Symposium Students Honored for Top Papers

Nathan Beddome (center), Reagan Opel (left) and Emma Chase (right) were honored at the spring reception for top papers in this year’s Symposium class.

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New Writing Program Takes Off

Senior Fellows professor Diana Dawson launches the Writing Support Program for Journalism to give students one-on-one writing help.

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The Engaging News Project

Senior Fellows instructor Natalie Stroud’s Engaging News Project helps make sense of political involvement online.

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Professor Gene Burd Recognized

Senior Fellows thanks legendary journalism professor for his legacy of creative teaching and learning.

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Graduating Senior Spotlights

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Symposium Students Honored for Top Papers

By Dave Junker

At the annual spring reception, advertising junior Nathan Beddome was awarded Top Symposium Paper 2013-14 for his final research paper, “An Unjust Metaphor.” The paper analyzed the central argument of “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,” Michelle Alexander’s influential 2012 book on the racial inequalities of the legal and prison systems in the United States. Nathan’s analysis stood out for its careful attention to Alexander’s comparison of the current system with Jim Crow segregation. While Alexander’s analogy brings to light alarming similarities, Nathan argues, it also minimizes important differences that call into question the validity of the comparison on the whole.

Public relations junior Emma Chase and political communications junior Reagan Opel were awarded honorable mention. Both symposium students wrote lucid critiques of “Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead,” the best seller by Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg.

The award, now in its third year, recognizes the top essays based on critical depth and compelling writing in Symposium each fall.

The Engaging News Project

By: Nick Hundley

Replacing the ubiquitous social media “Like” button with a “Respect” button on news websites would be better for democracy, according to a new report from the Engaging News Project, a research initiative led by Communication Studies Professor Talia Stroud, who taught a related class for Senior Fellows in 2012.

When given the option of a “Respect” button, more readers of online news click on comments from opposing political perspectives in comparison with the “Recommend” or “Like” buttons many sites have adopted from Facebook. The finding is part of a recent report that gives news organizations recommendations for engaging online audiences in ways that are beneficial for democracy and business.

“Given the political polarization facing our country, newsrooms should be thinking carefully about strategies to help citizens find common ground,” says Stroud. “This study shows that the word choices used for social media buttons are consequential and can encourage readers to engage with and show appreciation for opposing points of view — practices that are crucial to democracy.”

As part of the study, researchers examined how more than 700 readers of online news interacted with the comment sections following articles. The study participants saw identical comment sections, with one exception: one-third of participants saw a “Like” button next to each comment, one-third a “Recommend” button and one-third a “Respect” button.

Researchers found that some participants were up to 50 percent more willing to click on a “Respect” button in response to comments expressing opposing political perspectives.

Funded initially by the Niche News: The Politics of News Choice,” which studies “partisan selective exposure,” the phenomenon of people consuming news that aligns with their own political views. The Engaging News Project is a way to address some of the issues raised in the book.

Other findings from the Engaging News Project include:

- Reader comments in online stories become more civil when journalists participate in discussions.
- Online polls and quizzes should present new information to readers, rather than data on other readers’ opinions.
- Readers of online news spend more time with and learn more from “slider polls” compared with multiple-choice polls and information presented without interactive features.
- Hyperlink prompts have mixed results for increasing page views and engaging readers with opposing points of view.
You hear a lot of talk these days about the future of journalism. From the way we consume news to the way we produce and profit from it, the future is indeed a big question.

But rarely do you hear anyone say that journalists will no longer have to be good writers. That's because, no matter what the size of your screen or who is paying for what you read, view or interact with, the core skills of journalism will be the same tomorrow as they've always been.

According to Diana Dawson, lecturer in the School of Journalism and a regular Senior Fellows instructor, journalists are still society’s storytellers, and though they must now tell tales across multiple platforms, they must still do so with clarity, accuracy and good mechanics.

This is one reason Dawson launched the Writing Support Program for Journalism this year, with support from the Longhorn Center for Academic Excellence. Through one-on-one coaching sessions, group critiques and writing workshops, the program aims to give students a boost in their writing skills and the encouragement they need to succeed in a profession that will always require a special set of writing skills.

The program came from her realization that too many students were entering college without the writing competency needed to succeed as journalists. In addition, many of the students she would send to the Undergraduate Writing Center would return with rhetoric-based essays rather than news articles.

After hearing that funding was available for programs to help students graduate on time, Dawson enlisted the help of the School of Journalism to turn her idea into a reality. “I couldn't let go of the idea of a smaller writing center that focused on that different language spoken and written by journalists who need to communicate clearly and quickly to a broad audience,” she says.

Dawson now serves as the director and writing coach for the program. The others are journalism majors who have proven to be exceptional writers and believe strongly in working collaboratively to help their peers.

“Teaching writing is hard and writing is hard. But it's not impossible,” Dawson says. “If someone analyzes your problems and points out the steps to solving them -- and you’re willing to work hard -- you can do anything.”

The benefits of the program extend beyond journalism. Public relations students have also found it to be a valuable resource because they have to communicate with and through the news media. “I found that the best teaching in the newsroom happened on deadline as a reporter sat beside her editor and the two discussed improvements,” she says. For Dawson, the value of working one-on-one, and with students in smaller groups, is a product of her time working as a newspaper reporter.

“PR writers need to learn the same things journalists do,” says Senior Fellows Director Dave Junker, who also teaches classes in public relations writing. “As excellent as the Writing Center is, their instructors just don't have the right background to help our students. This program gives Moody students a cohort of writing coaches they can trust to give them sound feedback, to whom they’ll never have to explain why their first paragraph is only one sentence.”

“We're often looking over drafts of stories, pointing
According to most estimates, the walk is about two and a half miles. But the walker — journalism professor, and legendary Senior Fellows instructor, Gene Burd — does not have a GPS or an iPhone app to calculate the distance from his apartment on Barton Springs Road to the Belo Center for New Media.

On most days his walk is much longer than this, especially when it includes a trip down South Congress or a detour through the Capitol to look, listen and learn from the people he meets along the way.

To the great benefit of students, Burd has brought his natural curiosity to the Senior Fellows program. As its most prolific teacher, he has proposed six different courses and taught them a total of nine times. For

In Burd’s initial contract with the School of Journalism in 1975, Burd says he agreed to teach undergraduate courses on city and government reporting.

Looking back at his 42 years on the Forty Acres, Burd says, “I kept my promise.”

His classes have included “CARmunication: The Car as Communication and Culture,” and this semester’s “Disaster, Destruction and Disintegration in Communication.” The latter serves as an expansion of Burd’s dissertation at Northwestern University in 1963, where he studied the gentrification of Chicago’s northwest side, where he frequented Hull House, a settlement home for community education and social reform founded by Jane Adams.

All of his classes reflect his independent thinking and have inspired countless students to do the same. For his contributions to Senior Fellows through the years, and his creative approach to the “expansion of young minds,” Burd was presented with an award at the spring reception in April.
Burd has also been a huge financial contributor to journalism education. Over the past decade, he has donated $1,608,300 to education related to journalism and urban communication.

In 2002, Burd donated $28,300 to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AJEMC) to fund an annual $1,000 award for graduate students in Science Communication, Environmental Health and Risk studies. He helped to create the award in memory of Lori Eason, a graduate student who died in 2002. Burd had helped Eason with her studies and considered her a kindred spirit in the journalism department.

In 2007, he donated $500,000 to the Junior Statesman of America Foundation for the annual Institute on Media and Politics for high school students in Los Angeles. In 2009, he gave $30,000 to the Journalism Studies Division of the International Communication Association to award an annual prize for doctoral dissertations on urban communication. Throughout the last 10 years, Burd has endowed $1,025,000 to the Urban Communication Foundation—an organization for urban studies research that he helped start in 2004.

When asked where the money comes from, Burd says, “I didn’t win the lottery. I didn’t inherit it. I saved it.”

Burd’s frugality has helped fund his generosity. He has never owned a car, and he lives in an apartment furnished by gifts, hand-me-downs and things he has collected along the way.

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On the last day of his spring class, a group of six students and two professors, Kevin Robbins and Bill Minutaglio, walked with Burd on his route from home to campus to express their appreciation for his career and service. All the way up through that final walk to class, Burd kept his promise to teach students the finer points of urban communication.

He gave them a guided tour of his city, on foot, with time to stop and talk. Like his approach in the classroom, Burd had prepared notecards to make sure his students didn’t miss a thing.

Graduating Senior Spotlights

Allison Heinrich

From: Houston, Texas  
Major: Philosophy and Journalism, Government minor  
Favorite Class: “Is Communication (Science) Fiction?” with Joshua Gunn

Philosophy and journalism double major Allison Heinrich is putting her communication skills to the cause of social justice at a local level, working for the Texas Freedom Network, a civil liberties advocacy group, and running the election campaign of a candidate for Austin City Council.

Interviewed by Dave Junker

Dave: What are your immediate plans after graduating?

Allison: My immediate plans are to continue working for the Texas Freedom Network as an outreach intern, as they have asked me to stay on through their Texas Rising Summer Institute. I will also be working for Jimmy Flannigan who is running for Austin City Council District 6, which encompasses far northwest Houston.
Austin. I am super excited about this opportunity to help Jimmy get elected. I am grateful that he has put his trust in me to run his campaign and I am eternally thankful to the wide network of support that we both have in embarking on this journey together.

Do you have any long-term goals?

I told myself that I did not want to be too busy and as a result not be able to pitch in during the 2014 political cycle, which also led to the decision to stay in Texas as opposed to look for a D.C. job. I hope to work on a campaign this political cycle, work in the legislature next session, and then return to law school. My goal is to practice in an area that allows me to continue to advocate for social justice issues and stay in the public sector. I’d like to spend my life working on policy advocacy, either from the lobby/non-profit side, or as a politico, and maybe serve as an elected official.

What was your favorite Senior Fellows class?

This is a hard one. I thoroughly enjoyed every single Senior Fellows class I took. By the end of it I took Symposium, “Mass Media and Consumer Culture in the Lives of Children and Teens,” “Campaign Communication,” “Is Communication (Science) Fiction?,” and “American Voices.” Perhaps my favorite is, “Is Communication (Science) Fiction?,” simply because not only was it a great class and very well put together in terms of lecture, reading, and assignment, but because reading science fiction as a context for communication theory is something that was relatively out of my comfort zone. Right after registration listings were released, I showed the reading list to a group of friends and got a unanimous yes, so I’m glad that I deferred to their groupthink there.

Alex Judd

From: Houston, Texas
Major: Communication Studies - Corporate Communication
Favorite Class: “Creative Pathways to Entrepreneurship” with Tamara Bell

Backstories: After graduating, you’re planning on starting your own business around workshops that develop leadership skills in students, do you have any long-term goals in addition to this?

Alex: 1) Finish a full Ironman before 2016. 2) Develop my leadership development workshop so that it is consistent and established. 3) Love what I do. Do it really well. Never close myself to opportunity. 4) Finish 10 marathons by 25.

What was your favorite Senior Fellows class?

Tamara Bell’s “Creative Pathways to Entrepreneurship.” Tamara’s class was the motivation to make [a student leadership development business] something more than a dream. She gave me concrete tools to pursue this idea and encouraged me every step of the way.

You’re the drum major for the Longhorn band, correct? What does that mean?

I was the drum major of the Longhorn Band. I actually relinquished responsibility last week. The drum major is the primary student leader for the 400-person organization.

Do you see any merit in the idea of having a Senior Fellows marching band?

I’m not sure what a Senior Fellows marching band would look like. If it is something you are really interested in, I would approach Emma Chase as she will be in the organization next year.

Jordan Bustin

From: Dallas, Texas
Major: Advertising - TexasMedia sequence, Business Foundations Program
Favorite Class: “American Voices” with Dean Roderick P. Hart

Jordan Bustin is outgoing president of Texas Advertising Group and its student-led agency TAGlines. This summer she’ll begin working for legendary ad agency Leo Burnett in Chicago.

Interviewed by Dave Junker
Dave: Getting hired by Leo Burnett is a great accomplishment for a new grad. Do you have any long-term goals?

Jordan: I eventually want to go to business school to get my MBA to better prepare me to work in a leadership role in an advertising agency or a consulting firm.

What was your favorite Senior Fellows class?

Tough to choose just one, but I would say my favorite was Dean Hart’s “American Voices” class because it really made me think about our culture and what it truly means to be an American. It was also amazing to take a class taught by the dean himself!

How does a class like “American Voices” provide value to advertising majors like you?

The “American Voices” class was valuable to me as an advertising student because it forced me to think about our culture from an analytical and objective perspective. Understanding human behavior and consumer psychology is fundamental to the success of any advertising practitioner, so this class gave me the tools and the platform to critically examine the attitudes of Americans.

Most people know that TAG stands for Texas Advertising Group. But TAGlines might be less familiar. What is it and what is your role in it?

TAGlines, a subset of TAG (the Texas Advertising Group) is a student-run branding agency with the primary mission of providing students with a professional and educational agency experience that allows them to perform real world, decision-making roles. TAGlines, which has been around for about five years, is different from TAG. TAG is a student organization that helps students form a network of advertising professionals as well as a community of peers with similar interests in order to foster professional growth. I am the program director of TAGlines and the former president of TAG - clearly, I have a passion for advertising.

Christine To

From: Pearland, Texas
Major: Public Relations and Management Information Systems
Favorite Class: “Storytelling in Digital Times” with Tracy Dahlby

Double major
Christine To will hit the ground running after graduating this spring as a business analyst for Halliburton by day and a hobby baker by night.

Interviewed by Dave Junker

Dave: You’ve told me about your dream to someday start a nonprofit around baking. What’s your inspiration for this?

Christine: Cancer runs in my family. My grandmother, her sister, my dad, my stepdad, they all had it. Well, my dad and stepdad still do. It’s hard watching them going through treatment, and it’s even harder knowing that I can’t help them as much as I’d like to. One of the things my dad, the eternal foodie, struggles with is never being able to eat the things he wants. They’re either too processed or too full of “this” and not enough of “that.” To top it all off, you can’t trust anything to be clean enough to enter his body and make him worse off than before. As a person that lives to eat, I can’t even begin to comprehend how frustrating this must be. I think of all the other people just like my dad and stepdad and it makes me mad. I want to be able to do something for them, and that’s where the inspiration for everything comes from.

What do you like to bake?

I generally like to bake things that I get to make pretty once they come out of the oven. Cookies are a one-and-done kind of thing, so unless someone specifically requests them, I won’t go there. I recently bought a mandoline and let me tell you – it is a game changer. Think of it as a cheese grater but with only one really dangerous blade. It makes decorating with raw foods so
much easier. For mother’s day, I made this apple tart with roses made out of thinly shaved apple slices. The detail work is so fussy and time consuming, but the visual effect is just unparalleled. Sorry, I see I have lost track of the question. I like baking things that make your eyes, your soul, and your tummy happy.

You’re an excellent writer and Tracy Dahlby tells me you were one of the best storytellers in his class. Do you have any plans to exercise those talents in your work or personal life?

That’s so nice of him! I’m actually probably only a good storyteller because I love the sound of my own voice so much. In all seriousness, that was probably one of the most fun Senior Fellows classes I took. I’m such a linear person, but Tracy really pushed me out of that zone and helped me explore not only nonlinear storytelling, but also a more nonlinear approach to my own life. I like to think that I’ve already started using stories more because of Tracy and his class. I definitely used it this year in Tamara Bell’s entrepreneurship class, and I know that in terms of life in the long run, I’ll always work so that the story I leave behind will be the story that my kids will want to tell.

Did you have any Senior Fellows moment, i.e. moments of deep insight or change in perspective?

You mean every single day? Most recently, it happened in Tamara’s class. Well, several things happened. First, she started off the semester by saying that people don't need business degrees to start their own businesses. As a business major, that’s ridiculous. Complete and total blasphemy. Over the course of the past few months though, I’ve come to change my mind and see the error of my single-minded thinking, and now I’m kind of sort of maybe OK with admitting that maybe you don’t need a business degree to start your own business. Maybe. Another moment of clarity that recently occurred due to a combination of guest speaker words of wisdom and end-of-an-era reminiscent senior mentality: I’ve come to realize what a privilege it’s been to be a part of Senior Fellows. Never again will this kind of Socratic magic happen. In a lot of my classes, I pay to be lectured to and to listen to people talk over each other. That doesn’t happen in Senior Fellows. The professors actually listen and offer real insights and go above and beyond classroom teaching to inspire us to step outside our comfort zones and explore the world in new, eye-opening ways. The students actually offer up real insights that are inquisitive and thoughtful and discussion provoking. It’s incredible being in that kind of positive, energetic environment with all these brilliant people. I know I’ve been changed for the better.