grades, chase ideas. Preferably good ideas. The world doesn’t need pleasers, it needs creators, originators and leaders of conviction and character.

Now for some Rangers questions. The Josh Hamilton trade to the Angels is viewed by many fans as an insult. How could he go to a division rival? Yet, another fan’s point-of-view might see it as intensifying a rivalry and making the games against the Angels even more interesting. How do you view it as the executive vice president?

The system we have in baseball allows for all players after a certain number of years to qualify for free agency. Josh was a free agent and he took the offer that he felt was best for him and his family. He earned the right to make that decision and I believe everyone should respect his choice. As for him going to a division rival, I think it ratchets up the intensity among the fans, and as we play them 19 times this year, that is good for baseball.

Have you seen a lot of growth in the Rangers’ fan base since they’ve become a top-tier team?

Yes, we’ve moved from a mid-level club in attendance and TV ratings to a top 5 MLB club in both areas. In two years our number of season tickets grew from 7,500 to 23,000 and our annual attendance grew from 2.5M to 3.4M. Our total attendance last season was the third highest in all of MLB. This is astronomical growth for such a short time window. It is a testament to the great fans we have in Texas and throughout the Southwest. I would posit that our weather makes for some of the most oppressive game-time conditions of any top-tier professional sports team in America. That our fans will come out and brave the heat in such sweltering conditions speaks to the resiliency, consistency and commitment of our supporters. I think our fan base, while not often talked about nationally, is one of the strongest in all of sports.

Many of our communication students would be interested to know how the Rangers compete for fans in the Texas sports market, where there’s the Astros, and good college baseball and football to compete with. That must be an interesting challenge.

Having spent my childhood summers in Texas and going to UT, I had a good appreciation for Texas’s reputation as a football state. However, we have a strong baseball tradition here as well, albeit more on the high school and college level than professional level. That is changing and changing rapidly. The Astros had a great run in the mid 2000s. The Rangers are certainly in a stronger position now than they have been historically. With our Fox Sports partner no longer holding the Astros rights, we have a TV network that is promoting us from the Panhandle to the Valley and the four adjoining states.

Here’s another communications-related question: When I was in my home state of Minnesota recently I went to a Minnesota Wild hockey game, which is a relatively new franchise. I found it fascinating to see how their marketing efforts were focused on inventing a mythology for the team to give fans this sense of loyalty and pride. They have a theme song and video, for example, which emphasize Minnesota as a hockey state and the Wild as this natural extension of that. How do the Rangers draw on their history or Texas history to deepen fans’ connection to the team?

As the Texas Rangers, we feel our name connotes a state- and even region-wide affinity. We are a franchise that is very proud of carrying the Texas name and we trade on the great history of Texas throughout our game-day presentation, from the two dozen Lone Star State flags flying above Rangers Ballpark, to the Texas Legends in-game race we hold several times a season (featuring oversize characters Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie, Nolan Ryan and Earl Campbell), to the running of the Texas Flags on the centerfield berm after every Rangers run scored. While the team has only been in Arlington for 41 years, we share a great love of our state with our fans and it is something that is evident throughout the Ballpark, every gameday and throughout the year.

Can you offer a World Series prediction for 2013?

My prediction is not worth the paper this is printed on, but I’d love to see the Rangers and the Reds in the fall classic. Both clubs have the rosters to go deep into the playoffs. We shall see.