Student filmmakers and actors work on the set of sitcom *Frat Baby*, whose pilot was written and produced last spring by Eugene Brye (C23) as part of the Department of Radio/Television/Film's annual sitcom sequence. From left: seniors Zai Dawodu and Brady Meldorff and junior Morgan Barber.
Dialogue

ON THE COVER  Two River Theater in Red Bank, New Jersey, celebrates its 30th season this fall. Its founder, the late Robert Rechnitz (CS4), appeared on many Northwestern stages.

Lasting legacy
Alumnus Bob Rechnitz’s early dream of a life immersed in the theatre panned out—and what he built continues to grow.

A sound history
A new digital archive aims to record and preserve the school’s recent history, one story at a time.

Student focus
Junior Mel McDaniel casts one eye on her clinical ambitions and the other on her community.

4 NEWS
A new Italian immersion program, research grants, awards, and more.

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Alumna Njoki McElroy shares her life and her stories.

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Northwestern pairs with an industry pro to expand access to sound production careers.

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23 SOUND OFF
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30 IN MEMORY
After three years of nonstop planning, implementing, traveling, healing, hiring, and fundraising, I have reached a point in my deanship where I can pause to take stock of our successes, challenges, and opportunities for growth.

Well, a pause on the fly. While it doesn’t feel like I’m slowing down much these days, I do find myself more reflective. It’s been long enough now that initiatives I kicked off in 2020 are starting to bear fruit. Our diversity, equity, and inclusion work is excelling; faculty hiring is off the charts; changes to our undergraduate curriculum have been celebrated; updates to our facilities are underway; and big dreams of expansion, collaboration, and innovation have become an imminent reality.

But where is it that we need to pivot? What needs reevaluating? Reimagining? Regenerating?

Much of this reflection is done through an open dialogue I have with our faculty, staff, and students, as well as in getting to know the vision and goals of University president Michael Schill. And now a new channel to our alumni is helping me get a historical perspective of our school, specifically in the last 50 years (see page 14). Stopping a moment to consider how far we’ve come with student experiences since the onset of the pandemic is a helpful exercise, as our associate dean for undergraduate programs and advising Lori Barchiff Baptista demonstrates on page 13. And lastly, I am privileged to reflect on how the leadership of our alumni community can help shape and inspire the next generation of artists and scholars, as Bob Rechnitz and his dream of a regional theatre have done (see page 8).

And on that note, my brief pause has expired and it’s time for me to get back to work! I look forward to 2024 and all the growth we have in store. Moreover, I look forward to each of you, our dear alumni and friends, continuing to reflect your bright light back on us.

E. Patrick Johnson
Dean, School of Communication
Annenberg University Professor
From Wildcat roots to comedy triumphs

“Northwestern was my long shot,” comedian, actor, and singer Ana Gasteyer (C89) told Dean E. Patrick Johnson. “It changed my life. It truly was the most instrumental thing that happened—when I look back, what an unbelievably perfect match it ended up being.”

Gasteyer was the final guest of the 2022–23 Dialogue with the Dean series, where she doubled down with laughs, Northwestern memories, and wise words for the aspiring creatives watching via Zoom and at the Wirtz Center’s Josephine Louis Theater. Having entered Northwestern as an aspiring music major, Gasteyer shifted gears when she realized she wasn’t cut out for it. Giving theatre a whirl, she dabbled in the Waa-Mu Show and then discovered the Mee-Ow Show. “[I found] my people!” she said. She majored in interdisciplinary studies in speech, and what followed was a memorable stretch on Saturday Night Live and a high-octane career in film, television, Broadway, televised Broadway, and music.

Given her successes, she had actionable advice to share: “When you’re working hard to make [something] perfect, you’re no longer your best witness. Just go out there and try. Know your lines, do your blocking, and have a good time.”

The quarterly Dialogue with the Dean series spotlights emerging and established communicators who are advancing their fields, challenging paradigms, and promoting social justice.

New symposium explores trauma in media

Using the lens of film, scholars explored at a May symposium how trauma has become a defining feature of contemporary storytelling. The “Trauma Tropes” panel featured Northwestern faculty members Robin Means Coleman, Miriam Petty, and Peter Locke along with Ana Antić of the University of Copenhagen.

Panelists shared how trauma and violence in horror, historical, and biopic films can help society acknowledge and reconcile similar experiences without retraumatizing audiences—but context always matters. Films can evoke fear, anxiety, and dread and even lead to negative political actions, depending on how their themes and subjects are handled. Imagery can become voyeuristic in ways that artists did not intend.

“Biopics are a displacement of trauma because we know as viewers that [the subject] has already overcome,” said Petty, professor of radio/television/film, so viewers can dissociate from the articulations of harm they witness.

“In the end, it is important to understand how communities deal with stressors when escaping media traumatization cycles,” said Antić. Filmmakers must learn and understand how diverse societies react to trauma so they can make ethical content that everyone can consume.

The inaugural “Media and Mental Health” symposium was sponsored by the Pritzker Pucker Studio Lab for the Promotion of Mental Health via Cinematic Arts, the Buffett Institute for Global Affairs, and the provost’s office.
Faculty wins at ICA

The School of Communication loomed large in Toronto at last spring’s International Communication Association (ICA) conference, where multiple faculty were honored. Noshir Contractor, the Jane S. and William J. White Professor of Behavioral Sciences, completed his yearlong association presidency and will remain part of the group’s executive committee until mid-2026.

The article “Taking a Break from News: A Five-Nation Study of News Avoidance in the Digital Era,” coauthored by professor Pablo Boczkowski in Digital Journalism, received the Bob Franklin Journal Article and Wolfgang Donsbach Outstanding Journal Article of the Year Awards, marking the first time a single article won both honors. Associate professor Moya Bailey’s book Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women’s Digital Resistance received the Outstanding Book Award from the ICA’s activism, communication, and social justice interest group. Additionally, dean E. Patrick Johnson was among 30 scholars named ICA fellows.

“I consider ICA my perennial intellectual home,” Contractor says. “It has played a key role in conveying the significance of communication scholarship—to the broader scholarly community, to policymakers, and to the public at large.”

Wildcat frenzy in Firenze

What might the 15th-century Italian Medici family teach 21st-century students about social networks and leadership theories? Turns out, molto.

The new Leading a Renaissance: Then and Now study abroad program, led by communication studies professors Leslie DeChurch and Noshir Contractor, brought 30 Northwestern students across numerous majors to Florence, Italy, last summer for a five-week, two-course look at leadership development using case studies and data sets of the powerful Medici banking and political dynasty during the Renaissance.

“Social networks have shaped society throughout history,” Contractor says, “and there is considerable scholarship that unequivocally demonstrates that the Renaissance was in large part enabled by crucial social networks among important protagonists in art, science, technology, politics, and trade. It therefore provides a powerful retrospective canvas to understand how networks can catalyze such an important movement in the history of society.”

Classes met twice a week, with other days filled with site visits (including a tour of the Uffizi) and excursions outside Florence (a trip to Siena was one). Florence and the Medici family are not only vital teachers of leadership but the companion tenets of optimism and perseverance, DeChurch says, and the era can model much about examining one’s own capacity, especially when cynicism prevails.

“What better place to do this than in Florence, where humanism was born and where civilization moved from the dark medieval era into the Renaissance, ushering in society as we know it now?” she says. “At the center of that renaissance were transformative leaders with big ideas and passion, who brought the whole world along with them to a better place. Northwestern undergraduates are exactly the kind of renaissance leaders that we need today.”

The program’s courses are regularly taught in Evanston, but the Florentine immersion provides a synergistic experience for students to be up close to the people and events of the Renaissance. DeChurch and Contractor plan to offer the program again next summer.

Junior human communication sciences major RAMA DARRAYAD received an Alumnae of Northwestern grant to fund her summer internship conducting research at Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago.

A NEW FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM at the Wirtz Center Chicago welcomed two students last summer from the Master’s in Leadership for Creative Enterprises program to help with marketing, development, and community engagement in the downtown space.

“I’m excited to strengthen my creative portfolio while learning more about the administrative side of the arts industry,” says Grace Johnson, left. Jasmine Roberson, right, wants to find ways “art may be used as a tool of education and community building.”
Dancing to a new beat

In reimagining the dance program's philosophy and curricular goals, director and associate professor Melissa Blanco Borelli has a message for students: don’t sweat the technique.

“Movement is the foundation for liberatory possibility, so we want our students to think critically and creatively through their bodies and engage in the interdisciplinary fields of study that are within dance,” she says. “Students get a holistic understanding of what the thinking, moving, breathing, signifying body does.”

The program's changes entail less focus on mastering a this-or-that style of dance and more on empowering students with agency to create, interpret, and explore the medium.

“It was time to update the program,” Blanco Borelli says. “Given the sociopolitical and cultural situation that we find ourselves in nationally and internationally, it’s thinking beyond the Euro-American value systems about knowledge and bodies to incorporate critical difference and see the ways in which our bodies are political and politicized in and through dance.”

Curricular changes reflect a commitment to pluralizing the approach to dance theory: more courses teaching Black and African-diasporic traditions, widening the definition of what classical dance is, and emphasizing dance histories (versus a singular history). And in accommodating the program’s large percentage of double majors, it will offer more flexibility and fewer requirements.

Blanco Borelli is exploring more performance opportunities and regular summer intensives, like the trial-run residency a handful of lucky students experienced last summer in Val Taleggio, Italy.

“The University values challenging, rigorous intellectual development, and it has a long track record of being a leader in the arts,” she says. “There are multiple ways dance can integrate with the disciplines at Northwestern and with what students have come to study. And this can only enrich their education.”

Alumni and shows they work on are among the 75TH EMMY AWARDS nominees: Kathryn Hahn (C95), actress in a limited series, Tiny Beautiful Things; Late Night with Seth Meyers (C96, H16) and The Late Show with Stephen Colbert (C86, H11), variety talk series; Sofya Levitsky-Weitz (GC15), writer and story editor, The Bear, and Liza Katzer (C08), coexecutive producer, Ted Lasso, both for best comedy; and Will Arbery (GC15), writer and coproducer, Succession, best drama.

DEAN E. PATRICK JOHNSON will receive the Kessler Award this fall from the Center for LGBTQ Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center. The award is given to a career scholar whose work has changed the field.

The Office of External Programs, Internships, and Career Services (EPICS) welcomes director LAURA MYERS. She joins EPICS from Northwestern Career Advancement, where she supported communication and music students.
Equitable AI for children’s development

Artificial intelligence has the capacity to help clinicians identify and diagnose speech disorders in children, but it’s only useful if the diagnostic systems and processes are built to be equitable. Northwestern received a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to improve the efficacy of automatic speech-recognition tools for a diverse population of kids. Marisha Speights, assistant professor in the Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, will lead the creation of a data repository of child language samples beyond the white, monolingual, socioeconomically advantaged standard that has informed both diagnosis and algorithm development.

“If we don’t do this work properly, we will embed the same biases that are in current clinical assessments into new technologies,” Speights says. “In the not-so-far future, there will be more AI and automatic speech-recognition tools in education and clinical practice, but they’re going to disenfranchise certain groups if we do not do this work with an equity lens.”

Over 18 months, Speights’s PedzSTAR lab will gather language samples from 400 four-year-olds to broaden the sample pool and help correct a pervasive, systemic misunderstanding and misdiagnosis problem affecting Black and brown children. Groups of 100 children each will represent Black, white, and bilingual English- and Spanish-speaking communities as well as those experiencing poverty. The data will inform a study to establish more accurate screening measures for different groups and be publicly available for other research and technology development.

“These projects interweave a focus of addressing equity with early childhood screening and detection,” Speights says. “Since undetected communication difficulties can have long-lasting academic and social impacts, we need to catch them early. Every moment counts when you’re young.”

Collaborative creativity

The Black Arts Consortium (BAC) collaborated last spring with the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago on Frictions, a suite of dialogues featuring performers Shamel Pitts, Will Rawls, and Barak adé Soleil in conversation with writer Jafari S. Allen, curator Taylor Renee Aldridge, and Chicagoans Justin Cooper, Ry Douglas, and James Senbeta. These robust conversations traversed through the tenderness and violence of black masculinities; issues of access and disability in the world of movement; the relationship among blackness, queerness, and improvisation in image-making; and much more.

BAC’s quarterly works-in-progress series continued with music scholar Mark Villegas’s spring talk on Filipino hip-hop. This academic year, award-winning poets Phillip B. Williams and Anthony Joseph, above (also an acclaimed sound artist), will focus programming on sound frequencies; Joseph will also be artist in residence at BAC’s downtown Chicago studio.

“It’s been so exciting to see how many meaningful partnerships BAC has forged over the past year and how much our programming has ranged across art practices from art history to dance, to poetics, and more,” says Kameryn Carter, assistant director of BAC, the School of Communication–led assemblage of Northwestern scholars and practitioners working in the Black arts. “This year saw us considering how the C in BAC could also mean collaboration, community, collectivity, cultivation.”

Dean Johnson launched the #SERIOUSPLAYCHALLENGE last year, in which students submitted 10-photo Instagram galleries or 30-second videos demonstrating how they employ “serious play” in their studies and cocurricular activities. Winner MARK PARK, left, a class of 2025 theatre major, won $450 for showcasing his digital design skills.

The Hugh Knowles Hearing Center awarded its 2023 prize to PETER NARINS, professor of integrative biology and physiology at UCLA. Narins specializes in the acoustic and seismic communication of animals and is a trained electrical engineer, auditory physiologist, and behavioral biologist. The prize honors outstanding contributions to research or clinical practice in the prevention, diagnosis, or treatment of hearing disorders; the center is operated by the communication sciences and disorders department.
A THEATRIC

The vibrant regional powerhouse Two River Theater in Red Bank, New Jersey, celebrates its 30th season this fall. Family, friends, and colleagues reflect on the life and legacy of founder Robert M. Rechnitz (C54).

BY KERRY TROTTER
AL LEGACY
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
The Company of Wine in the Wilderness, directed by Brandon J. Dirden; Dirden in A Raisin in the Sun; Helen Cespedes and Eden Espinosa in Two Sisters and a Piano; Maureen Silliman in Lives of Reason
OPPOSITE PAGE
Bob and Joan Rechnitz
Robert Rechnitz felt theatre was his destiny, recalls his wife, Joan, “even if it took him 60 years to get there.” Far from the southern Colorado town where the late Rechnitz was reared is that destiny’s brick-and-mortar manifestation: Two River Theater, a robust, thriving regional performing arts and teaching complex in Red Bank, New Jersey. Known for its ambitious interpretations of the classics, expansive definition of the canon, development of new works, community empowerment, and artist residencies, the theatre and its reputation rest at the intersection of its founders’ unwavering creative passion and a lifetime of hard work.

“Joan and Bob wanted to create a place for transformation but also a place that would be a haven—a courageous space where we artists and audiences could let down our guard and be free to see each other for who we really are,” says John Dias, artistic director of Two River from 2010 to 2022.

An anchor in the community and a destination for theatergoers, the organization is a towering testament to the idea that art drives change. Longtime Two River actor and director Brandon J. Dirden says, “I think Bob really believed that what he was doing with that theatre was not only essential for the community but also life-affirming.”

* * * 

While Pueblo, Colorado, wasn’t exactly a performing arts hub in the 1930s and ’40s, the young Bob Rechnitz knew how to get his theatre fix.

“He was the starry-eyed kid whose mom took him to shows in his hometown,” says Joan Rechnitz, Bob’s wife of 58 years. “He looked forward to summer family trips to Chicago for even more theatergoing.”

Bob’s passion lured him to the then School of Speech’s Cherub program for theatre, and he soon after matriculated at Northwestern, studying acting under legendary professor Alvina Krause. A tour of duty in the Korean War didn’t dampen his dreams, and he then found his way to performing with the Leslie Barefoot Players in Felixstowe, England.

Upon returning to the US, he enrolled in Lee Strasberg’s famed Actors Studio, studying alongside Marilyn Monroe and Marlon Brando. Yet a twin passion for education led him back to university, first for his master’s at Columbia and then for a PhD at the University of Colorado Boulder. He joined the English and American literature faculty at New Jersey’s Monmouth University, where 35 years later he retired as a full professor and was later named emeritus.

The stage, however, never silenced its siren call. “We took a leap in the early ’80s and produced a season at a summer theatre in Pennsylvania,” Joan says. “By then, there was no turning back. We started a summer institute at Monmouth and then in 1994 produced our first Two River season on the campus.”

Two River developed the worldwide cult favorite musical *Be More Chill*, which ran on Broadway, in Japan, and in London’s West End, as well as Obie Award–winning off-Broadway hits and countless other plays. The company was itinerant until 2005, when the Rechnitzes commissioned the two-theater space in Red Bank.

Maureen Silliman, a veteran actor and member of Two River’s board of trustees, started working with Bob in the early days. “He was very hands-on. He loved theatre almost more than anybody I’d ever met,” she recalls. “He was committed to the beauty and wonder of it and the idea that art helps us see who we are as human beings.”

A big part of Bob’s grand idea was situating the company in Monmouth County, defying the recommendations of an early viability study that flatly stated it was a bad idea. “Red Bank is a quirky little town that punches far above its weight,” Joan says. “We always secretly hoped that the presence of the theatre would spur more cultural development and add even more quirkiness to the town.”

And it really has. About 45 miles from midtown Manhattan, the theatre draws New York audiences while keeping an
identity and following all its own. Its corps of high-caliber talent is large and diverse, allowing actors and directors a break from New York intensity while still being close enough to home “if the boiler breaks,” says Justin Waldman, Two River’s artistic director.

“You can see plays here that you’ll see at Lincoln Center next week, and that’s really special—art and community that is local is really important,” he adds. “The values of our community are reflected in the ability to support and sustain arts institutions. In many ways it’s like a public utility; it’s just as important as water and power, how you fulfill a full life.”

Part of that full life, as Bob and Joan envisioned, hinged on a spirit of inclusion that was affirmed well before recent reckonings on racism and representation at theatres nationwide. You’ll see it in Two River’s commitment to producing August Wilson’s American Century cycle or in the creation of the Crossing Borders Festival, a celebration of works by Latino playwrights.

“It’s not just lip service to diversity,” says Dirden, who will be acting this season in Wilson’s Gem of the Ocean, the seventh in Wilson’s 10-play cycle. “We really put our money and resources where our mouth is in making sure we highlight diversity beyond [a certain] month. It helps us see our neighbors in our communities. It’s an aspirational idea Bob had, but it’s really coming to fruition.”

“We’re for everyone, and our community is getting bigger and bigger,” says Nora DeVeau-Rosen, the company’s managing director. “And that’s something we’ve done really well with the artists we’ve supported and the stories we’ve told, but also in a lot of our community partnerships. Something that we’ve had a long track record of, and something that [Waldman] and I are continuing to push that’s very important to our vision, is working with more and more community partners.”

Bob and Joan’s hunch—shared by the artists they nurtured—paid off. In 2019, while under the leadership of Dias and managing director Michael Hurst, Two River was named to USA Today’s list of ten great places to see a play and, as Dias says, “Jersey’s best-kept secret became a national treasure.”

You have to hold onto the dream that brought you there to begin with. And with Bob’s words and legacy, it always keeps us where we should be.”

MAUREEN SILLIMAN, veteran actor and member of Two River’s board of trustees

Bob Rechnitz—whose roles at Two River over the years included executive producer, artistic director, director, and playwright—died in 2019 at age 89, leaving behind Joan; children Adam, Joshua, and Emily (also a former Cherub); and grandchildren. The following year, Two River opened its 36,000-square-foot Center for New Work, Education, and Design, with rehearsal studios, artist labs, classrooms, and offices all adjacent to the existing theater complex. Yet even amid massive expansion, the fundamental tenets that guided its founding persist.

“You have to hold onto the dream that brought you there to begin with,” Silliman says. “And with Bob’s words and legacy, it always keeps us where we should be.”

Two River’s 30th season is the first under the new leadership of Waldman and DeVeau-Rosen and includes such classics as Hair, Kate Hamill’s reimagining of The Scarlet Letter, and an abridged version of Love’s Labour’s Lost. Also on deck is the world premiere of Tony Meneses’s comedy A Thousand Maids and Gem of the Ocean, directed by Delicia Turner Sonnenberg—the first woman to direct one of Wilson’s works at Two River.

Alongside shows, Two River annually sponsors dozens of events, arts and humanities programming, and workshops for thousands of students and community members. Bob Rechnitz’s destiny, as it turns out, delivers.

“He just thought theatre was a contact sport and those ideas needed to penetrate people,” Dirden says. “I remember his smile—the laugh—and that came from a really deep place of just sheer satisfaction of being engaged in this thing.”
Two international programs for students return after a pandemic-induced hiatus.

In London last March, 17 undergraduates majoring in radio/television/film, theatre, and communication studies participated in the Global Media and Communications Seminar (GMCS). In cooperation with the London School of Economics (LSE) department of media and communications, GMCS includes a course in Evanston that prepares students for an immersion trek to the British capital during spring break. Established by communication studies professor Dilip Gaonkar, the course is taught by a School of Communication faculty member and features a combination of lectures, workshops, demonstrations, and site visits that explore arts and media practices in a global city. Students learn from and engage with peers, alumni, professionals, and organizations in the arts and creative media industries.

London-based Bill Murray Comedy Club proprietor Dec Munro virtually joined an Evanston discussion of the British comedy circuit and later welcomed students to a London performance. Media executive and producer Lou Wallach (C91) considered global Netflix; Eliza Abramson (C16)—Netflix’s director of PR for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa—continued the conversation at LSE. Lou Stein (C72) invited our group to Soho’s Groucho Club, known as a “refuge for arts, literature, and media folk” in London’s West End. And Thomas Hoegh (C92) extended the hospitality and technologies of the Garden Studios film production complex, inviting students on set to demonstrate state-of-the-art production equipment. The course came full circle when Katie Russell (C20), a senior programming executive for the BBC, participated in an alumni panel discussion.

In the Czech Republic, 14 MFA directing and design students and 9 theatre and performance studies undergraduates participated in the spring Prague Quadrennial seminar, which allows students to attend one of the greatest theatre design conferences in the world and learn about the country’s unique theatrical history and culture. The seminar includes a course taught by professors Mary Zimmerman and Ana Kuzmanić in conjunction with the festival calendar. The course uses lectures, discussions, presentations, and project critiques to explore representations of Prague in literature, major Czech playwrights and designers, and the histories of the Czech National Theatre. The quadrennial itself is integral to course learning goals.

Stage directors SKUTR (Martin Kukučka and Lukáš Trpišovský) and costume designer Simona Rybakova joined the Evanston class via Zoom to prep students for the performance of A Bouquet, which the class later attended in Prague followed by a talkback with the artistic team.

At the festival, more than 70 countries exhibit thousands of professional performance designs and artifacts—set models, costumes, sketches, and performance fragments in pavilions that are often interactive works of art or performances themselves.

From the West End to Wenceslas Square

BY LORI BARCLIFF BAPTISTA
SONIC SNAPSHOTSHOTS

What do you get when a school of communicators delves into its storied past? StoryComm—a project for the ages.

BY BREAJNA DAWKINS
In the School of Communication dean’s office, one book in particular gets a lot of use: the *Northwestern University School of Speech: A History*, an oft-referenced road map of the school’s first 100 years. The white, clothbound tome was written by Lynn Miller Rein in 1981; it is scripture of sorts—historically comprehensive, rich with detail, and full of school lore.

Dean E. Patrick Johnson is picking up where it left off. Adapting to modern media and using the ethnographic methodologies of his research practice, Johnson’s StoryComm project collects the oral histories of school faculty, alumni, and students, in their own voices and on their own turf. The resulting audio will be available online and accessible to scholars visiting Northwestern University Libraries, but it may also be a podcast, a book, or both—or something yet to be dreamed up.

“That’s what this is all about—gathering new perspectives and points of view about life here in the school,” Johnson says. “We hope that many years from now, historians will access these files and be able to get a snapshot of what life, culture, classes, and the general mood were here on campus in 2023, 1985, or even 1955.”

Moreover, Johnson wants to ensure that the voices recorded and remembered are representative. Says postdoctoral scholar Bryan Markovitz, StoryComm project coordinator, “We can have an ever-growing record of life in the School of Communication, its evolution, and all the things that happen within its diverse realms.”

“Ironically, it was the social isolation of the pandemic that prompted Johnson’s idea—sitting down face-to-face and capturing enduring stories of ephemeral moments that could be shared in a way that is both truthful to one’s experience and inclusive of the many voices and minds that once called campus home. Collins notes that Johnson’s interest in the project is artistic, performance based, and scholarly—the triumvirate of his specialties.

“The goal isn’t to get an encyclopedia of somebody’s disciplinary expertise on record, nor is the goal to document changes or the history of the school and its departments,” Markovitz adds. “What makes these interviews interesting is that we get to see the narrators as whole people, through the thread of what connects their different characteristics to Northwestern.”

Once the pandemic eased, the project went full throttle. Johnson and Collins began conducting interviews in California, Texas, Minnesota, South Dakota, New York, and closer to Evanston. Such alumni as Don Weiner (C79), Julie Sandor (C90, GC01), and the late Rocky Wirtz (C75) and such former and emeritus faculty as David Downs, Virgil Johnson (GC67), and Njoki McElroy (GC70, GC73) sat down and let it all spill out. The interviews were recorded with professional microphones, and software was used to maximize sound quality. Over 80 interviews have been conducted so far, with many more to go.

And having the best interviewers in academe asking the questions certainly doesn’t hurt.

“It is really about listening for and sometimes helping to tease out stories,” Collins says. “It is about empathetic, supportive listening. [You must] allow yourself to follow instincts in the moment, as opposed to having everything preplanned.”

“Part of my academic life has been the study of storytelling—I work as a professional storyteller, and E. Patrick Johnson is a very skilled oral historian,” says Rives Collins, professor of theatre and one of the first faculty members Johnson asked to join his team. “This is the school at Northwestern that values spoken word, so it makes perfect sense for us to have an excellent oral history.”
Among those vital stories, of course, are many from students. Collins connected in 2021 with sound artist and radio/television/film professor of instruction Stephan Moore and developed a first-year seminar on the craft of capturing oral histories. The two have since introduced students to the ins and outs of storytelling, invited experts on oral histories to lecture, and detailed how to create sonically intriguing audio. By the end of the course, each student took part in creating an oral interview, both as interviewer and interviewee. The professors plan to re-interview these same students during their final year at Northwestern to see how they and their stories have evolved.

“The years that you’re in college are so formative,” Moore says. “To have these bookending conversations—to come back and reflect on where [they’re] going—will be very powerful and very different for each person who does it.”

Next steps include deciding what format the recorded interviews will take and creating a space for them to live.

“How do we come up with new ways of telling stories that allow us to fast-forward through the mundane while still retaining the flavor?” Moore asks. “There’s a beautiful simplicity with this kind of storytelling that dives into much greater kinds of richness.”

And because the project is in its infancy, with plans to continue in perpetuity, the sky is the limit.

“We hope to scale StoryComm and add to our team of interviewers as we continue to collect, categorize, and begin the interview archival process with University Libraries,” Johnson says. “We are building the foundation for something that will be important to our school’s legacy. It is an exciting prospect.”
Faculty and alumni perform “Shine” from *Fugitive Songs* at the June inauguration of Michael H. Schill, Northwestern’s 17th president. From left: on piano, associate professor of instruction Alexander Gemignani; on vocals, Lucy Godinez (C18), Elyse Yun (C23), Jared Son (C23), dean E. Patrick Johnson, and associate professor KO.
When I got to Northwestern, I thought I’d work on language with kids with autism and other learning disabilities,” says human communication sciences major Mel McDaniel. “Then I learned what a wide range there is in speech-language pathology, with all the different populations you can treat. So I thought it’d be interesting to work with people with aphasia. Now I’m working with kids with hearing loss, and I really like that too. A cousin of mine has cerebral palsy, and there are language interventions in that area. Most recently I’ve gotten interested in treatment for stuttering and dysphasia. I can go in all these different directions. I love the diversity of being able to treat different populations and getting to know a lot of different fields before settling on one.”

McDaniel was born in Reno and grew up in Albuquerque, where she was a peer helper for her high school’s suicide prevention program. “You reached out to your peers, because they’re more likely to talk to someone their own age than to a faculty or staff member,” she recalls. Through that initiative, she and other student volunteers teamed up with the school’s special needs program, where she discovered she loved working with children on the autism spectrum.

Although she still expects to pursue a clinical career, she’s currently enjoying her work in the Early Intervention Research Group. The lab is led by professor Megan Roberts, who received a grant to study early communication interventions in toddlers with hearing loss. “We have our intervention group and our control group,” McDaniel explains. “I’m the recorder, so I collect videos—hundreds for each kid. I’m blinded to their conditions so I can observe how they improve, whether or not they’ve received intervention.”

Outside her major, McDaniel is minor ing in psychology and pursuing a module in childhood communication. But even as her academic work pulls her in multiple directions, she finds time to devote to Northwestern’s Native American and Indigenous Student Alliance. A member of the Maidu tribe, she cochaired NAISA’s annual spring powwow and serves on its knowledge keepers committee, which works to preserve the group’s archives. She also honors her Mexican and Black heritage through work with other campus cultural groups, including the Black Mentorship Program and For Members Only.

McDaniel hopes to stay at Northwestern to pursue graduate study in speech-language pathology and eventually to work in a hospital setting. “I’m excited about where the future will take me,” she says, “even though I don’t know exactly where it’s going to be.”
An abiding love for storytelling has been a constant for Mary Beth Phillips Ainsley (C83, KSM92).

Alumna Mary Beth Phillips Ainsley’s career—spanning television news reporting and brand management—has been centered on good writing, and today it guides her support of School of Communication initiatives and student experiences.

“The timing and the precision of communicating as a storyteller—I learned those at the School of Communication,” she says. “And in whatever profession you’re in—and I can tell you I’ve had different professions—writing is key across everything.”

As she considered ways to support the school, Ainsley homed in on comedy, specifically in a course taught by playwright Eliza Bent, an assistant professor of instruction in the radio/television/film department. The 400-level class is part of the advanced sitcom sequence, which results in students creating 30-minute pilots. Faculty select a winner whose production is funded by the department in the spring.

“Comedy writing is hard,” Ainsley says. “Delivering a message in a humorous way without making an audience feel bad about itself requires skill, intention, and training.”

As an RTVF and political science double major, Ainsley gravitated toward opportunities that allowed her to make meaningful connections with audiences, including WNUR and the Daily Northwestern. Now, with that bird’s-eye view, she provides a unique value to the dean’s Board of Advisors and as chair of its strategic planning committee.

“We are in a big world now, with all types of people from all types of places,” she says. “The School of Communication guides students to be much more sophisticated as thinkers. As they begin college, they know what they want, but they’re not shutting the lid and locking it down. They’re able to put themselves in the box, keep the lid open, and do what they want but still have these other beautiful experiences.”

Dean E. Patrick Johnson sees Ainsley’s support of comedy writing as a complement to his own priorities.

“I want our students to experience the full breadth of the communication arts and sciences, and comedy writing is a perfect example of why this is important,” he says. “Good comedy comes from a place of highly informed truth telling. One must know a little bit about a lot of things, have a frame of historical and social reference, and embrace taking risks. I’m so grateful to Mary Beth for her support of these initiatives, but moreover for her deep understanding of and care about our school and its culture.”

Student-driven pilot The Band was part of the spring 2023 sitcom sequence.
Playwright, performer, and storyteller Njoki McElroy (GC70, GC73) has been the subject of a documentary, penned an autobiography, researched Black folklore traditions, founded the Cultural Workshop of North Chicago, and taught for 35 years in the Department of Performance Studies. She has filled each day since her retirement from Northwestern with creative work.

When did you first identify your passion and gift for storytelling?
My mother loved to tell the story about how I became a storyteller at the age of two. I would open the Sunday paper to what we called the funny pages and make up stories and entertain my parents based on what I saw. My mother was also a great storyteller. She had great believe-it-or-not stories that I never got tired of hearing. Spending summer evenings on my grandparents' porch listening to the neighbors' stories also sparked my interest. I guess I came by storytelling naturally.

How did your interest in storytelling lead you to academia?
I started my teaching career in the Chicago Public Schools. I later taught in a district outside Chicago where my children attended. They complained that Black students were not cast in roles in the school plays and they were not being taught Black history. In the mid-1960s, I founded the Cultural Workshop of North Chicago in our home. We exposed children in the neighborhood to the arts and started a touring production entitled Black Journey. Richard Willis, a Northwestern theatre professor, was in the audience at one of our productions. He invited me to participate in his summer directing class and later supported me in my graduate studies in what was then the Department of Interpretation (now Performance Studies). I received my MA and PhD from that department.

Why is it important to share the lessons of folktales, particularly in African American traditions?
During my doctoral studies, I was awarded a Ford Foundation fellowship; I collected African folktales and interviewed influential artists like renowned playwright Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. I realized the importance to African people of sharing folktales: forbidden to read or write, enslaved people used stories to preserve history and culture. In the African American tradition, sharing folktales provides an opportunity for communal participation, the expression of feelings about lived experiences, and the internalization of moral lessons. Sharing folktales is important for parents to pass along knowledge and appropriate behavior. With humor being an integral part of folktales, children perceive the messages embedded in the stories in a fun and accepting way.
Amplifying voices

Three faculty members explained their research spotlighting populations that are misunderstood, misrepresented, or missed entirely. At the cross-disciplinary CommConnections symposium series last spring, they talked about their work through the respective lenses of science, social science, and art and advocacy.

On empowerment in communication
“As a society, there is hesitation around talking about gender-based violence. We either don't hear about stories, don't see representation in different cultural forms, or are just not prepared to hear stories from survivors.

“So how do you disrupt that? That’s what these advocates and artists are doing. They're thinking about how we create a public space—first for hearing these other voices and stories, and then allowing that to animate further action toward change. That's what’s so powerful about art. There's something about the multimodal ways we witness stories and the ways they can then animate and move people toward action.”

Elizabeth Son, theatre, author of Embodied Reckonings: “Comfort Women,” Performance, and Transpacific Redress

On hope
“I think there’s something really powerful about people creating what they want to see. I see a lot of resonance there in terms of the art that people create themselves to address and advocate for issues in their communities that aren't being discussed in mainstream media outlets.

“I just talked with Alice Wong, a disability rights activist, about making room for other voices. What does it sound like? What constitutes normal, in terms of who we get to hear?

“So I think about that as well, in terms of my own work, making room for diversity. Where do people get their representation and the room and the freedom to exist in the ways they do?”

Moya Bailey, communication studies, author of Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance

On health
“The populations I work with do not always have access to care, and swallowing is not a glitzy disorder. People don’t want to hear about people who have swallowing problems—where you have actual deformity, potentially of your face, and changes to your voice and the way you look.

“So advocacy is a big part of what I do, because you become an advocate for patients. They’re survivors of disease. These are young people who you’d never think would be dealing with this. And then there are people who are aging and live with chronic conditions that they try and cover up. They don’t want people to know. So social isolation is a huge problem. If you sound funny or if you are unable to eat without having to wipe your mouth every time you swallow, you’re not going to want to be in a group, and that leads to depression.

“We're all human, and we all are vulnerable to this really tough problem. So advocacy is important.”

Bonnie Martin-Harris, communication sciences and disorders, leading researcher in dysphagia
New Faces for 2023–24

The School of Communication welcomes a substantial cohort of 22 new faculty that includes accomplished artists, leading-edge scholars, and advocacy-minded clinicians. It is the largest number of new hires in recent history.

Among them is Bharath Chandrasekaran, the Ralph and Jean Sundin Endowed Professor in Communication Sciences and Disorders and chair of the department, who joins Northwestern from the University of Pittsburgh. His interdisciplinary approach to research uses neuroscience to investigate the computations, maturational constraints, and plasticity underlying auditory signals like speech and music.

“This opportunity to lead such a prestigious department fills me with immense gratitude and anticipation,” he says.

In addition, Tracey Scott Wilson, a prolific producer and writer for the stage and television, holds the inaugural Barbara Berlanti Professorship in Writing for the Screen and Stage.

The new cohort also includes:

- **Alana Arenas** (assistant professor of instruction, theatre)
- **Caitlin Body** (assistant professor of instruction, theatre)
- **Stephanie Boron** (assistant clinical professor, communication sciences and disorders)
- **Abby Bowman** (assistant clinical professor, CSD)
- **Ignacio Cruz** (assistant professor, communication studies)
- **Rayvon Fouché** (professor, communication studies; Medill)
- **Melissa Gunlogson** (assistant clinical professor, CSD)
- **Heather Hendershot** (visiting professor, communication studies)
- **Felicia Henderson** (associate professor, radio/television/film)
- **Sarah Irvine** (assistant clinical professor, CSD)
- **Calvin Liang** (Mancosh Fellow, communication studies)
- **Yingdan Lu** (assistant professor, communication studies)
- **Elisha Magnifico** (assistant clinical professor, CSD)
- **Chrissy Martin** (assistant professor of instruction, theatre)
- **Paloma Martinez** (assistant professor, RTVF)
- **John Mossman** (assistant professor of instruction, RTVF)
- **Alyssa Motter** (visiting assistant professor of instruction, theatre)
- **Alexa Stewart** (assistant clinical professor, CSD)
- **Sharra Vostra** (professor of instruction, communication studies)
- **Sulafa Zidani** (assistant professor, communication studies)

Masi Asare (MFA, New York University) headlined a June showcase of her original songs at Manhattan’s 54 Below cabaret. She was joined by performers and musicians associated with famed Broadway musicals, including Nathan Tysen, with whom she wrote lyrics for Paradise Square; the musical earned them both a Tony Award nomination. Asare also wrote the lyrics for transnational musical Monsoon Wedding, which played off-Broadway earlier this year.

A new book by Thomas J. (TJ) Billard (PhD, University of Southern California), Voices for Transgender Equality: Making Change in the Networked Public Sphere, is out this fall, part of the Oxford University Press Journalism and Political Communication Unbound series.

Thomas Bradshaw (MFA, Brooklyn College) received an Alumnae of Northwestern University grant to bring Pulitzer Prize finalist and playwright Will Arbery (GC15) to campus for a weeklong residency and the production of his acclaimed play Heroes of the Fourth Turning. Both will showcase the School of Communication’s writing programs and connect undergraduates with an accomplished playwright whose work has a political and cultural prescience roundly celebrated by critics. Bradshaw’s Chekhov adaptation The Seagull/ Woodstock, NY, ran last winter in New York City and costarred Parker Posey and Hari Nef.

Kent Brooks (BA, University of North Carolina) presented an original piece at last summer’s Gospel Music Workshop of America, the world’s largest aggregation of gospel music professionals, academics, amateurs, and enthusiasts. Emmanuel was one of 90 songs selected among 600 submissions considered for performance across five divisions. Brooks’s song was performed in the new-music division.
Barbara Butts (BA, Mars Hill College) will be a leader of this fall’s interuniversity Arts Leadership Summit and corresponding Evaluating and Innovating Creative Spaces class, a collaboration between Northwestern and DePaul University in partnership with the League of Chicago Theatres. Both are designed to devise solutions to problems in the theatre industry, challenge students to delve into industry issues and opportunities while considering antiracism and diversity, equity, and inclusion work, audience development, sustainability, and more.

Joshua Chambers-Letson (PhD, New York University) with Lakshmi Padmanabhan (PhD, Brown University) hosted last spring’s two-day Lambert Family Communication Conference in Evanston, established by the Lambert Family Foundation to highlight innovative topics in the field. Object Relations: Performance and Race at the Edge of Theory brought together scholars and artists in performance studies and media studies with work that centers race and racialization as forms of material and libidinal relation. A keynote lecture by Nao Bustamante of the University of Southern California’s Roski School of Art and Design capped the conference, sponsored by the Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities, the Council for Race and Ethnic Studies, and the Cluster in Critical Studies in Theatre and Performance.

Ignacio F. Cruz (PhD, University of Southern California) received a Northwestern Race and Justice Collaborative Seed Fund grant. With faculty from the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, he will lead the project Amplifying Justice: Community Oral Histories and Racialized Surveillance in Chicago.

Alexander Gemignani (BFA, University of Michigan) played the role of Janusz on six episodes in the fifth and final season of the Emmy Award–winning comedy The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel.

Nadine George-Graves (PhD, Northwestern) received the National Dance Education Organization’s 2023 award for outstanding leadership in higher education, recognizing excellence in creating programs, curriculum, or projects that have a significant impact on the field of dance education.

Cindy Gold (MFA, Professional Actor Training Program, Alabama Shakespeare Festival) performed in last summer’s adaptation of Mozart’s Idomeneo at the Aspen Music Festival. This fall she performed in Theatre Wit’s Household Spirits, written by Mia McCollough (C92), and will appear this winter in Aurora Real de Asua’s Wipeout at Rivendell Theatre. Next spring, she will retire from Northwestern after 27 years of service.

Stacy Kaplan (PhD, Northwestern) received the competitive Certificate of Recognition for Special Contributions in Higher Education of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

Ana Kuzmanić (MFA, Northwestern) and Mary Zimmerman (PhD, Northwestern) resumed their involvement in the Prague Quadrennial international juried exhibition of theatrical art (see page 13.) The pair will collaborate again—as costume designer and director, respectively—on Florencia en el Amazonas, opening at the Metropolitan Opera this fall.

Shana Cooper (MFA, Yale School of Drama) led a workshop in transforming artistic practices at the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space last June.
Marwan Kraidy (PhD, Ohio University) was elected chair of the fellows of the International Communication Association. He was appointed secretary of the board of the American Council for Learned Societies, of which he has been a member since 2017, as well as to the strategic council of the Institut d’Études Scéniques Audiovisuelles et Cinématoographiques at Beirut’s Université Saint Joseph. His Arab information and media studies project launched with a Theory and Method Institute on Arab Digitalities for emerging scholars in Beirut. Kraidy coauthored with Celeste Wagner the article “Watching Turkish Television Drama in Argentina: Entangled Proximities and Resigned Agency in Global Media Flows” in the Journal of Communication. He also published the book chapter “Hybridity as Dazzlement: Rethinking Fusion through Joseph Tonda’s Postcolonial Imperialism” in The Handbook of Media and Culture in the Middle East and the foreword to Resisting James Bond: Power and Privilege in the Daniel Craig Era.

Susan Manning (PhD, Columbia University) has written Dancing on the Fault Lines of History: Selected Essays, scheduled for publication by the University of Michigan Press in 2024. Jessica Friedman (GC23) served as editorial assistant on the volume. Manning is coediting with Lizzie Leopold (GC17) Dancing on the Third Coast: Chicago Dance Histories, a two-volume anthology featuring the research of school faculty and alumni including Friedman, Megan Geigner (GC15), Rebecca Rossen (GC05), theatre professor emerita Susan Lee, and performance studies faculty Nadine George-Graves and Shayna Silverstein.

Bonnie Martin-Harris (PhD, Northwestern) received the Dysphagia Research Society’s esteemed Gold Medal Award, recognizing unusually distinguished service and contributions to the organization.

Erik Nisbet (PhD, Cornell University) and Olga Kamenchuk (PhD, Utah State University) wrote about online dissent in Russia in the article “Signaling Silence: Affective and Cognitive Responses to Risks of Online Activism about Corruption in an Authoritarian Context” for the journal New Media & Society. Nisbet coauthored “Social Media Sentiment about COVID-19 Vaccination Predicts Vaccine Acceptance among Peruvian Social Media Users the Next Day” in the journal Vaccines as well as an article about circumventing online censorship in Iran in Social Media & Society. He was also interviewed by a number of news outlets about Donald Trump’s indictments.

Miriam Petty (PhD, Emory University), at last summer’s “A String of Pearls: The Films of Camille Billups and James Hatch” at Chicago’s Gene Siskel Film Center, participated in a talkback alongside Lakshmi Padmanabhan (PhD, Brown University) and Naeema Torres (GC19).

Dassia Posner (PhD, Tufts University) received the Fellowship of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, one of the group’s highest honors. Roberts was nominated in the categories of clinical education and academic teaching in

Marcus Doshi (MFA, Yale School of Drama) and Eric Southern (MFA, New York University) each designed the lighting for two of the four shows in the acclaimed Opera of St. Louis’s 2022–23 festival season, which included both classics and bold contemporary works. The featured productions were Joplin’s Treemonisha (Doshi), Puccini’s Tosca (Southern), Mozart’s Così fan tutte (Doshi), and Carlisle Floyd’s Susannah (Southern). In addition, Andrew Boyce (MFA, Yale School of Drama) designed the Susannah set.
Ozge Samanci (PhD, Georgia Institute of Technology) received the 2023 Illinois Arts Council Agency's Artist Fellowship Award for Media Arts, honoring exceptional artists who have created a substantial body of work. Samanci’s data-driven virtual reality installation VastWaste will be shown this fall at the Museum of Tomorrow in Rio de Janeiro; it was featured last summer at Sao Paolo’s FILE: Electronic Language International Festival.

Jason Tait Sanchez (PhD, Kent State University) delivered last spring’s Pepper Lecture, which resumed after a three-year pandemic hiatus. “Factors That Regulate Neuronal Properties in the Developing Avian Auditory Brainstem” explored how the auditory development of chickens in ovo follows patterns similar to humans in utero and how that plays an integral part in hearing research. Sanchez’s Central Auditory Physiology Lab is examining ways to genetically modify chickens in the hope of helping scientists eventually treat hearing disorders and deficits in humans. The annual Pepper Lecture is made possible by a generous donation from alumni Roxelyn and the late Richard Pepper, who endowed the communication sciences and disorders department in 2005.

Billy Siegenfeld (MA, New York University) premiered Jump Rhythm’s production of his new two-character play with music and dance, Fortitude and Gentleness, at the Mark O’Donnell Theater in New York. He supplied the choreography and musical arrangements for the show and performed the role of Actor. Jump Rhythm’s associate artistic director Jordan Batta (C04) performed the role of Actress, Tucker DeGregory (C20) directed, Taris Hoffman (C20) assistant directed, and Jay Towns (C22) supplied photos and video. Wirtz Center lighting and sound supervisor Peter Anderson designed the sound and lights. A monthlong run of the show in Chicago or New York and a tour are planned.

1960s
Terry Rose (C64) was elected in 2022 to a 19th term on the Kenosha County Board of Support in Wisconsin. He is an attorney with Rose and Rose Attorneys of Kenosha.

1970s
Terry Bayerd (C71) was nominated by the California Water Service Group board to the role of lead independent director.

1980s
Scott Olson (WCAS80, GC81, GC85) was appointed chancellor of Minnesota State University.

You Hurt My Feelings, starring Julia Louis-Dreyfus (C83, H07), was released in May after...
premiering at the Sundance Film Festival last winter. Her podcast, *Wiser than Me*, debuted last spring.

Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Louisiana welcomed Ellis Arjmand (GC84, GC86, GC96) to its board of directors.

Jennifer Regen Bisbee (C84) was elected to the Public Relations Society of America’s College of Fellows, representing professionals and educators who have made significant impacts on the public relations and communications professions. Selection to the college is one of the highest recognitions in the profession and, for many, the pinnacle of a distinguished career.

Susan Messing (C85) and John Lehr (C88) toured six cities last spring with their improv comedy show *Bring It*. Messing and Lehr have been performing for 30 years, but this was their first tour together. Messing, a Waa-Mu alum, performed with Second City and IO troups, is a founding member of Annoyance Theatre, and currently lectures at the University of Chicago. Lehr, who participated in the Mee-Ow Show, has appeared in numerous television series and created improvised shows for TBS, Sony, and Hulu. He is one of the original actors to play the caveman in Geico insurance commercials.

Susan Booth (GC87) was named artistic director of the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. She is the first woman to lead the organization.

Kyle Krebs (C87) was named general manager of FOX13 in Memphis.

Joliet Catholic Academy named Anita Lane (C87, FSM94) to its 2023 business and industry Hall of Champions.

Craig Shemin (C88) has written *Sam and Friends: The Story of Jim Henson’s First Television Show*. With a foreword by renowned puppeteer and director Frank Oz, the book is the culmination of years of research about the early days of the Muppets. Shemin began his association with the Jim Henson Company while a Northwestern student, working as a summer intern in the company’s New York office in 1987. He joined the company upon graduation and eventually became a staff writer. After leaving in 2002, he continued to occasionally work with the Muppets, writing 2014’s *The Muppets Character Encyclopedia* as well as for Jim Henson tribute concerts at Carnegie Hall (2012) and the Michael Fowler Centre in New Zealand (2018). He is currently president of the Jim Henson Legacy, a nonprofit founded by Jim Henson’s late wife, Jane, to preserve and celebrate his life and work.

Tricia Rothschild (C89) was appointed to the board of Rock the Street, Wall Street, a nonprofit organization that brings the world of math and finance to diverse high school girls.

1990s

President Joe Biden announced his intent to appoint Amy Gilman (C91) to the the National Museum and Library Services Board.

Sam Tepper (C92, GC96, GC04) joined consulting firm Korn Ferry as a senior client partner.

Matthew Friedman (C93) was invited to join the film editing branch of the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences. He won the American Cinema Editors Eddie Award for best edited comedic or musical feature for his work on *Palm Springs*, starring Andy Samberg and Cristin Milioti.

Jason Levine (C94) was appointed executive director of the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Byung Cho (C95) was elected to the Redondo Beach (California) Unified School District board.

Kathryn Hahn (C95) will star in *Agatha: Coven of Chaos*, a spinoff of *WandaVision*, to be produced by Marvel Studios for Disney+.

Ellen Jackowski (C95) is the new chief sustainability officer for Mastercard.

Brent Berger (C96) was named Blue Book Services’ new chief financial officer.

Former federal prosecutor and trial lawyer Steven Block (C96, PSL99) has joined Holland & Knight’s litigation section as a partner.
Stephanie March (C96) was appointed to Gotham Film & Media Institute’s board of directors.

Kamilah Williams Kemp (C96) was promoted to executive vice president and chief insurance officer at Northwestern Mutual; she was previously vice president of risk products.

Kim Rush (GC98) was promoted to senior vice president and chief operating officer of NW Natural Gas Company.

Illinois governor JB Pritzker announced that Ava George Stewart (GC98) will serve as a member of the Guardianship and Advocacy Commission.

Michael Neuman (GC99) is the first chief information security officer of Backstop Solutions Group.

April Perry (C00, PSL03) was nominated to be Chicago’s first female US attorney.

Micah Alpern (C01) was named to the Consulting Report's list of the top 25 human capital consultants and leaders for 2023.

Krista Johnson (GC01, GC09, GC10) was an honoree at the Memphis Business Journal’s annual Super Women in Business event.

Derrick Thompson (C01) was named to the Crain’s Chicago Business 2022 notable Black leaders and executives list.

Research and data analytics consultancy Mathematica named Noland Joiner (GC02) as vice president and chief technology officer of healthcare.

Anedra Kerr (GC03) was appointed vice president of development for Jeremiah Program, a nonprofit aimed at disrupting generational poverty.

Roshni Nadar Malhotra (C03, KSM08), chairperson of HCL Technologies, was featured in the Financial Express. She was named India’s richest woman for the second year in a row.

Amy Christensen (C04) was appointed vice chairperson of the Healthcare Private Equity Association nonprofit trade group.

Adrienne Hughes (C04, KSM07) was named to the Crain’s Chicago Business 2022 notable Black leaders and executives list.

Lindsay Lawrence (C04) joined the Clearinghouse Community Development Financial Institution board of directors.

Luyan Li (GC04) joined the board of directors of Chinese Mutual Aid Association, an Asian American social services agency serving immigrants and refugees in metro Chicago.

Actor Greta Lee (C05) was highlighted in the New York Times for her recent work in Russian Doll, High Maintenance, Girls, and Past Lives.

John Pappas (C07) produced and directed the two-part docuseries Sin Eater: The Crimes of Anthony Pellicano. Part of the New York Times Presents series and available on FX and Hulu, the series looks back at Hollywood’s history of bad behavior and the Chicago private investigator paid to keep it quiet.

2010s

Farhan Arshad (GC10) is coexecutive producer for the Frasier reboot. He served as a supervising producer on season three of Upload and on The Pradeeps of Pittsburgh, a series that will premiere on Freevee. His pilot The Peters is in development at Bell Media and Cineflix, with comedian Russell Peters attached to star. Arshad was also admitted into the Sony Pictures Showrunner Training Program.

80s

Matthew Friedman

Greta Lee

John Pappas

Farhan Arshad

The Seafood Nutrition Partnership added Victoria Gutierrez (C07) to its board of directors for 2023–24.

Kathy Jeffery (GC07) joined health technology company Element Science as its first chief people officer.

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Elodie Edjang (C18) was selected as a documentary fellowship finalist by Chicago nonprofit Sisters in Cinema for her film *Queer Christians*.

Devon Kerr (C18) received the 2022–23 Humanitas New Voices Fellowship for emerging screenwriters.

Jess Zeidman (C18) wrote the feature film *Tahara*, released in theatres in June. The film has a 97 percent Tomatometer score on Rotten Tomatoes.

Creative Arts Agency promoted Emmett Gordon (C19) to sports property sales executive, working with such clients as the LA Clippers, Formula 1, and Riot Games.

2020s

Misty De Berry (GC20) was hired as an assistant professor of performance studies at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University.

Payal Patel (GC20) is interim communications and marketing director at the American Library Association.

Nolan Robinson (C20) and Marc Blakeman (WCAS93) will coproduce a Broadway revival of *The Wiz*, set for April 2024. Their new partnership is Blakeman-Robinson ENTMT.

The College of Fine Arts at the University of Texas at Austin appointed David Arevalo (GC22) as assistant professor in the theatre and dance department.

Makda Fessahaye (C11) was appointed associate vice chancellor and chief human resources officer at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.

Danielle Kleene (C11) was hired as a consultant at Vantage Leadership Consulting.

Jaimie Farris (C12) was inducted into the 2022 class of the Connecticut Field Hockey Hall of Fame.

Kevin McCloud (GC13) has been named wealth advisory vice president at First Business Bank.

Reality Check, a play by Nayna Agrawal (GC15), was one of 30 finalists for the New Works Festival and a semifinalist at Left Edge Theatre’s 2023 festival and New York’s Normal Ave NAPSeries festival of new plays.

POTUS, a play written by Selina Fillinger (C16), opens at Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre this fall after its run on Broadway.
Famed theatrical songwriter **Sheldon Harnick** (BSM49, H18), colyricist of *Fiddler on the Roof* and longtime friend of the School of Communication, died June 23 at age 99.

Harnick grew up playing violin in Chicago and attended Northwestern with help from the G.I. Bill because, he said, “Northwestern had one of the most elegant student revues in the Chicago area—the Waa-Mu Show.”

Known for his work on many Tony Award–winning musicals, Harnick won the 2009 Oscar Hammerstein Award for Lifetime Achievement in Musical Theatre, the 2016 Drama League Award for Distinguished Achievement in Musical Theatre, and a special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2016. His work was notable for its wit, warmth, and playful profundity. “His genius as a lyricist and composer was only matched by his kindness and love of theatre. He was a giant of the American music theatre,” says Dominic Missimi, professor emeritus of theatre and founder of Northwestern’s music theatre program.

**Newton N. Minow** (C49, PSL50, H65), Northwestern life trustee and Walter Annenberg Professor emeritus, died May 6 at age 97. Born in Milwaukee, Minow majored in speech and political science at Northwestern. He was also editor in chief of the *Illinois Law Review* at Northwestern.

Minow served as a clerk for US Supreme Court chief justice Fred M. Vinson and later as assistant counsel to Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson. It was Minow who first suggested televised presidential debates, in a memo to Stevenson in 1955. In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy appointed Minow chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, where he drafted legislation that expanded the broadcast spectrum and promoted the implementation of communication satellite technology. President Barack Obama awarded Minow the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2016.

Minow was predeceased by his wife, Josephine “Jo” Baskin Minow (WCAS48); the Newton N. Minow Endowed Fund was established in their honor. He is survived by his children, Martha (H12), Nell, and Mary.

**Rev. Steve Pieters** (C74) died July 8 at age 70. Born in Andover, Massachusetts, Pieters majored in theatre at Northwestern and later graduated from Chicago’s McCormick Theological Seminary.

In 1984, Pieters was diagnosed with AIDS, Kaposi sarcoma, and stage 4 lymphoma. After his diagnoses, he became director of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Community Church’s AIDS ministry. He made history in 1985 when his cancer went into remission; the same year, he appeared on televangelist Tammy Faye Bakker’s *PTL Club* in an interview that has since been depicted in the film *The Eyes of Tammy Faye*.

Pieters worked as an activist and minister for the rest of his life, uplifting people around the world. This past spring, Northwestern University Archives acquired Pieters’s personal papers, ensuring that the details of his inspiring life will be accessible to future audiences.

**W. Rockwell “Rocky” Wirtz** (C75), chairman of the Chicago Blackhawks and a Northwestern University trustee, died July 25 at age 70. Wirtz attended Boston University and then transferred to Northwestern, where he majored in communication studies, joined the Phi Delta Theta fraternity, and played club rugby. He graduated early and then moved to New York to start his career.

In addition to his work with the Blackhawks, who won three Stanley Cup championships on his watch, Wirtz was president of Wirtz Corporation, one of the largest family-owned businesses in the US; cochairman of Breakthru Beverage Group, a national distributor of luxury and premium wine, spirits, and beers; and cochairman of Chicago’s United Center.

With gifts nearing $13 million, Wirtz and his wife, Marilyn, are the School of Communication’s most significant donors to date. Their gifts have underwritten expansive renovations on both the Chicago and Evanston campuses, including the theatrical complex that now bears the name of his grandmother, 1924 alumna Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz. Wirtz is survived by his wife; children Danny, Kendall, and Hillary; stepdaughter Elizabeth; and six grandchildren.
A new collaboration aims to diversify music production.

The professional world of music production and sound engineering sits beneath a vast glass ceiling, with men outnumbering women in the recording studio by a margin of 19 to 1. A new partnership between a titan of the music industry and the School of Communication's MA in Sound Arts and Industries program aims to break the glass by empowering more women and non-binary artists with support and resources early in their careers.

Emily Lazar, a Grammy Award–winning mastering engineer (and parent of a Northwestern student), founded the nonprofit We Are Moving the Needle to combat the recording industry's gender disparity. Last spring she tapped Northwestern to be the site of the organization's first university chapter.

“Working with Emily is super inspiring—she's somebody at the very top of her field,” says Jacob Smith, professor in the Department of Radio/Television/Film and director of the sound arts and industries program. “It's always great for our students to be engaging with and learning from people who are at the cutting edge of audio. But Emily also shows us how we can make real transformation in the industry. Making the world of audio more inclusive has been a goal of our program from the beginning, and partnering with We Are Moving the Needle gives us more traction.”

Lazar guest-lectured for Smith's class last winter, which led her to join the sound program's advisory board. When Lazar and Smith first discussed We Are Moving the Needle, they realized that Northwestern could advance the mission as a vital entry point for budding engineers and producers.

“After that first conversation regarding all the additional programming we could offer to the Northwestern student body and faculty, it was clear that it was a perfect fit,” Lazar says. “We couldn't be more excited to be affiliated with such a prestigious institution filled with rock-star students to amplify our cause and empower the next generation of creative individuals in the industry.”

The partnership, which launched this academic year, will comprise a series of events including community gatherings, workshops, industry panels, and master classes.

“Education is a big part of their mission, and we can provide the organization with a foothold in the Chicago area,” Smith says. “Our MA program takes a holistic approach to sound that links science, arts, industry, and a cultural and historical perspective—I think they feel a resonance with that. We are excited to work together to remix the future of sound recording.”