

Calendar of events

Hans Christian Andersen

Music and lyrics by Frank Loesser

Book and additional lyrics

by Timothy Allen McDonald

Directed by Rives Collins

July 13–28

Ethel M. Barber Theater

Machinal

by Sophie Treadwell

Directed by Joanie Schultz

October 25–November 10

Josephine Louis Theater

Fun Home

Book and lyrics by Lisa Kron

Music by Jeanine Tesori

Directed by Roger Ellis

November 8–24

Ethel M. Barber Theater

Julius Caesar

by William Shakespeare

Directed by Danielle Roos

January 31–February 9

Josephine Louis Theater

Information and tickets at
communication.northwestern.edu/wirtz

In this issue

- 2 The next big things
- 14 Student comedians keep 'em laughing
- 20 Comedy in the curriculum
- 24 Our community
- 28 Faculty focus
- 32 Alumni achievements
- 36 In memory
- 37 Communicating gratitude



The Waa-Mu Show is vying for global design domination. The set design for the 88th annual production, *For the Record*, called for a massive 11-foot-diameter rotating globe suspended above the stage and wrapped in the masthead of the show's fictional newspaper, the *Chicago Offering*. Northwestern's set, scenery, and paint shops are located in the Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts, but Waa-Mu is performed in Cahn Auditorium. How to pull off such a planetary transplant? By deflating Earth. The globe began as a plain white (albeit custom-built) inflatable balloon, but after its initial multisection muslin wrap was created (to determine shrinkage), it was deflated, rigged, reinflated, motorized, map-designed, taped for a paint mask, primed, painted, and unpeeled to reveal computer-generated, to-scale continents. The team then built a masthead (with interior lighting, no less) and painstakingly let all the air out of the balloon until it was small enough to fit into a box truck. The flattened Earth was then carefully moved across campus and reinflated, rigged, and motorized to dazzle this year's Waa-Mu audiences. "This project in our studio had a good number of hours put into it by Northwestern staff, our graduate students, and our undergraduates," says Wirtz Center technical adviser Matt Buettner. "We are proud of the work we do here, and our staff members often have the opportunity to create really stunning works of art through practiced trades in a close relationship with our MFA design students."

On the cover: The Story Pirates cast performs "The Day Dad Put the Emergency Poncho on Me," adapted from a story by a New York-based second grader named Theo. Founded by School of Communication alumni, Story Pirates turns children's original stories into sketches and music and performs them for live audiences and on their podcast.



The School of Communication places a high priority on two objectives:

being responsive to student needs and goals, and engaging as fully as possible with our industries and alumni. We listen when alumni tell us what their industries and professions look for in graduates. And we now conduct an annual student survey to learn how our students' interests and objectives are changing so that we can tune our programs to better serve them.

Music theatre provides a good example of one area that has seen a dramatic expansion of faculty, curriculum, and programming. Our friends and alumni advised us that music theatre was a key area of strength we should build on, especially with its growing importance in the creative industries. And our students begged for an expanded program that would better guide their development.

We responded with a major new investment in this area, which since 2000 has grown from one professor to four plus several lecturers. New faculty allowed us to expand instruction in voice and dance, and the curriculum now includes modules in creating the musical (with courses in writing, composing, and orchestration) and music theatre choreography. The American Music Theatre Project has brought a whole new set of opportunities to our students, who participate in evaluating projects, conducting readings and workshops, developing new musicals, and presenting new works. For the third year in a row, AMTP is supporting a partnership between Northwestern and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland to develop and present a new alumni-written, student-performed musical at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. As a result of this growth in opportunities, our students are enjoying even greater success as they pursue their dreams after graduation.

And that brings me to the subject of this issue of *Dialogue*. I admit it was great fun to pull together a whole issue on comedy arts. Our school has emerged as an incubator for talent and new content in this area, and this issue gives us a wonderful opportunity to showcase not only our comedic dominance in late-night television, sitcoms, stage, and cinema, but also the wonderful young alumni of our writing, acting, and media arts programs who are adding their distinctive voices to the mix.

Of course, like music theatre, this area is more and more important in the industry and a magnet for students. So, as we did with music theatre, we are investing in new faculty, new curriculums (including a new module in comedy arts), and new opportunities for students. We hope that the investments we are making will help us recruit students and faculty and will help them be even more successful as they pursue their goals.

As always, we welcome your feedback (and seek your support!) in making our school the most creative, responsive, and inclusive community in higher education.

A handwritten signature in purple ink, reading "Barbara J. O'Keefe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'B' and 'O'.

Barbara J. O'Keefe
Dean, School of Communication
Start a dialogue: dialogue@northwestern.edu



THE NEXT BIG THINGS

by Kerry Trotter

From the record books to bookstores, from late night to stand-up, Northwestern School of Communication alumni dominate comedy—and for good reason. In the last decade, the school has prepared ever greater numbers of writers, producers, and performers for the funny business, thanks to the school's robust comedy curriculum and the University's liberal arts backbone. It's a winning combination for producing smart, clever comedic artists marked by intellectual curiosity, an ability to adapt and innovate, a sense of responsibility, and the desire to help other 'Cats succeed. The following young alumni are rewriting comedy's rules.

N

orthwestern has long been a pipeline for aspiring comedic writers. But recent graduates are forging an even smarter path in an increasingly competitive field.

“I think there’s something special

about going to a school that has produced people to look up to,” says **Nicole Silverberg (C13)**. “Julia Louis-Dreyfus was there and was in some of the same clubs that you can be in—you too can be given the tools that she had.”

Silverberg graduated from Northwestern as an aspiring performer but fell into writing through University connections and her obvious talents. She’s now a writer on the Emmy Award-winning late-night show *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* and hosts a popular podcast about *Grey’s Anatomy*.

Her work demands discipline. “There’s an intellectual rigor to it; you have to be inquisitive and able to watch a lot of boring C-SPAN and CNN,” she says. “I think those skills can be traced back to what Northwestern professors asked of me. It doesn’t surprise me that a school priding itself on ambitious and curious students produces alumni who have a high tolerance for hard work and long hours.”

Ashley Nicole Black (GC08) began taking improv classes at Chicago’s Second City while she was at Northwestern earning her master’s degree in performance studies. The comedy training upended her plans to become a professor but provided an unexpected complement to her interests.

“The second I got started doing sketch comedy, I realized that was what I was meant to do all along,” Black says. “I realized that I was funny and that with the ability to write my own material, I could be in charge of how I was representing myself.”

It’s one thing to be younger than me, but to be more successful???? Very disrespectful. Ultimately I will allow it because I cannot bend time and space YET, but just know, I’m not thrilled about this.
—Nicole Silverberg via Twitter

Her performance studies background fostered an informed, more activist approach to sketch that took her from the bustling Chicago improv scene all the way to the writers room at *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* and recently NBC’s *Bless This Mess* as well as to the writing team and cast of HBO’s forthcoming *A Black Lady Sketch Show*, created by **Robin Thede (Medill01)**.

“I’m very happy to have a cultural, theoretical, and historical background for what I’m doing,” says Black. “It’s so important to have this context for what you are making; otherwise you aren’t fully aware of the message you created.”

As a woman of color, Black considers this especially important in approaching and debunking stereotypes. And it’s very much the essence of performance studies. Northwestern combines “going to a good school with being in the perfect city to learn comedy,” she says. “You really need both.”

Caitlin Kunkel (GC09) also pursued improv training at Second City in conjunction with earning a graduate degree, in her case an MFA in writing for screen and stage. She produced New York City’s first-ever Satire and Humor Festival, cowrote the satirical book *New Erotica for Feminists* (published last fall), writes for Public Radio International’s *Live Wire*, cofounded the *Belladonna* comedy website, does podcasts, and teaches

I ordered lunch, and then half the room ordered lunch from the same place. I’d like to announce my new career as an influencer.
—Ashley Nicole Black via Twitter

satire writing classes through her improv alma mater.

“Northwestern helped me understand how to structure stories, and it created really great work habits in me that I still have to this day,”

she says. As a graduate student she wanted to learn “a hard skill

like production, and what I learned is

still really applicable to the kind of work I do.”

Kunkel found her niche in online satire, an attainable format for fledgling comedians. It can be done from home without childcare, with no need for live performance.

“But satire is the kind of writing that requires a strong point of view,” she adds, “so if you just give students the scaffolding, most people can write a pretty great piece that says what they want to say.”

Comedy rewards intelligence, but Kunkel is quick to point out that it’s less about book smarts and more about being curious, making observations, and recognizing patterns—with a decidedly Northwestern spin. “I tell my students, ‘You should spend as much time reading every week as you do writing,’” she says. “Learn how to come up with a smart take on something and be able to back it up with data.”

LAUGH LINE

School of Communication alumni have been splitting sides for the better part of a century. This timeline highlights just some of the school’s many contributions to comedy, both on campus and far beyond.

Previous pages, from left: *Late Night* writers Amber Ruffin and Ally Hord (C05) in a segment with Seth Meyers (C96, H16)

1927
Edgar Bergen (C27) leaves Northwestern to begin a legendary career. Best known for ventriloquism acts with his dummies Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd, Bergen (center) received an honorary Academy Award, a Screen Actors Guild Lifetime Achievement Award, and a Peabody Award. In 1960 he was inducted into the Hollywood Walk of Fame with three stars—one each for television, motion pictures, and radio. He died in 1978. In 1939 Northwestern awarded Charlie McCarthy an honorary degree.



1929
Northwestern students **Joe Miller (29)** (right) and **Darrell Ware (29)** write the music and lyrics for a musical comedy revue and enlist the help of the University’s



Women’s Athletic Association (WAA) and Men’s Union (MU). *Good Morning Glory* is a smash hit, and the *Daily Northwestern* writes that campus interest is the “highest yet” for any dramatic activity in University history. The annual Waa-Mu Show has endured as Northwestern’s premier student-written musical theatre event. After eight decades in a revue format, Waa-Mu is now an incubator for new musicals.

1930
Clara, Lu ‘n’ Em, one of the first radio soap operas, debuts on Chicago’s WGN-AM. It stars **Louise Starkey Meade (C27)**, **Isobel Carothers Berolzheimer (C26)**, and **Helen King Mitchell (C26)** as small-town housewives exchanging gossip.



1963
Ann-Margret (C63) receives her second Golden Globe Award nomination, this time for her role as Kim McAfee in the film version of the musical comedy *Bye Bye Birdie*.

1969
The Brady Bunch, costarring **Robert Reed (C54)** as the patriarch of a large blended family, premieres on ABC. After its five-season run, its syndication in 1975 made the show iconic for generations to follow.



Comedy innovation

Story Pirates, a wildly popular comedy podcast and touring stage show for families, was launched in 2004 by **Lee Overtree (C02)** and a gaggle of other Northwestern alumni. As an undergraduate, Overtree had been involved in the student group Griffin's Tale, which turns children's writings into sketches, skits, and songs and performs them for kids. His first professional directing gig was with a New York children's theatre. Drawing on his Northwestern training and connections, he staged a Griffin's Tale-inspired show that developed into Story Pirates. An instant hit, it landed Overtree in the thick of comedic innovation.

"It was pretty accidental how we started this company," says Overtree of his work with cofounder and CEO Benjamin Salka (C99). "But we saw a need for entertainment for kids that wasn't condescending, that fuels the creativity of the people who are making it as well as the people you're making it for, and that felt like it was good for the world but still in a funny way that is subversive—in the way that kids telling the truth is subversive."

That model has proved as successful as any improv powerhouse in churning out talent ready for the big time. Overtree believes the Northwestern connection plays an integral part.

"The number of Northwestern graduates who have come through Story Pirates in the last 15 years is insane," he says. "I think the University encourages you to be independent and find your own creative voice. When you start from a young age

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A LATE-NIGHT WRITER

Ally Hord jokes that working in late night is like the government job of comedy writing.

"It's a year-round position, we get pay raises through WGA scale, and we don't tape on Fridays," she says. "It's very stable, and people are actually able to settle down and have families. Compared with other writing room situations, we have a great schedule."

But when she's on the job as a member of the *Late Night with Seth Meyers* monologue writing team, she's working nonstop. Hord describes a typical day: "Monologue writers tend to get in a little earlier, usually between 8:30 and 9 a.m. We have three monologue deadlines throughout the day—1:30, 3:15, and 5:30 p.m.—and that is further broken up with meetings, reads, and audience rehearsals.

"We'll write through the morning, and at 2 p.m. we go into Seth's office and he reads through every joke that's been selected by our head writer,

They say your wedding will be the best day of your life, but they haven't seen this junk-food crawl map I made for the day after my wedding, ending at the ER.
—Ally Hord via Twitter

Alex Baze. Seth'll highlight the ones he likes, and those will be put in a packet that will be read at 4:15 in front of a test audience assembled from tourists in the 30 Rock lobby—for better or worse, because we're a pretty political show. We'll have a joke about the deputy attorney general and it can go right over the heads of a crowd from Norway.

"Then we pick what worked, Seth will run through 'A Closer Look,' we'll run through any sketch bits and test as much as we can. We're supposed to be done with joke writing at 5:30, but since Trump loves to drop news at 6 p.m., we sometimes have to keep working. The show shoots from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

"It's like a crash course in comedy writing, every single day."

trying to figure out not just how you fit into the bigger picture but also what's unique about you, you start honing that individuality, and it makes you pop when you get out into the real world."

Such individuality allowed **Ziwe Fumudoh (C14)** to pursue academic interests in math, African American studies, and poetry as well as radio/television/film. "I just wanted to write more," she says, "and with RTVF I was able to do screenwriting." Fumudoh found that comedy requires "the same economy of words as poetry."

Now a stand-up comedian, podcaster, web series creator, musician, and television writer—most recently for Showtime's *Desus & Mero*—she credits RTVF senior lecturer Brett Neveu for encouraging her to "say yes to everything" (advice *he* credits to Stephen Colbert). All those yeses have yielded an innovative career characterized by its lack of limits.

"I have multitudes, just like Walt Whitman," she laughs, referencing his seminal poem *Song of Myself*. "I'm working all the time and always trying to refine my craft."

Adapting to a changing landscape

Dave Holstein (C05) is writing and producing the second season of Showtime's *Kidding*, a dark comedy about a Fred Rogers-esque children's TV host. Holstein cut his professional teeth writing for Showtime's *Weeds* and HBO's *The Brink*, shows centered respectively on a soccer-mom drug kingpin and nuclear war.

1972

McLean Stevenson (C52) receives his first Emmy nod—for outstanding performance by an actor in a supporting role—for his work on TV's *M*A*S*H*. A year later, for the same series, he is nominated for best comedy writing.



the Television Academy's Hall of Fame; she held the record for most overall wins by an actress (eight, with 22 nominations) until tied by Julia Louis-Dreyfus (C83, H07) in 2017.

The Mee-Ow Show is founded on campus as an irreverent answer to the Waa-Mu Show, which had allegedly mishandled material submitted the previous year. The 30-student cast performs its inaugural show in McCormick Auditorium.

1975

Tony Randall (C41, H02) (right, at left end of couch) receives his fifth consecutive Emmy nomination and first award for playing Felix Unger on ABC's *The Odd Couple*. He was previously nominated in 1954 for *Mr. Peepers*.



1978

Created by **Garry Marshall (Medill56)**, *Mork & Mindy* premieres. Marshall had built an already legendary career writing for such shows as *The Odd Couple* (left), *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, and *The Jack Paar Tonight Show*. He parlayed *Mork & Mindy*'s success into creating *Laverne & Shirley*, its spinoff *Happy Days*, and its spinoff *Joanie Loves Chachi*. Marshall later directed *Overboard*, *The Princess Diaries*, *Pretty Woman*, and other hit comedy films. Though he was a journalism student at Northwestern, he served on the School



of Communication's National Advisory Council and was the parent and grandparent of communication graduates.

1979

Laughtrack debuts. An Evanston-based comedy group created by Northwestern alumni, it features the work of **Jeff Lupetin (C76)**, **Gary Kroeger (C81)**, **Bill Wronski (C79)**, and **Victoria Zielinski (WCAS78, GC79, Law83)** as well as manager **Bridget McDonough (C78)**. Attack Theatre is launched, soon to be renamed the Practical Theatre Company. In 1982 its entire improv cohort (right)—**Brad Hall (C80)**, **Gary Kroeger (C81)**, **Julia Louis-Dreyfus (C83, H07)**, and **Paul Barrosse (C80)**—is hired by *Saturday Night Live*.



COMEDY IS LITTERED WITH 'CATS

Los Angeles-based Dave Holstein says he spends about two hours a day in his car, which has led him to devise a fun game to help pass the time. "I see a lot of Northwestern alumni vanity license plates, and I always try to pull up and see if I know the person in the driver's seat," he says. "It's the equivalent of walking up to north campus and hoping you recognize someone on the way."

Farhan Arshad contends that "you couldn't escape Northwestern even if you tried." One of four alumni writing for *Man with a Plan*—where Gregg Mettler (C94) is an executive producer—he recently participated in a joke-writing "punch-up" for a pilot where "the entire room was basically Northwestern people."

Ally Hord is accustomed to being in rooms dominated by 'Cats. After all, she and writer Jenny Hagel (GCo9) work for Seth Meyers (C96, H16). "I feel like Northwestern graduates in the industry are very down to earth and accessible," she says. "I don't see anyone I've encountered as an ego-first celebrity."

But alumni do enjoy bragging about Northwestern. Hord says they come out of the Twitter woodwork when Northwestern athletics are in the news.

When Kathryn Hahn starred in Sarah Gubbins's Amazon series *I Love Dick*, did their alma mater connection



Sarah Gubbins and Kathryn Hahn

come up on the set? "Oh, all the time," says Gubbins. "We compared professors, we talked about going back and seeing all the changes. And we'd give each other the 'Go 'Cats' claws."

Ziwe Fumudoh, whose work extends from late-night writing to live performance, sums it up: "Northwestern dominates entertainment, that's very apparent. I'm literally surrounded by Northwestern graduates all the time, because they're the ones hustling, putting pedal to the metal, and taking the super-focused energy they used in their studies and applying it to their lives."

"These topics were taking a traditional comedic approach in terms of rhythms and plots, but we also had to thread through-stories that were political and important," he says. "There's comedy and then there's comedy with something to say. I want to be involved in comedy with something to say."

Holstein participated in Northwestern's program in creative writing for the media, a precursor to the undergraduate module of the same name. He notes that his on-campus playwriting was filtered through the broader spectrum of his Northwestern academic pursuits, which helped him take a bigger-picture approach to writing than he might have received in a conservatory program. Case in point: Holstein nimbly responded to political tumult and an increase in divisive rhetoric by trying to fill the "empty chair that was Mister Rogers, and how we don't have that voice on television anymore." He thus successfully pitched Showtime his idea for *Kidding*, directed by Michel Gondry and starring Jim Carrey as kids show host Mr. Pickles—who, true to Holstein form, has an edge.

Kidding's first season won critical acclaim, and Holstein is confident that in today's changing media landscape, audience appetites can support such an outside-the-box show. "It's a really democratic time to make television—the rules have been thrown out the window," he says. "It used to be that there was one track to making a television show, and now there are a dozen. It's exciting; you feel like you're really riding the crest of a sort of revolution—how we digest content and define what television is and what constitutes a hit."



Do you ever go to the doctor and think, wow, this was a waste of \$17,000?

—Ziwe Fumudoh via Twitter

Sarah Gubbins (C97, GC08) can relate. She puts a playwright's spin on her television work—most recently FX's *Better Things* and Amazon's *I Love Dick*, starring Kathryn Hahn (C95) and Kevin Bacon—plus the forthcoming film *Shirley*, starring Elizabeth Moss.

"I gravitate toward character-driven comedy where the characters are having some sort of political experience," she says. "The queer experience, gender, race, class—that's the kind of storytelling I'm drawn to."

Gubbins acknowledges that her storytelling style—like the platforms where her work appears—is positioned to attract a new type of television consumer: those who can carefully curate shows of interest and watch them uninterrupted. "I can



1983

Shelley Long (C71) (below) wins her first Emmy and Golden Globe for her role as Diane Chambers on the hit NBC sitcom *Cheers*.



1982

Charlotte Rae (C48), a Waa-Mu alumna (center) known as a cut-up among her Northwestern theatre cohort, earns her second Emmy Award nomination, this time for her role as Mrs. Garrett on the sitcom *The Facts of Life*.

1986

The Northwestern student improv group No Fun Mud Piranhas (right) debuts. The comedy troupe features two Mee-Ow rejects: future multi-Emmy Award winner Stephen Colbert (C86, H11) and two-time Emmy nominee David Schwimmer (C88).

1994

Friends premieres on NBC, costarring David Schwimmer (C88) as Ross Geller. Widely recognized as one of the most popular sitcoms in history, the show would run for 10 seasons, earning 62 Emmy nominations.

The Titanic Players improv group debuts. It will go on to take first place in the 2007 and 2009 College Improv Tournament, open for MADtv, and perform as a team at Chicago's iO.



Top row: Rob Helms, Alan Goldwasser, David Schwimmer, Ayun Halliday; center: Jessica Hughes, Stephen Colbert, Joy Gregory, Steve Conley, Trey Nichols; bottom: Mark Goldsmith



1996

Spin City premieres on ABC, costarring Richard Kind (C78) (above left)—one of two actors to appear in every episode of its six-season run.

Daniele Gaither (C93) (right) debuts on the new sketch comedy series *MADtv*,



also featuring Nicole Sullivan (C91) and Josh Meyers (C98). Gaither becomes a cast member and series regular in 2003, continuing through 2006.

2000

The Tale of the Allergist's Wife—by playwright, actor, and drag legend Charles Busch (C76) (right)—opens at Broadway's Ethel Barrymore Theatre. The show runs for 777 performances and garners Busch an Outer Critics Circle Award and a Tony nomination. The original cast includes Tony Roberts (C61) as Ira, a role later played by Richard Kind (C78).



2002

After six years on *Saturday Night Live*, Ana Gasteyer (C89) (right) moves seamlessly into film and television roles, including 2004's *Mean Girls*, written by former SNL castmate Tina Fey.



have an idea that doesn't necessarily resemble any other show that you've seen, and yet there's a platform for it," she says. "We're looking at television, at least seasons, in a structure that you would think of like a feature film. It spans four or five hours, but you have an expectation, an engagement with your audience. It's not just about crafting one episode that will keep them coming back; you can build plotlines and make them play out over three episodes."

Jen Spyra (GC12) works in late-night comedy—not a new format, but one confronting new demands. As a staff writer for *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, she pens

jokes and sketches for her fellow

'Cat but with a hurdle indicative of our social media saturation—getting her takes out there before another comedian beats her to the punch on Twitter or elsewhere.

"It's challenging," she says. "The general rule is that if something has already been played with, we don't want to do anything that feels familiar."

A senior writer for *The Onion* before joining *The Late Show*, Spyra recalls a writers room rule that if two people come up with a similar headline or idea, they scrap it. And now, with the proliferation of quick-take tweets, Spyra and her colleagues need to be sharper still.

"It's actually a good thing," she says. "It challenges us to come up with a fresher, more alternative angle."

Keeping her writing original and her head on a swivel has led to opportunities for Spyra to appear in *Late Show* sketches and for her byline to appear in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, *McSweeney's*, and more. "This is good for me, someone who's also interested in doing her own thing," she says. "It's nice to run with an idea and have it be about your imagination. The autonomy of that is really fun."

Embracing new faces and stories

In 2011, fresh from internships at Comedy Central and MTV, **Farhan Arshad (GC10)** was heavily courted by a reality television producer to take part in an unscripted series about arranged marriages. While he had no interest in participating, the process inspired him to follow through with an idea of his own: a mockumentary about parent-driven matchmaking. The resulting web series, *Brownies*, depicted 10 families trying to find spouses for their children—but only nine are successful,

putting the focus on a lonely outcast played by Arshad. The first two episodes were produced using a bunch of his Northwestern friends and on a budget of \$50—the cost of their pizza dinner.

"We were just messing around and had no idea if it was going to be good," he says. But those first two episodes garnered about 200,000 views, earned a sponsorship from the dating site OK Cupid, and landed Arshad an agent and manager. This and his Northwestern connections led to more meetings, writers-assistant gigs on CBS's *The McCarthys* and ABC's *Dr. Ken*, an entree into the Disney Channel Storytellers program, and a staff writing position at CBS's *Man with a Plan* (starring Matt LeBlanc), where he's been for three years. He's concurrently pitching projects featuring characters who resemble him and reflect his experience as a Pakistani American who grew up in Davenport, Iowa.

"We're in such a unique situation, where millions of people tune into our work and you really do have a chance, if you exercise it correctly, to get your message out there," he says. "If you don't know different types of people in real life, the way you can get to know them is through TV. Telling inclusive stories is so important."

April Quioh (C15) finds that her own story has struck

Adam: How can the kids get lice again? I thought you could only get that once. Don: That's mono. Although I've somehow taken that around the block a few times.

—Farhan Arshad for *Man with a Plan* episode "Lice, Lice Baby"

a chord with an underserved audience. The cocreator and cohost of the popular podcast *She's All Fat* started her career writing for the Netflix show *Haters Back Off* and then moved to *Joker's Wild*, the TBS game show hosted by Snoop Dogg. She's also now writing for NBC's *Sunnyside*. While those experiences

allowed her to flex her comedic muscles in unexpected ways, the podcast took her writing in a decidedly more personal direction.

Conversations with friend and cohost Sophia Carter-Kahn delved into "body positivity and what bothers us about the public's take," says Quioh. "The subject matter is not always funny—it might be 'let's talk about the time we were discriminated against at the doctor's office'—so how can I find the humorous take on this while also providing my personal experience in a way the audience is able to relate to?"

The alchemy works. *She's All Fat* is in its fourth season and averages about 18,000 listeners per episode. Quioh gives a lot of credit to her RTVF major and sociology minor for helping her craft her message.

2003

Stephanie D'Abruzzo (C93) (right) is nominated for a Tony Award for her performance in the Tony-winning Broadway musical *Avenue Q*, directed by **Jason Moore (C93)**.

2004

Michele Ganeless (C87) begins her 12-year tenure as president of Comedy Central, which under her leadership grows to be the number one brand in comedy with such award-winning hits as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *South Park*, *Inside Amy Schumer*, *The Colbert Report*, and *Key & Peele*. She has since focused on film and television production that places more women in creative leadership positions.



2005

Zach Braff (C97) (below center), playing John Dorian on NBC's *Scrubs*, receives the first of three consecutive Golden Globe nominations for best performance by

an actor in a comedy or musical television series. He is also nominated for an Emmy as best lead actor in a comedy series as well as two People's Choice Awards.



2006

Megan Mullally (C81) (left, in the *Waa-Mu Show*) wins her second Emmy Award for playing Karen Walker on NBC's *Will & Grace*. The role nets her a total of eight Emmy nominations and seven consecutive Screen Actors Guild Award nominations, with three SAG wins. **Jill Leiderman (C93)** begins her current run as executive producer of *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, winner of three Emmy Awards.

2014

Seth Meyers (C96, H16) (right) moves from his head-writer position at *Saturday Night Live* to take over Jimmy Fallon's seat as the host of *Late Night* on NBC. He debuts to an audience of 3.5 million, the show's largest in nearly a decade.



TWO SOCIAL ONES

Stephanie March (C96) played fan-favorite New York assistant district attorney Alex Cabot on NBC's *Law & Order: Special Victim's Unit* for well over 100 episodes. It was a decidedly unfunny assignment, but make no mistake—she has comedy chops.



"I really, really like doing it," says March of comedic acting. "I've had a couple of great opportunities in the last few years, and I have enjoyed it thoroughly."

One of those opportunities was *The Social Ones*, a mockumentary about social media influencers and the trap of online celebrity; the film won the audience award for comedy feature at last spring's Cinequest Film Festival. Also the film's co-executive producer with Laura and Danielle Kosann, March costars as a therapist who counsels, among others, a young couple grappling with social media's grind on their marriage. "My character's therapy isn't doing much to save it, by the way," laughs March, who visited

the Evanston campus to screen *The Social Ones* last spring. "Thank God there weren't cellphones when I was in college."

What she did have in college was great acting training—and access to an alumni network that has revealed itself in surprising ways. March returned to Evanston for the School of Communication's CommFest 2018 weekend and was featured in "A Starry Night," the live alumni show. While walking backstage, she noticed a familiar name on a dressing room door: Richard Kind (C78).

"I've worked with Rich a couple of times," she says of *Law & Order* and *The Social Ones*, in which he also costars. "I ambushed him, and he said, 'Kid, how did we not know this?'" Finding themselves together "was such a fun discovery."

In addition to acting and producing, March is a philanthropist and entrepreneur who cofounded the custom makeup company Shespoke. Her advice to students entering the business, show and otherwise, has an interdisciplinary ring: "Don't wait for somebody to give you a job—make your own job. You never know what kinds of opportunities are going to come from all of these collaborative efforts you have over your lifetime. Some of them are entrepreneurial, some of them are producing, some of them are acting, but they all add up to something."

"I was talking on my show about how at Northwestern I discovered the political feminism movement, and less the glossy 'you go, girl!' version I had experienced as a kid in *Seventeen* magazine," Quioh laughs. It wasn't until getting to campus that "I was like, 'yeah, I agree! I go, girl!' Because once I got into it in a more academic space, it stayed with me and informed what I make."

Helping 'Cats on the way

Budding television producer **Ally Hord (C05)** moved to Los Angeles at an unfortunate time—during the 2008 writers strike. Productions on scripted television shows ground to a halt. She needed an in.

"I reached out to an old Northwestern RTVF friend of mine, **Jake Szymanski (C04)**, who had just started working at *Funny or Die*," she says. "He described what he did day to day, and it sounded a lot like what we did at NSTV together."

She sent him a resumé outlining her work with Upright Citizens Brigade and in television production and was hired immediately. Since then, Hord has been on a professional ascent.

"I would say I've gotten most of my best jobs through a Northwestern grad," she says, modest about her sizable talents, production background, and drive. "If we had an opportunity to help out or recommend an interview or write a recommendation, we were there for each other along the way."



Stop asking for my skin care routine. There is none. I'm just mean to men and it keeps me young and beautiful.

—April Quioh via Twitter

Now a staff writer for *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, Hord remembers a campus visit by comedy legend **Garry Marshall (Medill56)**. Speaking to students, he was free of ego and full of appreciation for his alma mater—sentiments similar to what she sees emerging among her fellow graduates.

"We came up together in the industry, and we're still close," she says. "It has ended up being a really great, supportive community."

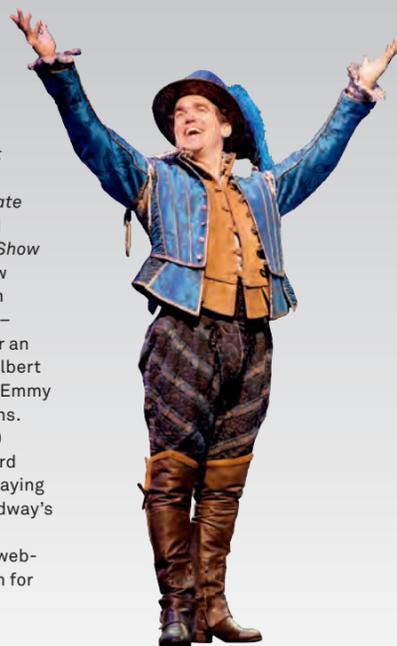


2015

Stephen Colbert (C86, H11), previously the host of Comedy Central's Emmy Award-winning *The Colbert Report*, succeeds David Letterman as host of *The Late Show* on CBS. A critical and popular success, *The Late Show* would go on to break a show ratings record in 2016 when Colbert (left) hosted a post-Super Bowl live program for an audience of 21.1 million. Colbert has been nominated for 32 Emmy Awards and boasts nine wins.

Brian d'Arcy James (C90) receives his third Tony Award nomination, this time for playing Nick Bottom (right) in Broadway's *Something Rotten*.

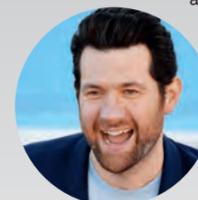
OTV | Open Television, a web-series distribution platform for



intersectional artists, is founded by radio/television/film and communication studies assistant professor Aymar Jean Christian. Its Chicago-based comedy series *Brown Girls* will be nominated for an Emmy and picked up by HBO. More recent OTV content includes *The Right Swipe*, a comedy about the perils of online dating, written by and starring **Kyra Jones (C14)** and **Juli Del Prete (C14)**.

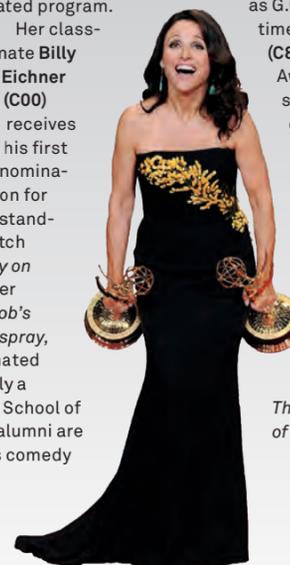
2017

Kristen Schaal (C00) receives her first Emmy nomination for outstanding character voice-over for her work as Sarah Lynn on *Bojack Horseman*. **Bob's Burgers**—with



Schaal voicing the fan-favorite character Louise Belcher—is nominated for outstanding animated program.

Her classmate **Billy Eichner (C00)** receives his first nomination for outstanding sketch series for his *Billy on the Street*. Eichner also costars in *Bob's Burgers* and *Hairspray, Live!*, both nominated for Emmys. Nearly a dozen additional School of Communication alumni are among the year's comedy



Emmy nominees, and many of them win.

In an amazing case of 'Cat as G.O.A.T. (greatest of all time), **Julia Louis-Dreyfus (C83, H07)** breaks Emmy Award records when she receives her sixth consecutive award as outstanding lead actress in a comedy—the most ever by a performer for the same role (as Selina Meyer on HBO's *Veep*) and her eighth acting Emmy. She previously won for *Seinfeld* and *The New Adventures of Old Christine*.

2018

CommFest weekend, the monumental event welcoming the School of Communication community back to Evanston to rediscover, reengage, and reunite, raises the bar for alumni

entertainment with "A Starry Night." Hosted by Stephen Colbert, the show features a long list of comedy alumni as well as current students from the Mee-Ow Show.





STUDENT COMEDIANS KEEP 'EM LAUGHING

by Cara Lockwood

What makes Northwestern students such great comedians? Creative energy, prime location, and lots of options for practicing their craft. The abundance of respected student-run comedy groups—on paper, on camera, and on stage—has given the University a reputation as a comedy powerhouse where all are welcome.

A

As co-head writer of *The Blackout*, Northwestern's late-night show, Jake Daniels was thrilled to hear the show had been nominated for a College Television Award, the

undergrad version of an Emmy. Never in a million years did he think it would win.

"When we saw the other nominees, they were so strong and we couldn't believe we even had a shot," says Daniels, a radio/television/film major who graduated in June. "The budgets for these other projects were so much greater than ours, too, but we flew to L.A. in March anyway, expecting just to have fun and enjoy the red carpet and the ceremony. But then at the awards ceremony they said our name, and none of us could believe it."

Winning at comedy is something School of Communication students do on a daily basis. *The Blackout* is just one of many groundbreaking student-led improv and sketch groups on campus; others include Northwestern Sketch Television (NSTV), the Titanic Players, Out Da Box, and, of course, the legendary Mee-Ow and Waa-Mu Shows. The school's students continue to

advance and nurture the rich comedy community that keeps spawning new generations of late-night hosts, stand-up comics, comedy producers, and award-winning writers and performers.

"Historically, Northwestern has produced successful comedians, and several students come here for things like Mee-Ow," says junior theatre major Jaclyn Orlando, who worked as a Mee-Ow producer this year. The show is known for such famous alumni as Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Seth Meyers, both of whom gushed about it on Meyers's show last spring. "People know the comedy here is good, so then good comedians come here. It's a cycle. I think Northwestern students are unique, because they're very bright and socially and politically aware, and each student is looking to create something as a reflection of the world around us. And comedy is a creative way to reflect on our society and its problems."

One thing Orlando especially loves about Mee-Ow is how engaging the experience is. "You can't be a passive audience member," she says. "The students will get on stage and dance with the cast and the band. I've learned that comedy is inherently an immersive art form. If you're laughing, you're in on the joke."

Northwestern students have been in on the joke for generations, and with the campus located on the doorstep of improv's birthplace, it's the perfect place to pursue humor.

"It might be Chicago—and the weather—that makes us funny," says RTVF senior lecturer Brett Neveu, who cochairs the comedy arts module, a curricular path focused on the history and mechanics of humor and the practical demands of the industry. He's also the faculty adviser for *The Blackout*. "Chicago is different from New York or L.A. It's a blue-collar city for the most part, and people are living their lives. You can really disappear into your own world and sense of humor. People here are looking for camaraderie, and comedy can provide that, too. Cracking each other up is a survival tool for January or February."

Comedy at NU is not new. The first Waa-Mu Show, staged in 1929, was a comedic musical revue, a tradition that continued for eight decades. Even now, with the new original-book-musical format, the funny stuff still works its way in.

"One of my favorite things about Waa-Mu is its capacity to combine serious subject matter with moments of joy and humor," says

"Historically, Northwestern has produced successful comedians. People know the comedy here is good, so then good comedians come here. It's a cycle."

—Jaclyn Orlando

Olivia Worley, the public relations director for 2019's show, *For the Record*—which scored big laughs amid heavier plot lines. "While Waa-Mu continues to tackle important issues, the show itself is never overly somber. Through humor, Waa-Mu invites the audience to positively engage with and relate to the stories and themes of each show, even the more serious ones."

And there are more and more humor outlets to engage audiences. Two decades ago, the campus boasted only a handful of comedy options, but new student groups are born every year, many emphasizing inclusiveness.

"In the time I've been at Northwestern, the number of comedy groups has really multiplied, and it's been amazing," says recent RTVF graduate Maya Armstrong, who acted for NSTV, improvised with Titanic Players, and codirected for Mee-Ow. "Here, people want to express themselves and they want to laugh."


This year's Waa-Mu Show is called Manhattan Miracle, the show about a theatre major getting a paid summer internship.
—The Blackout


The Northwestern Mock Trial Team finished ninth in the country at the national championships held a few weeks ago in Minneapolis–St. Paul. No word yet on where the actual Trial Team has been all this time.
—The Blackout



They see all these amazing comedy groups and awesome shows, and it gets people excited about joining groups or making their own mark on Northwestern's comedy scene."

Max Kliman, also a June RTVF graduate, worked on the satirical newspaper *The Flipside*, produced for *The Blackout*, and coached for No Fun Mud Piranhas, an improv company that welcomes any student interested in joining. The troupe famously included Stephen Colbert (C86, H11) and David Schwimmer (C88) after both were rejected by Mee-Ow. No Fun Mud Piranhas currently boasts more than 60 members.

A recent intern at *The Late Show*, Kliman says that Northwestern students are uniquely creative and open to new projects. "Whether it's *The Blackout*, Waa-Mu, *The Flipside*, or improv teams or comedy newspapers, the students here have such an interesting and unique sense of humor," he says.

"Working with them improves your ability to create funny things. There are other schools

"There are other schools that have a lot of comedy, but I've never been in another environment where everyone wants to make things together."

—Max Kliman

that have a lot of comedy, but I've never been in another environment where everyone wants to make things together. People are always down to create. You have an idea for a sketch? You can find people who want to film it."

Emphasizing inclusivity helps nurture Northwestern's rich comedy scene. Out Da Box, a multicultural improv group, focuses on putting underrepresented voices on stage. "We're the only comedy group on campus with a mission statement that prioritizes multicultural representation," says senior RTVF major Avery Powell, who served as the group's 2018–19 president. "Diversity is not just a plus or a benefit—it's

our priority. And that affects a lot of our decisions, from show themes to the audition process. It really makes us who we are." He believes that it also makes for better comedy, noting that audiences find a new perspective funnier and "honestly refreshing."

Dolores Diaz, a June MFA graduate in writing for the screen and stage, regards the school's abundance of voices as a window into what's to come. "I think the diversity of my cohort is a great litmus test for what's funny to whom and why," she says. "About half my cohort are international students, more than half are people of color, and we have a diversity of physical expressions, gender expressions, and sexual orientations. If you can make that room laugh, you're doing something right."



ABOUT THAT (COLLEGE) EMMY

The Blackout's College Television Award win recognizes its "2018 Spring Quarter Update" (think *Saturday Night Live's* "Weekend Update" but covering the whole quarter), one of three collegiate nominees in the variety category. Other College Television Award nominees included student-produced comedy and drama series, commercials, and animation. According to the Television Academy Foundation, 25 videos were nominated out of more than 600 submissions from 170 US schools. This was *The Blackout's* first nomination and win.

Launched in 2015 by RTVF majors interested in the late-night style of televised comedy, *The Blackout* produces live shows, taped segments, promos, sketches, and more. Like *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, it involves teams of writers, a handful of producers and directors, and carefully selected on-air talent. The "Quarter Update" segment is filmed in the Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communication's broadcast studios, and live shows and sketches are produced all over campus. The group takes an inclusive approach to membership; anyone who is interested can join the production team, though students aiming to host segments must audition and aspiring writers have to submit applications.

"It's pretty bold stuff, and they keep pushing themselves to get bigger and more connected—and lots of people want to be part of the organization," says radio/television/film senior lecturer Brett Neveu, *The Blackout's* faculty adviser. "It's only been around a short time, but it's exploded. They've got something really special."

The 39th annual awards ceremony was part of an extended weekend of Television Academy programming March 14–16 in Los Angeles.



R&B artist Daniel Caesar has been announced as one of the mainstage performers at this year's Dillo Day. However, if he's anything like Northwestern's CAESAR, he'll take forever to show up and then quit when you ask him to do anything.
—The Blackout



This year the University's acceptance rate dropped to a record low of 8.4 percent—almost as low as the campus's self-acceptance rate of 0 percent.
—The Blackout

COMEDY IN THE CURRICULUM

FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE STAGE AND SCREEN

by Cara Lockwood



The School of Communication takes comedy seriously. While student groups have long been part of the University experience, comedy in the curriculum is a newer, more strategic focus. The study of comedy—its history, social and cultural implications, roots in activism, and practical applications—has found a dynamic home in the school’s interdisciplinary ecosystem. The results are immersive opportunities at the graduate and undergraduate levels: the MFA program in writing for the screen and stage, the comedy arts module, and the sitcom sequence.

“Comedy is woven into the fabric of our MFA in writing for the screen and stage curriculum, from the sitcom initiative, to topics classes like Writing and Performing Stand-Up and Writing Comedy, to the various improv courses we offer,” says David Tolchinsky, radio/television/film professor and the MFA program’s codirector. “We also host a constant stream of guests from the comedy world, many of whom are our grads. To us, learning comedy is as important as learning drama. I think the fact that we embrace comedy so seriously sets our program apart from other screenwriting and playwriting programs.”

Playwriting and screenwriting are close cousins, and incoming MFA candidates interested in one arena wind up becoming proficient in both. The same principle applies to

those entering as dramatic writers and emerging as far more. In fact, recent MFA cohorts have been expressing an ever-greater interest in writing comedy—perhaps no coincidence at a time when satirists and comedians are emerging as arbiters of truth in a complicated political climate.

Undergraduate students, too, are yearning to leverage comedy into something more than an easy laugh. Those interested in a deeper, more focused track can pursue the comedy arts module, which includes classes in comedy history and practice, internships, cocurricular practice, and a capstone portfolio. It’s open to any Northwestern student, thus inviting different backgrounds and perspectives and embracing comedic performance training as a highly transferable skill.

“We concentrate on what it means to be funny in whatever realm you might



“We concentrate on what it means to be funny in whatever realm you might be entering, whether that’s a stand-up stage or a law office.”

—Brett Neveu

be entering, whether that’s a stand-up stage or a law office,” says RTVF senior lecturer Brett Neveu, the module’s cochair. “There’s this strategy in Second City and other improv groups called ‘yes, and—.’ It’s the idea that instead of shutting things down, you build on them. I think that strategy works in all sorts of situations: in music, in the boardroom, on stage, or even with yourself. If you’re developing a TED Talk or a stand-up routine or a corporate presentation, it’s about ‘yes, and—ing’ your own material.”

In addition to classes on such topics as advanced performing and sitcom writing, the module includes genre studies delving into rom-coms and improv. Additionally, students are required to get involved in cocurricular activities such as NSTV, Mee-Ow, or Out Da Box. The years-long process coalesces in students creating an original 30-minute comedy script, a spec script for a comedy already on the air, a comedic play or screenplay, a comedic monologue, multiple sketches, and/or original web content. All told, students must write a lot and familiarize themselves with the trials of performance—two big features of most comedy professions.

“Northwestern students take a lot of risks,” says RTVF lecturer Zina Camblin, staff writer for the upcoming *Wu Tang: An American Saga* and the comedy arts module’s cochair. “And even in my stand-up class, they always come around, no matter how

nervous they are. They feel great about themselves afterward because they prove to themselves they can do it.”

For students keen on writing televised comedy, the school’s sitcom sequence has been a popular pathway since its launch in 2012. Students spend a year writing an original sitcom; faculty select one script to be produced, filmed, and screened the following June. “Students learn by actually seeing their project through from idea to finished pilot,” says Erik Gernand, an RTVF senior lecturer who cocurates the sequence with Camblin.

Also integral to the process is the near-annual trip the sitcom students take to Los Angeles. The group visits with industry professionals, tours studio backlots, and gets caught up on alumni projects. Past trips have included meetings with **Jeff Jacobs (C85, Medill87)**, **Gregg Mettler (C94)**, **Laverne McKinnon (C87)**, and **Farhan Arshad (GC10)** as well as visits to the sets of *Modern Family* and—alongside **Julia Louis-Dreyfus (C83, H07)** and **Brad Hall (C80)**—*Veep*. This year, students met with **Alex Barnow (WCAS95)**, executive producer of *The Goldbergs*. Says Gernand, “It’s an incredible experience to get to watch these amazing comedies being shot and to learn from the people who make them happen.”

RTVF senior Mega Annabel Dafiaghor directed the latest sitcom sequence winner, *Aliens in America*, which follows the lives of two international students. She went on the spring trip

and got to meet Kay Cannon, the director of *Blockers* and the producer and writer of the *Pitch Perfect* movies—the first of which was directed by **Jason Moore (C93)**.

“I learned from her that it’s not just about telling these jokes, because what we’re doing isn’t stand-up comedy,” says Dafiaghor, who hopes to pursue a career as a director. “It’s all about the format and how you tell the jokes. You can have something ridiculous going on in the background of a scene and then play classical music over it. When I came back, I used that advice in my own work.”

Dafiaghor says comedy is a way for her to laugh at things that can otherwise be hard to handle. “Comedy has always been important to me,” she says. “I’m this really tall black girl, and people don’t expect me to have the personality that I do. But comedy is a way to break that barrier.”

Aalisha Sheth, a writing for the screen and stage MFA student and a cocreator, cowriter, and co-executive producer of *Aliens in America*, agrees that comedy lets us open up about difficult topics. “Comedy encourages dissent,” she says. “It allows for the release of suppressed human emotions in the guise of a laugh. It makes space for a discussion on pressing issues—that often go unnoticed—about society and the world at large, through a setup and punchline.”

Greg Porper (C12) worked on the first sitcom sequence winner in 2012 and says the experience helped him in his



professional career as a writer, director, and producer on multiple productions, including a CW web series and projects featured on *Funny or Die* and *College Humor*. “I learned that you can’t win every battle and that every person on the show plays an important role,” he says. “When I sold a show to the CW, I had been running a similar crew about that same size, and I put those skills to work.”

Tolchinsky sees Northwestern’s culture of comedy evolving even further, both in the curriculum and beyond. More than just an outlet, comedy can be a vehicle for political commentary and social change. As he points out, late-night monologues and sketches are now regularly quoted and discussed by network news reporters and have become an intriguing and evolving dynamic in a variety of aesthetic and social interactions.

“The School of Communication and Northwestern make for an amazing environment to write and study comedy,” he says. Citing discussions with colleagues in art history and art theory and practice, he says that “humor, irony, and humorous juxtapositions are often at play, not just in media writing but across art making.”

He adds that “our faculty colleagues in the screen cultures doctoral program, including Mimi White, Jeff Sconce, Miriam Petty, and Lynn Spiegel, are often investigating the nature of the humor in a lot of the works we admire. Most recently, Miriam has been writing about Tyler Perry. And more broadly, our scientists have been investigating the role that humor plays in communication and healing. That’s why it’s so exciting to be at a place like Northwestern—we can look at the same subject from a lot of angles.”





From left: Aymar Jean Christian, Yance Ford, and Kyle Henry

2019 Hoffman Visiting Artist

Acclaimed director Yance Ford screened his Emmy Award–winning, Academy Award–nominated Netflix documentary *Strong Island* in Annie May Swift Hall on April 11 while on campus as the 2019 Hoffman Visiting Artist for Documentary Media.

Strong Island focuses on the murder of Ford’s older brother on Long Island in 1992, a grand jury’s refusal to indict the white man who shot him, and the tragic repercussions for Ford’s family. Ford said he made the movie to honor his brother’s legacy.

“My brother was truly here one day and gone the next, and the person he was had been completely rewritten,” Ford said, referring to detectives’ and prosecutors’ failure to see his brother as a victim and how they too quickly sided with the white suspect’s claim of self-defense. “If I didn’t make this film about my brother, then the truth about who he was would be lost to history.”

Just 24 at the time of his death, William Ford Jr. was known in his blue-collar Long Island community as a loyal friend who helped strangers. He was pursuing a career as a correctional officer.

“I started with this film because I knew that if I never got to make another movie, this is the one I *had* to make, and everything else would be what I *wanted* to make,” said Ford, the first transgender director to be nominated for an Oscar. “It’s the difference between what’s necessary and what’s wanted, what’s vital versus what’s fun—for as long as it took, for as much money as it took. In the end it was all worth it because—in the way that artists often need to prove to themselves that they’re artists—I proved to myself that I was the artist I believed I could be.”

The Hoffman Visiting Artist for Documentary Media is a short-term filmmaker residency funded by a generous gift from Jane Steiner Hoffman and Michael Hoffman. Previous Hoffman Visiting Artists have included Raoul Peck (2018), Kirsten Johnson (2017), and Frederick Wiseman (2016).

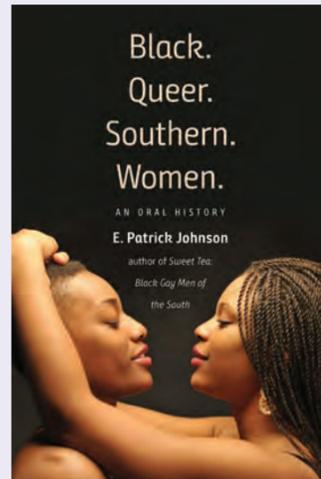
Professor’s newest work receives triple honors

School of Communication professor E. Patrick Johnson’s latest scholarly book, *Black. Queer. Southern. Women.: An Oral History*, has garnered three prestigious honors from leading LGBTQ literary advocacy organizations.

In January, *Black. Queer. Southern. Women.* was recognized as a 2019 Stonewall Book Award–Israel Fishman Nonfiction Award Honor Book. In March alone, it was named a finalist for both a Lambda Literary Award for LGBTQ studies and a Judy Grahn Award for lesbian nonfiction. Each organization is renowned for recognizing LGBTQ authors of scholarly works as well as other nonfiction and fiction.

“We might say that 2018 was a watershed moment for women coming into voice in a profound way, whether through speaking out against gender violence with #MeToo or a record number of women being elected to public office,” says Johnson, the University’s Carlos Montezuma Professor of Performance Studies and African American Studies. “Black, queer Southern women are also a part of that movement, yet their voices are not always the ones being elevated—due to racism, homophobia, and even a condescending attitude toward the South.” He adds that “*Black. Queer. Southern. Women.* fills an important void by providing a platform for these women’s voices to be included and, more importantly, heard.”

Published in October, the book delves into the lives of more than 70 black women ages 18 to 80, born and raised between East Texas and Maryland (and one in Puerto Rico), who love, desire, and are in relationships with other women. Through his interviews, Johnson facilitates an exploration of their intersectional identities—along racial, sexual, gender, and class lines—all with the common thread of their Southern heritage.



Leading algorithm-in-news researcher receives CAREER Award

In February, assistant professor of communication studies Nick Diakopoulos was awarded a prestigious National Science Foundation Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) Award, making him the department’s seventh faculty member to receive this honor. Diakopoulos is a leading researcher of computational and data journalism, with a focus on the human-centered use of algorithms, automation, and artificial intelligence in news production and consumption.

“This grant from the NSF is a key validation of my research agenda in computational journalism,” says Diakopoulos. “It underscores the importance of scientifically understanding how computing can enhance and advance and will change the practice of journalism in the future.”

Distributed over five years, the grant is given to nontenured



professors in recognition of distinguished research and exemplary classroom leadership. As one of the few significant grants available to nontenured faculty, it supports ambitious, long-term research planning that can eventually lead to a tenured position—and major scientific breakthroughs.

“The grant will allow me to pursue several projects in my Computational Journalism Lab to better understand the efficiency and effectiveness of computational story-discovery tools in domains ranging from investigative and social journalism to computational fact-checking,” Diakopoulos

explains. “I’m excited that the grant will also support my efforts to increase the data and computational literacy of journalists so that practitioners will be better equipped to operate in a data- and algorithm-driven media landscape.”

His book *Automating the News: How Algorithms Are Rewriting the Media* was published in June by Harvard University Press.

Documentary media MFA alumni screen short films at Block Cinema

Two films by MFA in documentary media alumni demonstrated the medium’s power at a special April 13 screening at the Block Museum of Art.

As part of the Northwestern Alumni Association’s “A Day at Northwestern,” Iyabo Kwayana (GC17) screened *Practice*, a best-short-film nominee at the 2019 London Short Film Festival. The film shows young men practicing martial arts exercises outside China’s Shaolin Temple.

Shuhan Fan (GC16) and Luther Clement (GC17) showed *Stay Close*, which premiered at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival. Coproduced by Nevo Shinaar (GC17) and Ashley Brandon (GC17), the film tells the story of Brooklyn fencer Keeth Smart’s against-the-odds journey to a silver medal at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

The films were shining examples of the work that documentary media MFA graduates are doing, says Debra Tolchinsky, the program’s founding director.

“I dug up the original PowerPoint presentation outlining our dream outcomes for the MFA program in documentary media, which was implemented in 2013,” says Tolchinsky. “And those included projects being accepted into respected film festivals, films achieving theatrical or broadcast release, graduates receiving nationally recognized fellowships, graduates taking on key roles for documentary projects, graduates obtaining employment in the documentary or gaming industry, and graduates obtaining teaching positions at universities. I am beyond thrilled to say that in five years, we’ve achieved all of these outcomes plus much more. We’ve been especially fortunate to have the support of the Jane and Michael Hoffman Foundation, which enabled us to get the program off the ground, offering scholarships and having Oscar-nominated guest filmmakers visit classes and give master classes.”



From left: Iyabo Kwayana, Shuhan Fan, and Luther Clement

Lambert Conference focuses on autism



From left: Molly Losh, Elizabeth Norton, and Megan Roberts

A new School of Communication clinical collaborative tackling autism research and clinical advancements shared its findings—and the work of peers—on April 26 at the 2019 Lambert Family Communication Conference, “Understanding the Autism Spectrum: Clinical, Biological, and Cultural Perspectives.” Discussions ranged from how families cope with autism to the latest research about the autistic brain. Norris University Center was packed with clinicians, researchers, and autism-affected families eager to learn about breakthroughs—and barriers—to care.

“We realized there was a strong need for an integrative discussion forum to bring together some of the more important issues facing

individuals with autism,” says conference co-organizer Molly Losh, the JoAnn and Peter Dolle Chair in Learning Disabilities in the Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. The conference brought together experts in clinical, cultural, and biological areas of autism study “to help us generate ideas and create momentum to advance change in the research, treatment, and policy aspects that affect individuals with autism, their families, and their broader communities.”

With two colleagues—assistant professor Elizabeth Norton and Megan Roberts, the Jane Steiner Hoffman and Michael Hoffman Assistant Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders—Losh recently launched the Northwestern University Autism Research and Clinical Collaborative, which marries clinical work with research and education to improve outcomes for children and families affected by autism. “Understanding the Autism Spectrum,” which also served as this year’s CSD Connect alumni-professional gathering, provided a prime opportunity to broadcast the collaborative’s mission and invite leading voices to help guide the conversation.

Those voices included featured speakers Alison Singer, cofounder and president of the Autism Science Foundation; Sandy Magaña, autism and neurodevelopmental disabilities professor at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work of the University of Texas at Austin; Kevin Pelphrey, the Harrison-Wood Jefferson Scholars Foundation Professor at the University of Virginia School of Medicine; and Northwestern colleagues and regional advocacy partners.

Chicago fluency group kicks off programming

Clinicians, faculty, and graduate students gathered at the Northwestern University Center for Audiology, Speech, Language, and Learning (NUCASLL) in February for the inaugural meeting of the Chicago Fluency Interest Group.

The group’s purpose is to regularly review research in stuttering and other fluency disorders. These disorders tend to be complicated, affecting quality of life and defying easy treatment. A collaboration between NUCASLL and CHMELA Fluency Center, the interest group represents a significant step toward understanding and communicating more about fluency disorders.

Sarah Penzell, a lecturer in the Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, appreciates having a place to discuss the latest research. She says that the group “will keep me at the forefront, not just in literature, but also in utilizing the bank of knowledge that clinicians have.”

During the meeting, participants discussed the scope of the “fluency umbrella”—the complex and multifaceted nature of fluency disorders. They focused on topics they’d like to explore in more depth, including how to better involve families in the therapeutic process, how treating

multilingual patients presents complex challenges, how a stutter might affect a patient’s emotional well-being, and how clinicians might help fluency-issue patients navigate the modern world—including Siri, Alexa, and other artificial intelligence programs that often don’t allow users to pause during speech.

“When I was in school and early intervention, it was a little isolating, because no one knew how to work with fluency clients, so groups like these are extremely important,” says Megan Moriarty, a CSD lecturer. “Here, we can troubleshoot together.”

NU-Q students forge bonds in Evanston

Northwestern University in Qatar’s communication exchange and ambassador programs underscore NU-Q’s commitment to providing its students with a global education.

“I was in Evanston to welcome our ambassadors to campus and meet with the exchange students,” says Everett E. Dennis, NU-Q dean and CEO. “These programs allow our students to enjoy the benefits of attending a global university and also strengthen the ties between the Evanston and Doha campuses.”

This winter and spring, a dozen NU-Q communication exchange juniors spent two 10-week quarters on the home campus—taking courses, engaging in extracurricular activities, building connections with Evanston students, and sampling American culture.

Juniors Maha Essid, Wijdan Al-Khateeb, and Sahar ElKabash participated in events sponsored by Northwestern’s Muslim-cultural Students Association. Essid and Al-Khateeb were also involved with the Students for Justice in Palestine, a student, faculty, and community group dedicated to Palestinian rights and self-determination.

Noting Evanston students’ curiosity, ElKabash says, “We get to hear their opinions about our culture and countries.” Muhammad Humam, who took business classes to complement his studies in communication, played with Northwestern’s recently revived cricket club. “The club is improving,” he says, “and the attendance for our matches was great.”

For a week in early March, a separate delegation of NU-Q student ambassadors partnered with Evanston campus students, who took them to classes, popular eateries, and other social activities. NU-Q journalism student Saad Ejaz quickly discovered that he and radio/television/film major Miguel Aponte shared two key interests: filmmaking and HBO’s *Game of Thrones*.

“We’re increasingly a more global society,” Aponte says. “It’s one thing to think of other places as ‘that somewhere out there,’ and it’s another to have personal relationships with someone from somewhere else. You still share this common experience.”

NU-Q student ambassador Alreem Alkhatir says of the program, “It really helps having someone with you 24/7.” Tagging along with an Evanston student helped her “feel more comfortable. It was a positive experience for me.”

In late March, the NU-Q ambassadors reciprocated, playing host to their Evanston partners when those students visited Education City.

—Larry Greenberg





A scene from the stage musical *Monsoon Wedding*

Masi Asare (PhD, New York University) contributed lyrics for the Broadway-bound musical adaptation of the hit indie film *Monsoon Wedding*. As part of the process, Asare joined director Mira Nair and other members of the creative team last winter for a workshop in New Delhi.

Danielle Beverly (MFA, Columbia College) participated in a panel at the International Documentary Association's 2018 "Getting Real" industry conference in September. Moderated by radio/television/film professor **Marco Williams**, the panel "What Is the Value of a Film School Education" examined the pros and cons of obtaining a film degree for entry and success in the documentary field.



Southern Promises by **Thomas Bradshaw** (MFA, Brooklyn College)—pictured above

right with **David Tolchinsky**—enjoyed a six-week run at the Flea Theater in Los Angeles. Based on slave narratives, the 2008 play follows a dying plantation owner who wishes to free his slaves and whose wife's rejection of his decision causes the plantation to erupt in chaos. The production's cast consisted entirely of actors of color.



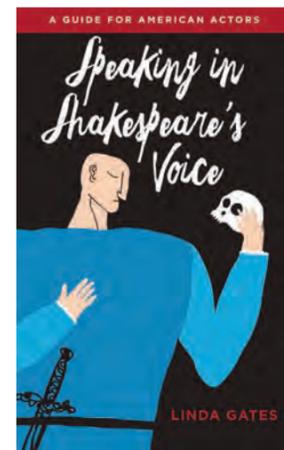
Aymar Jean Christian (PhD, University of Pennsylvania) hosted an April event at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago to celebrate the premieres of pilots and web series distributed on his OTV | Open Television digital platform. New series include *Damaged Goods* and *Good Enough*. As part of the festivities, Christian moderated Q&As with the shows' creators.

Tracy Davis (PhD, University of Warwick) was featured in the book *The Thespian's Bucket List* by Stacy Karyn. Founder of Theatre Trip, Karyn lists reading Davis's 1991 book *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* as one of 1,001 "Stagey Things to Do before Kicking the Bucket."



Leslie DeChurch (PhD, Florida International University) and **Noshir Contractor** (PhD, University of Southern California) (top above) presented their research on crew compatibility and teamwork for NASA's

projected Mars mission at the American Association for the Advancement of Science conference in February in Washington, DC. Early findings identifying the mission's weak spots attracted major media coverage and landed the pair's work in such publications as *The Economist* and *Science Daily*.



Linda Gates (MA, New York University) wrote *Speaking in Shakespeare's Voice: A Guide for American Actors*, published this spring by Northwestern University Press. The book is intended for undergraduate and graduate acting students as well as professionals wishing to perform Shakespeare with the skill of classically trained actors. It is also valuable for European actors interested in performing Shakespeare in American English and British actors who would like to explore Shakespeare from an American perspective. Focusing on breathing, resonance, diction, and other technical elements of voice and speech, the guide also provides an introduction to verse speaking and scansion and to Shakespearean rhetorical devices such as antithesis, alliteration, onomatopoeia, irony, metaphor, and wordplay.

Elizabeth Gerber (PhD, Stanford University) cohosted a Stanford University workshop with practitioners and academics last December on scaling design thinking. She is now working on an article detailing the findings for the *Sloan Management Review*. Design for America, the initiative she spearheaded, held an event in San Francisco last winter on the role of trust in design. The heads of design at Airbnb (which hosted the event) and Walmart spoke with the CEO of Artefact, a leading Seattle-based interaction design organization.

Twilight Bowl by **Rebecca Gilman** (MFA, University of Iowa) was performed at Chicago's Goodman Theatre February 8–March 10.

Cindy Gold (MFA, Professional Actor Training Program, Alabama Shakespeare Festival) appeared last spring in *The Cake*, directed by Lavina Jadhvani at Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota, Florida. This summer she will be seen at Wisconsin's Peninsula Players in an adaptation of the Agatha Christie novel *A Murder Is Announced*, directed by Joe Foust.



Kyle Henry (MFA, University of Texas, Austin) was selected as a 2019 Kaplan Fellow. This prestigious residency—juried by eminent humanities professors from beyond Northwestern—allows recipients either a full year's leave or a teaching reduction in order to develop their projects

within an interdisciplinary setting. Henry's project, the film *Eldercare* (below left), centers on the sometimes fraught relationships between eldercare workers and the families they care for.



Nina Kraus (PhD, Northwestern) continues to be in demand nationwide for keynote addresses. Recent highlights include "Teaching Music for Brain Health" at the Music Institute of Chicago, "Modulating from Arts Research to R&D" at the National Endowment for the Arts, "Music and the Mind" with celebrated soprano Renée Fleming at Chicago's Harold Washington Library Center, and a talk about Brain Awareness Week at the University of Chicago. She will continue to speak extensively through summer and fall.

Hamid Naficy (PhD, UCLA)—a well-known scholar on Iranian, postcolonial, and diaspora cinema—was the subject of a documentary that screened in February at the Gene Siskel Film Center and the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art. Maryam Sepehri's film *Mouth Harp in a Minor Key: Hamid Naficy on/ in Exile* contextualizes Naficy's many professional accomplishments within his personal experience as well as the political and social history of Iran and the United States. Additionally, *Iran Namag*, a leading Canadian bilingual Persian-English journal, will publish a fall special issue celebrating Naficy's career, publications, films, and caricatures.

Dassia Posner (PhD, Tufts University) was shortlisted for the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space Award for her book *The Director's Prism: E. T. A. Hoffmann and the Russian Theatrical Avant-Garde*.

Linda Roethke (MFA, University of Iowa) designed costumes for last spring's world premiere of *The Gods of Comedy*, directed by Amanda Dehnert at the McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton, New Jersey. Roethke also designed costumes for *Indecent* at Baltimore Center Stage.



Ariel Rogers (PhD, University of Chicago) wrote *On the Screen: Displaying the Moving Image, 1926–1942*, published this month by Columbia University Press. Rogers explores the role screens played at the height of classic Hollywood cinema—how filmmakers, technicians, architects, and exhibitors used a variety of screens within diverse spaces, including studio soundstages, theaters, homes, stores, and train stations.



Ozge Samanci (PhD, Georgia Institute of Technology) was the artist in residence at the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The March residency was cosponsored by the Squire Foundation. Samanci gave a talk for the UCSB Media Arts and Technology Seminar Series and used her observations of marine scientists' research processes to produce the media art installation *You Can't Unblink* for the art show *Sense of a Future Ocean* at Santa Barbara's SBCAST. The video of her interactive installation *You Are the Ocean* was featured by two art galleries, Brooklyn's Plexus Projects and Michigan's Ann Arbor Art Center. In April an exhibition in Berlin highlighted the creative process behind her graphic novel *Dare to Disappoint*.



Anna Shapiro (MFA, Yale School of Drama) will direct the Broadway-bound Elton John musical *The Devil Wears Prada*. Shapiro is the artistic director of Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre and the director of the School of Communication's new MFA program in acting.

Gail Shapiro (MFA, Yale School of Drama) plays the recurring role of Nurse Belinda on NBC's *Chicago Med*. She appeared at Chicago's Victory Gardens Theater June 7–July 7 in *I Forget*, directed by Devon DeMayo and written by Steven Levenson (a Tony Award winner for *Dear Evan Hansen*).



Billy Siegenfeld (MA, New York University) (above) is preparing *Democracy's Energy: Getting Down to Go Forward* for publication; the book focuses on Jump Rhythm Jazz Project, the performing and teaching company he founded and continues to lead as artistic director. His two-character play *What Do You Want to Be When You Give Up?* (subtitled *A play about letting go—with snatches of song, a handful of dances, rants about life, and impassioned appeals to both the moon and Jane Austen*) premiered at New York City's Mark O'Donnell Theater in March and will play in London this summer and Rhode Island this fall. Siegenfeld also staged the play, created its movement and vocal-rhythmic arrangements, and performs in it with longtime collaborator Jordan Batta (Co4).



Jake Smith (PhD, Indiana University) released his book *Esc* this spring on iTunes. An academic book reimaged as a podcast or audiobook, *Esc* is a work of experimental audio-based scholarship combining sound studies, radio history, and environmental criticism. This fully open-access digital suite of audiographic essays is presented as a 10-part podcast series combining spoken commentary, clips from classic radio dramas, excerpts from films and television shows, news reports, and the work of contemporary sound artists.

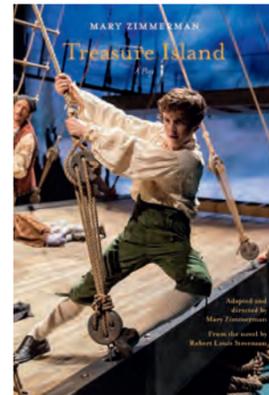
J.P. Sniadecki (PhD, Harvard) recently received an individual Graham Foundation Grant and was an invited visiting speaker at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston's Core Program. This summer he will be an artist in residence at the MacDowell Colony.

Ines Sommer (MFA, School of the Art Institute of Chicago) organized the inaugural Doc Chicago conference, which brought together filmmakers from Chicago's diverse documentary community. Featuring expert panels, a short docs program, community conversation, and networking, the free March event offered an opportunity for local documentary filmmakers to learn, exchange ideas, and connect.

Elizabeth Son (PhD, Yale University) is one of the inaugural recipients of the Mellon/American Council of Learned Societies Scholars & Society Fellowship. Made possible by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the fellowships offer opportunities for faculty who teach and advise PhD students to serve as ambassadors for humanities scholarship beyond the academy and to deepen support for doctoral curricular innovation on their campuses. During her fellowship year, Son will work on her second book, *Possessing History: Korean Diasporic Women and the Performance of Persistence*, while in residence at Chicago's KAN-WIN: Empowering Women in the Asian American Community.

David Tolchinsky (MFA, University of Southern California) coproduced the film *Creature Companion* with its director, former radio/television/film faculty member Melika Bass, and the Block Museum's Dan Silverstein. The film has been screened at the Florida Experimental Film and Video Festival (FlexFest) in Tampa in February; the

Images and Views of Alternative Cinema Film Festival in Nicosia, Cyprus, in February; Chicago's Onion City Film Festival in March; as part of *Gothic Fictions* at Pittsburgh's Silver Eye Center of Photography in March; and the Headroom Screening Series in Iowa City, Iowa, in April. In March, Tolchinsky gave the talk "Techniques and Trends in Movie/TV Dialogue" at the Prague Film School. *The Coming of Age*, which he wrote and produced, was screened at the Benton Park Film Festival in St. Louis.



Mary Zimmerman (PhD, Northwestern University) directed *The Music Man* for Chicago's Goodman Theatre this summer. Her oft-produced theatrical adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* was published this summer by Northwestern University Press. The adaptation marries Zimmerman's renowned energy and imagination with the larger-than-life tale of seafaring adventure.



AMTP focuses on mental health

Roger Ellis (MFA, San Diego State University) directed the American Music Theatre Project's May workshop performance of *Get Out Alive*, an autobiographical multimedia musical by Chicago-based artist and musician Nikki Lynette. With Ellis's guidance, what started out as a one-woman show was molded into a work that bridged performance art and more traditional music theatre—all with an undercurrent of mental health awareness.

"We developed this idea of the echoes (played by senior Marisol Beaufrand and junior Olivia Pryor) as different versions of her throughout her life," says Ellis. "It's through the act of recounting her story that she's able to understand herself. There's a great deal of content around the mental illness and trauma and abuse that she's endured, and finding ways to grow and move beyond those traumatic experiences and to put her pain into her art."

Get Out Alive signaled a departure for AMTP, which uses Northwestern talent to develop new works by emerging writers and composers. Ellis says that AMTP is always a place where artists can experiment, but Lynette's radical exploration of self and the show's striking audiovisual elements point to the future of the medium. "This was an opportunity for AMTP to expand its view of what a new musical can look like and bring the mental health conversation to campus in a new way," says AMTP producing director Brannon Bowers (C15). "Nikki activates and energizes conversations around mental health, abuse, trauma, suicide, and sexual assault specifically in communities of color, giving a voice to those who don't see themselves or their struggle represented in the media."

The opening of the piece kicked off Mental Health Awareness Month. Lynette also held a mental health awareness workshop for students.

Alumni achievements

Class notes are selected from stories of alumni featured in the media as identified by the University's Office of Alumni Relations and Development and updates sent to Dialogue by mail or by email at dialogue@northwestern.edu.

1940s

Peggy Helmerich (C48) was honored as Philanthropist of the Year by Oklahoma State University's Women for OSU on April 25.

1950s

Madeline Miles (GC55) received the 2019 B.E.A.C.O.N. Award. Recognizing enthusiastic advocacy for community and organizational needs, the award was presented by Beacon Light, an affiliate of Pennsylvania's Journey Health System.

1970s

Joanne Williams (C71) was honored at the 2017-18 Chicago/Midwest Regional Emmy Awards in the category of outstanding achievement for public/current/community affairs program/special for Milwaukee PBS's *Crossing the Bridge: A Black Nouveau Special*. She has hosted *Black Nouveau*

for six years. Previously she was an anchor, reporter, and community relations director at Milwaukee's WITI-Fox6. She is also producing the independent documentary film *Kaukauna & King: 50 Years Later*.

Louis Stein (C72) won a London Offie (Off-West) Award for best production for *Don't Stop Thinking about Tomorrow*, which looks at the issue of climate change through dance, monologue, and music. The production was designed by Will Fricker, an associate designer of the National Theatre's *War Horse*. Stein is the artistic director of leading London-based inclusive theatre company Chickenshed and the founder of London's internationally renowned Gate Theatre, which has helped launch the careers of such theatre and film luminaries as Jude Law, Hugh Grant, and Stephen Daldry.

Rocky Wirtz (C75) served on the transition team for recently elected Chicago mayor Lori Lightfoot as cochair of the economic development subcommittee.

Jay D. Stein (C78) has joined Bernstein Law Firm, a litigation and commercial practice.

1980s

Annbeth Eschbach (C81) is now the president of Kindbody, a women's healthcare start-up company. She is the founder and former CEO of Exhale Spa, which was sold to Hyatt Hotels in 2017.



David Kragseth (C81, GC86) was recently elected to the American Law Institute, founded in 1923 by prominent judges, lawyers, and academics to improve law and its administration in the United States.

Amy Zadeik Anderson (C82) was elected to the City Council of Logan, Utah, in 2018 and named 2019 Woman of the Year by Logan's Cache Valley Chamber of Commerce and Women in Business.

Denise Baba (C85) was named community engagement liaison for the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority in Portage County, Ohio.



Dennison Smith (C86) is an award-winning author, performer, and curator. Her published works include the novels *Scavenger* and *The Eye of the Day* (Harper Collins) and the poetry collections *Anon Necessity* and *Fermata* (Quattro). She recently completed her latest novel,

The Westward Hours, following three generations of women through the environmental and geopolitical devastation of climate change. In addition, she is founder and curator of the Baldwin, London's leading gallery and curatorial team representing contemporary fine art by indigenous North American artists.

Melissa Ross (C88) was recently named cohost of the statewide Florida public radio program *The Florida Roundup*. Heard across all major Florida media markets, the live call-in program features newsmakers and politicians discussing major issues affecting the Sunshine State. Ross also hosts the North Florida call-in show *First Coast Connect*.

1990s



Leelai Demoz (C90) has joined Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company as its new associate artistic director. In this role he will oversee and facilitate artistic operations while assisting artistic director Anna Shapiro in administrative and production work. Cofounder of Small Ax, a digital production company based in Venice, California, Demoz produced the film *Difret*, an award winner at the Sundance and Berlinale Film Festivals, and coproduced the Ladysmith Black Mambazo film *On Tip Toe*, nominated for an Academy Award and an Emmy Award. As an actor he has appeared on numerous Chicago stages as well as at the Kennedy Center, at London's National Theatre, and on Broadway.



Seana Kofoed (C92) wrote, produced, and starred in *30 Miles from Nowhere*, a thriller about old college friends gathering for a funeral and the spooky events that ensue during their stay at a nearby cabin. The film was coproduced by **Kelly Demaret (C93)**. **Rob Benedict (C93)** costarred, and his band, Loudon Swain, performed a song for the film; **Andrea Peterman (BSM93)** also contributed songs. The cast features the late **Roslyn Alexander (C46)**.



Mia McCullough (C92), a former School of Communication faculty member, is the writer of *The Haven*, a web series released on May 8 by assistant professor Aymar Jean Christian's OTV | Open Television. Inspired by McCullough's work at an area shelter, *The Haven* is a dramedy about a fictitious domestic violence shelter's staff and clients. It was shot in Chicago and Evanston with an all-local cast and crew that included associate producer **Grace Hahn (C16)**, editor **Marion Hill (C16)**, first assistant directors **Sophie Gordon (C17)** and **Troy Lewis (C17)**, colorist **Thomas Malosh (C18)**, and composer **Catherine Yang (C18)**.



Matthew Friedman (C93) edited Lulu Wang's film *The Farewell*, which premiered to critical acclaim this year at the Sundance Film Festival and was immediately picked up for distribution by A24. In addition to editing feature films, Friedman teaches advanced screen editing at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles.



Gabriella Santinelli (C93) coached actors Danielle Macdonald and Ashley Thomas for *Skin*, the 2019 Oscar-winning live-action short. She went on to work with Macdonald on the upcoming feature film *Skin*, which also stars Jamie Bell and Vera Farmiga. Santinelli recently joined the theatre faculty at USC's School of Dramatic Arts, teaching voice-over acting, advanced voice diction, and acting in English.

From left: Seana Kofoed, Kelly Demaret, Michael Ness, Andrea Peterman, Tom Mizer, Rob Benedict, Samantha Fuerbringer Stark, and Wendy Baldikoski at the premiere of *30 Miles from Nowhere*

Kimberly Williams-Paisley (C93) and her husband, musician Brad Paisley, broke ground last spring on a Nashville grocery store that provides free food to area residents struggling with hunger and food insecurity.



Kat Falls (GC94), an adjunct screenwriting lecturer in the Department of Radio/Television/Film, is the author of the young adult novel *Undaunted*, published last spring by Scholastic Press. It is the companion book to her dystopian romance *Inhuman*, which received rave reviews from *Publishers Weekly* and *School Library Journal* and was added to the Tome Student Literary Society "It List" for "clean" teen reads. Falls also wrote the undersea Western adventures *Dark Life* and *Rip Tide*, both also published by Scholastic Press.

David Gioiella (C95) and Mark Littman (WCAS93) were co-executive producers of the feature-length documentary *Chi-Town*, which follows basketball player Keifer Sykes from



his dazzling career at Marshall High School on Chicago's West Side to his improbable shot at the NBA. It premiered at SXSW in 2018, won the 2018 Black Harvest Film Festival's Audience Award at the Gene Siskel Film Center, and was an official selection at the Toronto Film Festival, among many other distinctions. *Chi-Town* is now available on Amazon Prime and iTunes.

Christopher R. Cowan (C97) joined the Butler Snow law firm in its Austin office. He was previously affiliated with Beck Redden.

David Levine (C97) is president of television at the entertainment company Anonymous Content, where he oversees television development and production. Levine spent the last 10 years at HBO, where as executive vice president and co-head of drama he oversaw such shows as *Game of Thrones*, *True Detective* (an Anonymous Content production), *Westworld*, *Sharp Objects*, and *True Blood*.

NUEA news

On December 7 **NUEA West** held a casual holiday party, the Fun & Festive Mixer, in Hollywood. The group held a networking night on April 14 in collaboration with the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles; NUEA provided discount tickets to members for all festival screenings as well as the closing night gala. On May 23 the group's Storytellers series continued, centering on the theme of breaks.

NUEA East is reorganizing and will have updates soon.

Alumni at the Tony Awards

The School of Communication was well represented on stage and behind the scenes at this year's Tony Awards ceremony on June 9. **Daniel Fish (C89)** was nominated for best direction of a musical for *Oklahoma!* (which won for best revival of a musical), and **Kristine Nielsen (C77)** was nominated for best featured actress in a play for *Gary: A Sequel to Titus Andronicus*. Additionally, *The Ferryman*—costarring **Brian d'Arcy James (C90)** and featuring **Fred Applegate (C77)**—won four awards, including best play. *The Cher Show*, directed by **Jason Moore (C93)**, won for best lead actress in a musical and best costume design in a musical. **Ruth Hendel (C75)** coproduced best-revival-of-a-play nominee *Burn This* and best-musical nominee *Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of the Temptations*. Two River Theatre, cofounded by **Bob Rehnitz (C54)**, is credited as a producer of *Be More Chill*, nominated for best original score.

Ian Thompson (C98) was appointed communications director for the Los Angeles City Controller, one of three citywide elected officials in the nation's second largest municipality.

Justin Donne (C99) has been appointed to the board of trustees of England's Autistic Nottingham. Also the East Midlands region's roundtable chairman, he serves on the Nottingham City Council Autism Strategy Board and the Greater Nottingham Committee for Light Rapid Transport. Donne designed and presented the well-received Autism Strategy 2018–20 for the Health and Well-Being Board. He is currently writing the book *To Lead Is to Teach: Significance, Impact, Contribution* and creating an information product for cat lovers.

2000s

Billy Eichner (C00) announced last winter that he will star in and cowrite a gay romantic comedy for Universal Pictures, a major step for underrepresented voices and a major studio development. Eichner's story will focus on two men with commitment issues who fall in love. Judd Apatow has signed on to produce the film, and Nick Stoller will direct. Eichner voices Timon in the remake of Disney's *The Lion King*.

Nick Guroff (C00) directs communications for International Rivers, a global river protection organization. He is also a part-time strategist with the watchdog group Corporate Accountability, where he spent the last 11 years as a deputy director overseeing development and communications.

Jennifer Bender (C01) is creating and developing new work as an independent producer with her company Quick Brown Fox Productions. She is also a creative development consultant for Lively McCabe Entertainment. Previously she served three years as the Araca Group's senior vice president of production and development.



Coya Paz Brownrigg (GC02, GC10) and **Chloe Johnston (GC06, GC11)** cowrote *Ensemble-Made Chicago: A Guide to Devised Theater*, published by Northwestern University Press. Spotlighting the work of many School of Communication alumni, the book profiles 15 Chicago theatre companies that

create devised performance—including Second City, Free Street Theater, and Lookingglass Theatre—and includes exercises from each. The book is aimed at artists, teachers, students, and Chicago theatre enthusiasts.

Nancy Spector (GC05) was appointed chair-elect of the board at WEDI, a nonprofit organization focused on using health information technology (HIT) to create efficiencies in healthcare information exchange. Spector is the coding and HIT advocacy director at the American Medical Association.

Wei Lin Wong (C05) is senior vice president of corporate strategy and development at Information Resources. He previously led the corporate strategy team for the company's North America business.

Miguel Jiron (C06) was a storyboard artist for the film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, which in February won an Academy Award for best animated feature film.

J. S. Puller (C07, SESP11) was honored by the 2019–20 Texas Bluebonnet Award Master List for his debut novel, *Captain Superlative*, which was listed as one of 20 books the state's schoolchildren are especially encouraged to read.



Elizabeth Polans (C08) was promoted to executive producer for season five of Lifetime's *The Rap Game*, starring Grammy Award winner and So So Def Recordings founder Jermaine Dupri. The season's guest stars included artists Will.I.Am, Lil Jon, Xscape, Killer Mike, Rapsody, and Jacquees. Additionally, Polans was selected as an official envoy for the American Film Showcase, the US State Department's premier arts exchange program.

The play *The Delays* by **Sarah Accuardi (C09)** premiered in January at Shoebox Theater in Portland, Oregon.

Diane Carol Harder (GC09) directed *Penny Foster*, a short film written by **America Michele Palacios (GC08)** that premiered in January at the National Screen Institute Online Short Film Festival.

Caitlin Kunkel (GC09) (see page 5) and **Jen Spyra (GC12)** (see page 10) were named to *Paste* magazine's March list of "Fifteen of the Best Humorists Writing Today."



Marc Underhill (C09) cowrote, produced, and edited *Auggie*, starring **Richard Kind (C78)** (above). The film premiered at Cinequest Film Festival, where

it was chosen as one of 15 can't-miss features. *Auggie* follows a newly retired husband and father who falls in love with an augmented reality companion that only he can see. Underhill and his filmmaking partners crowdfunded the film and later partnered with Strangely Compelling Multimedia.

2010s

Terrance Brown (GC11) was hired as a visiting professor of screenwriting at the University of Notre Dame.

Ilana Peña (C13) wrote the script for *Diary of a Female President*, which was given a 10-episode, straight-to-series order by Disney+, the Walt Disney Company's forthcoming direct-to-consumer streaming service.

Betsy Stewart (C14) played the role of Annette in the touring musical adaptation of the film *Cruel Intentions*. The tour's artistic team included director **Kenneth Ferrone (C04)** and music director and arranger **Zach Spound (C11)**. The original film was written and directed by **Roger Kumble (C88)**.

Nayna Agrawal (GC15) was selected as one of eight participants in the Disney ABC Television Writing Program. The one-year program helps emerging writers secure staffing assignments via Disney-ABC series. She recently became a

staff writer for ABC's new hour-long romantic comedy series *The Baker and the Beauty*.

Plano, a play by **Will Arbery (GC15)** about a family stricken with a series of strange plagues, received an encore off-Broadway run last spring. His play *Heroes of the Fourth Turning*—about four young Wyoming conservatives clashing at a backyard party—was selected for Playwrights Horizons' 2019–20 season.

Zachary Piser (C15) was cast as the alternate for the role of Evan in the Toronto production of *Dear Evan Hansen*.

Shuhan Fan (GC16) and **Luther Clement (GC17)**, alumni of the MFA program in documentary media, codirected *Stay Close*, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival's short documentary competition last winter. Coproduced by **Nevo Shinaar (GC17)** and **Ashley Brandon (GC17)**, the film featured music composed by **Summer Lin (GC18)**.

Jessie Pinnick (C16) was cast as Samantha "Sammy" Bennett in *Happy Accident*, a forthcoming ABC single-camera comedy pilot from the writers of *Modern Family*. She was also cast in *Her Smell*, starring Elizabeth Moss. Pinnick played the title role in *Princess Cyd*, a critically acclaimed indie film written, directed, and coproduced by School of Communication lecturer Stephen Cone.

Clarifications

In the summer 2018 issue, the article "The Black Student Theatre Experience" detailed a 1972 trip to Joliet Prison during which the student group Black Folks Theatre performed for inmates. As mentioned, the show was directed by Renee Ward; the group was cofounded by **Eileen Cherry Chandler (C73)**. In the winter 2019 article "Bridging the Word Gap: Helping Children's Language Development," the founders of Language Empowers All People (LEAP) are credited with creating their Beginning with Babble app; it was developed by a team that also included **John Lybolt (C69, GC70, GC77)** and Josh Holton.

It started on stage



When **Charlotte Booker (C74)** was a student, she played the role of Irene Malloy in *The Matchmaker* opposite Mark Nutter (center), a Loyola University student taking summer theatre courses at Northwestern, and **James Goode (C76)**. Now a New York actress, Booker crossed paths with Nutter again 38 years later when the Los Angeles-based comedy writer and composer traveled east for work. After Facebook friending and a glass of wine, a new match was made. Booker and Nutter will be married on New Year's Eve this year, 45 years after sharing the stage outside Annie May Swift Hall. Booker gives a lot of credit to Janet Olson of the Northwestern University Archives for providing a production photo she had requested. She says Nutter was visibly touched when she gave it to him, asking, "How do we get the other guy out of the picture?"—which sealed the deal.

Nikki Yeboah (GC16) is a professor at San Jose State University. Her play about police brutality, *The (M)others*, was recently performed in Sarasota after productions in Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Jose.



Ryan Martin (C17) wrote and composed *The Incredible 6,000-Foot Ladder to Heaven*, which premiered in February at the Chicago Music Theatre Festival. Directed by **Elliott Hartman (C17)** and costarring **Rachel Guth (C18)**, the comedy-drama was first performed in 2018 on campus as a staged reading by the Purple Crayon Players.

Sebastian Pinzon Silva (GC17) and current MFA in documentary media candidate Milton Guillen have been selected as Diverse Voices in Documentary fellows. The mentorship and development program for documentary filmmakers of color is offered by Kartemquin Films and the Community Film Workshop of Chicago.

Adrian Alea (GC18) is the associate director for the Public Theater's new stage adaptation of Disney's *Hercules*, the final show of its Summer in the Park series. The production marks the first collaboration by New York's Public Theater (birthplace of *A Chorus Line* and *Hamilton*) with Disney. The show will run August 31 to September 8 at Central Park's Delacorte Theatre.

Russell Gillespie (GC18) composed the theme for the *New Yorker's* podcast *Politics and More* and created the music and sound design for *Richie Beyond*, an animated short by Northwestern radio/television/film graduates.



D. Charles “Chuck” Whitney, professor emeritus of communication studies and the School of Communication’s former associate dean for faculty and graduate affairs, died February 9 at age 72 in Evanston. Whitney enjoyed a long and prestigious career in academia, researching and publishing works about the sociology and social history of mass communicators as well as taking

on leadership roles and a key Northwestern international initiative.

David Charles Whitney was born in 1946, in Asheville, North Carolina, and grew up in Clemson, South Carolina, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in English at Clemson University. He earned a doctorate in mass communication at the University of Minnesota, where he met Ellen Wartella. They married in 1976.

The two embarked on joint academic careers extending more than four decades: at Ohio State University (Whitney in journalism, Wartella in communication); for more than a decade at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s Institute of Communication Research; for 11 years at the University of Texas at Austin (Whitney in journalism, Wartella as dean of the College of Communication); and at the University of California, Riverside (Whitney as chair of the creative writing department, Wartella as provost). They came to Northwestern in 2010.

In 2015 Whitney moved to Doha, Qatar, to serve as associate dean of academic affairs for Northwestern’s Middle East campus. He retired and returned to the United States in 2017.

Whitney is survived by Wartella, the Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani Professor of Communication, as well as his son David and his brother John Barry Whitney III. He is predeceased by his parents, his brother Robert Krehl Whitney, and his son Stephen Wright Whitney (GC16).

Boyer Jarvis (GC58), dedicated activist and professor and administrator at the University of Utah for more than three decades, died March 28 at age 95. Jarvis started at the university as a teaching assistant, then became an assistant professor of speech, and in 1967 was named a full professor. He held administrative posts as well, including associate vice president of academic affairs from 1967 to 1988. Passionate about civic activism, Jarvis was a founding member of the Utah Citizens’ Counsel, which advised on such matters as congressional redistricting. He was also active with the YWCA’s Utah chapter, ACLU Utah, the NAACP’s Salt Lake City branch, the Utah Heritage Foundation, the Salt Lake City Library, the local chapter of Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG), and more. He is survived by his wife, Pat, whom he married in 1955, as well as his two sons, a daughter, eight grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, and five of his seven siblings.

Harriet S. Gaston (C46) on April 24 at age 95 in Kalamazoo, Michigan

Roslyn (Alexander) Grodzin (C46) on May 30 at age 94 in Chicago

Eunice Uebele Snyder (C47) on December 23 at age 92 in Spokane, Washington

Cecelia Woolley Goodwin (C48) on February 13 at age 92 in Oklahoma City

Marguerite W. Perkins-Mautner (C48) on April 15 at age 92 in Los Angeles

Barbara L. Hardy (C49) on January 17 at age 92 in Evanston

William A. Heller (C49) on March 15 at age 91 in Atherton, California

Elizabeth J. Matthews (C49) on December 28 at age 92 in Chester, Virginia

James D. Ryan (C49) on February 7 at age 91 in Lombard, Illinois

Robert O. Weiss (GC49, GC54) on January 31 at age 92 in Greencastle, Indiana

Nels Arnold (C50) on January 3 at age 91 in Fairview, North Carolina

John L. Regenmorter (C50, GC53) on March 5 at age 94 in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Anne Whipple Murphey (GC52) on January 28 at age 91 in Macon, Georgia

Richard B. Salzberg (C52, GC53) on January 17 at age 88 in Sierra Madre, California

M. Claudine Vignery (GC52) on April 5 at age 93 in St. Louis

Barbara J. Baker Sillars (C53) on March 3 at age 87 in Wilmington, North Carolina

Mary-Lou Rude Leidheiser (GC54) on April 8 at age 88 in Glenview, Illinois

James R. Mitchell (C54, L57) on December 28 at age 85 in Valparaiso, Indiana

Lynn W. Sherman (C54, GC55) on January 11 at age 85 in Salem, Massachusetts

Mary Jo Alexander (C55) on February 15 at age 85 in Newton, Massachusetts

Rush K. Evans Jr. (C55) on March 3 at age 87 in Bryan, Texas

John L. Goodman (C59) on January 1 at age 81 in Sarasota, Florida

George M. Lehr (C59) on March 14 at age 87 in Erie, Pennsylvania

Joyce C. Thorn (C59) on January 3 at age 81 in Denver

Mary-Stuart Carruthers (GC61) on April 7 at age 81 in Rockford, Illinois

Peggy Blomquist (GC62) on November 14 at age 85 in Frederick, Maryland

Barbara Nickolich (GC63) on February 9 at age 92 in Charlotte, North Carolina

Michael Munday (C71) on January 27 at age 69 in Tucson

Jennifer Adams Kelley (C85) on February 26 at age 55 in Skokie, Illinois

Heidi Kugler-O’Connor (C87, GC91) on April 20 at age 54 in Lake Oswego, Oregon

Nancy K. Smith (GC91) on March 24 at age 67 in Anderson, Indiana

Maxwell Saines (C13) on June 7 at age 28 in Chicago

Commemorating radio pioneers

In 1930, three housewives with folksy Midwestern accents triggered a comedy movement. *Clara, Lu ‘n’ Em*, the first-ever radio soap opera, debuted on Chicago’s WGN and soon after moved to NBC and a national audience. Its three leads—Isobel Carothers as Lu, Helen King as Em, and Louise Starkey as Clara—would gossip in character about family, friends, and current events, all with funny malapropisms and mispronunciations that endeared them to an audience weary from the economic and social anguish of the Great Depression.

The irony, of course, is that these small-town housewives were enterprising Northwestern School of (then) Speech graduates and Zeta Phi Eta sorority sisters who wrote their own scripts, negotiated their own contracts, and understood before most of their contemporaries how to leverage humor in a new media frontier—a male-dominated frontier, at that.

The women—or “the girls” as they were better known—wrote five shows per week and juggled in-person appearances with marriages and growing families. The show’s first sponsor was Super Suds dishwashing detergent, and in 1932 Colgate-Palmolive-Peet, the parent company, moved their show’s time slot from late night to midmorning. This move tapped into their target “housewife” audience via 42 stations and gave rise to the term “soap opera.”

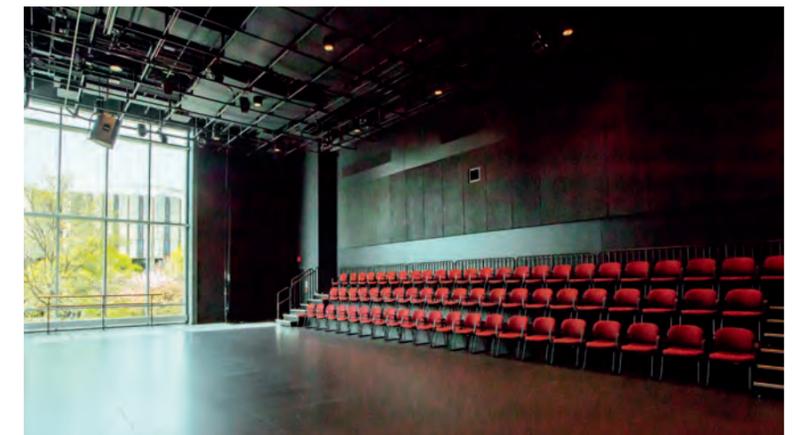
Isobel Carothers (C26) married **Howard Berolzheimer (C23, GC25)**, a Northwestern professor and debate coach, and they had a son, David. But after Isobel Berolzheimer died unexpectedly of pneumonia in 1937, the show went off the air. The surviving women attempted a reboot years later, but it didn’t last.

David Berolzheimer, in memory of Isobel Carothers Berolzheimer, gifted the School of Communication with a remembrance of his mother and her friends’ extraordinary legacy. The new second-floor black box space in the Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts is now the Clara, Lu ‘n’ Em Theater.

The flexible space, which was part of a Wirtz Center addition completed in 2016, seats up to 100 and features a 24-foot ceiling and a structural grid for dance activities and aerial work. The black box theater provides a space where students can strive for the same level of innovative, collaborative work that was the hallmark of Isobel Berolzheimer and her fellow alumnae.

Sadly, David Berolzheimer passed away May 17, before he could see the space with its new name. The school is honored to be the recipient of Berolzheimer’s generosity and deeply touched to memorialize the wonderful contributions of both mother and son.

Photos and history courtesy of Northwestern University Archives



Top: Isobel Carothers and Howard Berolzheimer with their son, David
Bottom: Clara, Lu ‘n’ Em Theater



Northwestern University
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