It's curtains for construction!

Late last fall, the School of Communication put the finishing touches on the Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Center for Performing and Media Arts, located in Abbott Hall on Northwestern’s Chicago campus. The 24,000-square-foot center occupies space on the first, mezzanine, and second floors of the historic art deco building.

Wirtz Chicago, as it’s become known colloquially, will be the creative hub for the school’s suite of MFA and professional programs in acting, stage design, directing, sound arts and industries, documentary media, and writing for screen and stage. The state-of-the-art facility is designed for a unique combination of performance and instruction and includes multiuse black box spaces (with one equipped for film screenings), a lobby and gallery space, teaching studios, a computer lab, a design studio, a green room, and administrative offices.

A result of a yearslong effort to expand interdisciplinary graduate programming and develop partnerships with established Chicago arts stalwarts and audiences, Wirtz Chicago was made possible by a generous donation from William Rockwell “Rocky” Wirtz (C75), University trustee and member of the school’s National Advisory Council, and his wife, Marilyn. Like its counterpart center in Evanston, Wirtz Chicago is named for Rocky’s grandmother Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz (24), an enthusiastic patron of the arts.

“Marilyn and I are proud to honor my grandmother’s love of theatre and Northwestern through our support of the new center downtown,” he says. “The School of Communication now has the opportunity to expand its graduate education programs and fully integrate itself with Chicago’s vibrant performing arts scene.”
In African American religious culture, there is a formulaic trope known as the call story. Narratives spun by preachers about the moments in their lives when they were called to preach, call stories typically involve a crisis—a near-death experience, the loss of a loved one, a low point in one’s life—when a higher power speaks to and calls the person into service. Over the years, I’ve heard many a call story from preachers whose rousing sermons crescendo with tales of sitting down by a riverside, a tree, a rock, or some other majestic natural formation while reckoning with their past and contemplating their future, being pressed by some otherworldly force to step up, speak out, and stand firm in the obligation to spread the good news—to heed the call.

My call story is less dramatic and perhaps even a bit banal, but nonetheless just as compelling. It all began on a cold but sunny January 14, 2020, when I received a call—not from God, but from the WittKieffer search firm, about an “opportunity.” Turns out that the opportunity was becoming a candidate for the deanship of the School of Communication. I took the call as a courtesy but quickly rebuffed the caller, providing a laundry list of reasons why I was not interested and how I was enjoying my sabbatical. The voice on the other end of the line listened patiently to my travails before posing one haymaker question: “Are you at a point in your career where you are simply interested in accumulating more accolades, doing your own research, and performing, or are you at a point where you want to support the careers of others?” I was gobsmacked by the question—and a little offended by what I believed was a false binary—and responded accordingly:

(Clutching my pearls) “I’ve never been only interested in my own career. I’ve always been a big-tent person.” (Silence) “Okay, then,” the caller said. “That’s information for you as you ponder this opportunity.” Still, I stated my disinterest and indicated that I would not be applying. Yet the question haunted me.

Fast forward six weeks later. I was in Sydney, Australia, on my annual writing retreat. I got another call, this time from the head of the firm, who just wanted to chat once more about the opportunity because the window for submitting a letter of interest was closing. “People who pursue these leadership roles typically shouldn’t have them,” the head of the firm shared. “But people like you, who are discerning and have done a lot of self-reflection, should at least go through the process. It doesn’t mean you’ll get the job, and if you get the offer it doesn’t mean that you have to take it. But you’ll never know unless you go through the process. You don’t want to look back and regret not at least exploring this opportunity.” Only an agent of God could be so crafty with that one provocation. Needless to say, I took the bait.

We all know well what happened next. As I was interviewing for this position, we devolved into an economically devastating global health crisis, a stark national reckoning with anti-Black racism, continuous attacks on election integrity and democratic norms, and a swelling distrust of the truth. The prospect of leading this school through a series of ongoing catastrophes had me feeling like my call story was out of sequence—my crisis came after the call. And as I became more and more overwhelmed and angry at this cruel joke the universe had played on me, the voice of my grandmother came to me in an almost inaudible whisper: “Be still, chile, and know.” And in the quietude of my own self-pity, I had to wrestle with knowing that I had no right to complain, that I had been called for a reason, and that, indeed, my 20 years at Northwestern had prepared me for this moment. The barrage of challenges crystallized my convictions, and I found that what I wanted for the school—a more equitable distribution of opportunities and resources for our students; better racial and ethnic representation among students, faculty, and staff; a culture of support, encouragement, and mentorship; and a chance to heal from the inside out—was exactly what we needed, what I needed.

Since it was announced last June that I would be the seventh dean of the School of Communication, I have been overwhelmed by your support and encouragement. Our National Advisory Council greeted me with open (virtual) arms and has pledged to assist me as we put diversity, equity, and inclusion at the forefront of our work (see page 8). Our alumni, who saturate all industries, have been reaching out to connect more with our students and faculty, some of whom you’ll meet in this issue. Those folks who have become disengaged from or disenchanted with our school will, I hope, read a little about me and where I come from (see page 2) and consider reconnecting. I want anyone who identifies as a member of an underrepresented group to know that we’re doing the hard work of confronting past sins, holding ourselves accountable, and taking decisive steps toward making this school stronger—especially for our Black students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

This issue highlights them—us—and makes a demonstrative statement that we’re building a community keen on amplifying voices so often silenced, perspectives historically ignored, and differences rarely celebrated. This year has forced us to be a new kind of school, but we are choosing to be a better one. Indeed, we are heeding the call and taking advantage of the opportunity.

E. Patrick Johnson  
Dean, School of Communication  
Annenberg University Professor
The youngest of seven children in a Hickory, North Carolina, home, Elondust Patrick Johnson found peaceful abundance in staying close to his single mother’s side. He listened to her hard-won wisdom as she laid the studious, observant foundation for his lifelong pursuit of art and scholarship. He listened to his grandmother—the granddaughter of an enslaved man—who had learned how to navigate a world hostile to her existence. He listened, skeptically, to his first-grade teacher in a newly integrated school when her thinly veiled racism leached out. He listened to legions of others—Black, gay, Southern men; Black, queer, Southern women; domestic workers; gospel musicians; theorists; practitioners; and anyone else with a story to tell—and he helped them tell it. His listening was radical and revelatory.
“I’m doing research that in my mind is elevating the voices of people who don’t get a chance to speak and who don’t get to be in spaces like the ones we are in, these elite institutions,” Johnson says. “I want to give them that platform, and I also want to bring them into the conversation.”

After decades of scholarship—particularly ethnography—and much of it at Northwestern, Johnson last summer became the seventh dean of the School of Communication. The first Black dean in the school’s history, he is now hard at work listening to the needs of the community.

“I know that I wasn’t supposed to be here, and I know that many folks before me worked very hard so that people like me could enter these spaces, and I don’t take that for granted,” he says. “But I take my background into all the spaces I am in—and the values that were instilled in me based on my experiences. And what I am committed to doing in elite spaces is wealth redistribution. So I’m inviting people to campus who don’t necessarily have access to the resources of Northwestern—students of color, Black students, queer students. It’s important that our presence be made known. I’m really committed to opening the door for more people like me to come in.”

Hickory, a small city in western North Carolina, was segregated when Johnson was growing up. White families lived on one side of the train tracks dividing the town, Black families on the other. Johnson recalls sitting in the Black section of the local movie theater as well as the feeling he got when heading to the other side of the tracks. His mother taught her children to pay attention, obey the rules, and keep an eye out. “Our entire body language would change,” he says.

But in Ridgeview, the Black neighborhood, he felt safe, beloved, and appreciated. He discovered African American theatre and poetry at the Ridgeview Community Center, a sense of belonging at community fish fries, a reverence for God—and inimitable style—at church, and an extended family in the network of mothers who looked after their friends’ children. Johnson also nurtured his love for learning, first with a set of secondhand encyclopedias his mother received from a family for whom she worked, but also in school, where teachers—some of whom were stifling their own racism—recognized Johnson as the bright, high-achieving, musical student he so unabashedly was.

“My mother never finished high school, and the interesting thing about that is she is probably one of the smartest people I know,” Johnson says of his mother, Sarah, who died in 2019. “She was an organizer, she was an archivist, she kept things in

“I’m inviting people to campus who don’t necessarily have access to the resources of Northwestern. I’m really committed to opening the door for more people like me to come in.”
order, and I got a lot of that from her. And the other thing she always stressed to all of her children was education.”

Johnson complied, but unconventionally. He earned stellar grades, developed his musicianship, and was elected senior class president in high school. But along the way he experimented with his education, delivering assignments in forms they were never meant to take and planting the seeds for his unique brand of performance scholarship. Attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was Johnson’s longtime dream—in fact, it was the only college to which he applied. He started out as a theatre major, but a work-study job landed him in the department of speech communication, where he discovered the major in oral interpretation, the precursor to what is now performance studies.

“I fell in love with adapting literature for the stage. And then when performance studies emerged and ethnography and oral history became part of the field, I was really fascinated with that,” he says. “I think I took twice the number of courses I needed for the major, because I just loved it.”

Even in those early days at UNC, Northwestern connections began to coalesce. Among Johnson’s influential professors was D. Soyini Madison (GC89), the former chair of the Department of Performance Studies in the School of Communication (and who recently retired as a professor). Johnson also worked with Della Pollock (C80, GC81, GC86) on her show based on oral histories of Southern cotton mill workers. And later, when Johnson was earning his doctoral degree at Louisiana State University, Ruth Bowman (C79, GC82, GC92) served as his dissertation adviser. Madison, Pollock, and Bowman had all been students of Dwight Conquergood, the former professor and performance studies department chair at Northwestern who later hired Johnson and became his mentor. Before he died, Conquergood appointed Johnson as his literary executor to publish his collection of essays, which Johnson did in 2014.

“There was a legacy I was following,” he says.

Johnson was accepted to Northwestern’s performance studies doctoral program, but at the time, full funding was not available to graduate students. He chose LSU and continued his research in oral history and ethnography, turning his focus back to those from whom he first learned the power of authentic, engaged story gathering: his family in Hickory.

“For years I told stories about my grandmother and about my mother, and it was D. Soyini Madison who said to me, ‘You should be writing about your grandmother,’” Johnson recalls.

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“For my dissertation, I focused on my grandmother’s oral history as a live-in domestic for 18 years with the same family. I decided to go live with her over several summers and collect her oral history. I framed it in the context of Black feminism, because it was from my grandmother that I learned strategies about how to survive being a Black person in the United States, but she also gave me strategies for how to be a better person, how to be humble, and how to be a scholar.

“She taught me how to focus on discernment and discerning a situation, which is the key to being an ethnographer—not being the center of focus, but actually sitting back and observing, watching, trying to understand people, listening carefully to others,” he says. “And my grandmother was a master at that
because she had to be as a woman of her generation. She was born in 1914 and was raised by her grandfather, who had been enslaved, and she understood what it was going to take to survive being who she was in the world. She understood that sometimes you have to be quiet, pay attention, observe, and then make your move, as opposed to reacting constantly."

Before earning his doctorate in 1996, Johnson received a dissertation fellowship at Amherst College that eventually led to a tenure-track position in the English department. But in 2000 he moved to Northwestern and its performance studies department, the wellspring of his college mentorships and what would become his scholarly home. In 2003 he earned tenure and a joint appointment in the African American studies department in Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences and was named director of graduate studies for performance studies. In 2006 he became the latter department’s chair, and in 2012 he launched the Black Arts Initiative (now the Black Arts Consortium), his interdisciplinary collective of Black Northwestern scholars and artists.

“One of the reasons I’ve stayed at Northwestern over these last 21 years is because of the community that I have. I could not be who I am today without working in community,” he says. “What’s exciting for me in this role as dean is that I get to use this wonderful platform to build community and make it even stronger, through such actions as an investment in collaborative learning.”

His community-building and collaboration started much earlier, though, through his research. In 2003 Johnson published the first of many books, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*, winner of both the Lilla A. Heston and Errol Hill Awards. In 2008 he published *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South—An Oral History*, which would become his flagship, multimodal research and performance enterprise. The idea came to him in 1995, when he attended a cookout in Washington, DC, for an outreach group dedicated to Black men living with HIV and AIDS. After talking with them, he realized their stories had been a largely ignored part of the American narrative. Johnson homed in on these Southern voices and documented their triumphs and struggles in a 600-page volume, which was recognized as a Stonewall Honor Book by the LGBT Round Table of the American Library Association. Nonetheless, he knew that so much of the power and vulnerability of these men came through their cadences, verbal tics, and body language, which couldn’t be fully expressed on the page. The project evolved into *Pouring Tea*, a performance piece that Johnson has presented at colleges and for communities more than 150 times. In 2009 it took yet another form—the full-length *Sweet Tea—The Play*, which won the Black Theatre Alliance Award for best solo performance.

Last year Johnson, with Stephen Lewis, his husband and partner of 22 years, and codirector John L. Jackson (see page 13) released the documentary *Making Sweet Tea*, which follows Johnson as he reconnects with some of the men and performs their own stories for them. Johnson calls the process a labor of
love, but also a necessary step in understanding an important element of the American experience—and Johnson’s own experience as well.

“My impulse was always to run in the other direction from that, because as a scholar I wanted the focus to be on my interlocutors, not me,” he says. “But everyone said to me, ‘What’s interesting is the relationship of the men’s stories to you. You are a Southern, Black, gay man, and your relationship with these men is important—and so is your story.’ But I went kicking and screaming.”

Making Sweet Tea has picked up multiple awards on the festival circuit, and its producers are looking into streaming options. Johnson has written numerous other books, chapters, and scholarly articles, all pinpointing and elevating populations otherwise ignored or misunderstood, such as Black, queer, Southern women. His successes in these endeavors have earned him myriad accolades, including induction in 2020 into the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences. And his desire to seek out historically silenced voices has in fact become his top priority for strengthening the School of Communication.

“Northwestern has a history of valuing creative scholarship, collaboration, and engagement, so the bones are good, so to speak,” he says. “But my intention for the school is to foster equitable access and achievement, diversity of background and thought, a foot in the door, and a seat at the table. I feel an obligation to make sure that I’m not the last person of color or queer or first-generation college student to sit in this role. And I will lay any kind of groundwork to ensure that is the case. I’m here to listen and to lead.”

AWARDS AND HONORS

- 2020 American Academy of Arts and Sciences inductee
- Audience Choice Award for Best Documentary Feature at the Kansas City Film Festival
- Bert Williams Award for Best Solo Performance from the Chicago Black Theater Alliance
- Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame inductee
- Errol Hill book award
- Hurston/Wright Legacy Award finalist
- Judges Choice Documentary at the Longleaf Film Festival
- Lambda Literary LGBTQ Studies Book Award and LGBTQ Anthology Award finalist
- Leslie Irene Coger Award for Outstanding Contributions to Performance from the National Communication Association
- Lilla A. Heston Award for Outstanding Scholarship in Interpretation and Performance Studies
- Publishing Triangle Judy Grahn Award for Lesbian Nonfiction finalist
- Randy Majors Memorial Award for Outstanding Contributions to LGBT Scholarship in Communication
- Rene Castillo Otto Award for Political Theater
- Stonewall Book Award Honor Book from the LGBT Round Table of the American Library Association
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and INCLUSION in SOC

Northwestern’s School of Communication enjoys a reputation as a global leader in the communication arts and sciences, with alumni, faculty, and students who excel at the top of their fields. Yet the recent national conversation around anti-Black racism and injustice, when viewed through the lens of our community’s many achievements, shows us that access to our resources and opportunities for advancement are not equal—not on the national level, and certainly not at the university and school level.

I am making the pursuit of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) a central tenet of my deanship. Expanding access to opportunities, thinking critically about our established curriculum and its implications, engaging in thoughtful conversations with scholars outside the academy, and pushing for institutional change are to the benefit of everyone, but especially our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) community of students, faculty, and staff who have long been kept at the margins.

By elevating and committing to celebrate the voices of this community, we will shift not only the school’s culture but also the functions of the professions we study, our government, and society at large. The School of Communication will be a leader in systemic change.

It is through the following initiatives as well as ongoing evaluation of our work in this space that I hope to create a school that leads not only through our achievements but also through the breadth of voices actualizing our excellence.

By E. Patrick Johnson
DEAN’S INITIATIVES

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force  Our newly launched school-wide task force includes students, faculty, and staff charged with ensuring that we all embrace the urgency of this moment, that we communicate constructively, that we listen and learn, and that we are prepared to do the work of authentic, impactful diversity, equity, and inclusion. The group will work in consultation with leadership and staff in the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion to create and implement best practices for the school.

Black Arts Consortium  Formerly the Black Arts Initiative, my flagship multidisciplinary collaborative of Northwestern Black artists and scholars is growing. We now have space to work, meet, and perform on the 18th floor of Abbott Hall on the Chicago campus. Longtime BAC contributor and professor Ivy Wilson (right) is our new director, and Sheridan Tucker Anderson is our new assistant director. BAC offerings will include expanded programming, more artist residencies, more on-campus and virtual screenings of Black films, additional Black Arts in the City excursions, and new undergraduate and graduate opportunities.

Dialogue with the Dean  To raise the visibility of the dean’s office and, in many instances, to keep the DEI conversation moving forward, I am hosting quarterly events with scholars and art makers from both inside and well beyond the University. At the inaugural dialogue in October, I was joined by John L. Jackson, dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and codirector of my documentary, Making Sweet Tea. The conversation explored media making as a form of community building and knowledge production and the impact of mass media on urban life (see page 13). The second dialogue, on February 18, welcomes Ruha Benjamin, professor of African American studies at Princeton University and founder of the Ida B. Wells Just Data Lab; on April 22, the third event will...
feature Safiya Noble, an associate professor at UCLA and author of *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*.

**David Mancosh Pathways to the Professoriate Postdoctoral Fellowship Fund** I am creating a pipeline for Northwestern postdoctoral scholars to advance seamlessly into tenure-track faculty positions here—a program that will be the first of its kind at the University. This will allow us to support efforts to search for and hire BIPOC and intersectional scholars while also ensuring these candidates feel at home and empowered in our school. (See page 37.)

**CommFutures: The SoC Mentoring and Development Initiative** While an invitation to teach in the School of Communication is a coveted honor, for postdoctoral fellows, PhD candidates, and early-career faculty, the process can be fraught with questions about resources, pathways to advancement, and research funding. To address these concerns, we launched a program of conversations and workshops to provide guidance and support to those just beginning their university teaching journeys. This will establish a culture of equity and accessibility across all ranks and contribute to extraordinary learning outcomes for our students.

**Associate dean for external affairs** I am pleased to introduce our community to Roderick Hawkins, the new associate dean for external affairs and my chief of staff. He joined us last August from his post as communications director at the education nonprofit Advance Illinois and was previously deputy chief of staff for public engagement for former Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel (GC85). Hawkins has extensive experience in civic engagement, communications, and advocacy. I am thrilled that he will be assisting me in enacting our agenda and strategic priorities, DEI being top among them. Since his arrival, his impact on our workplace culture and productivity has been refreshingly positive.
Staff advisory board To ensure that our staff recognizes its role in furthering the school’s excellence, I will be assembling an advisory board to explore ways to facilitate pathways to promotion, including mentorship and professional development opportunities.

Antiracist syllabus statement The dean’s office is working with departments to develop a statement that will convey in no uncertain terms the urgency of creating a supportive and inclusive community and ensuring that we are committed to dismantling systemic racism and injustice from the inside out.

SCHOOLWIDE EVENTS AND GUESTS

Hope Abelson Artists
This academic year we welcome two distinguished artists to guest-teach classes and speak to our community. In the fall, we hosted Moisés Kaufman (right), the prolific Venezuelan theatre maker and 2016 recipient of the US National Medal of Arts. In the winter, we’ll be joined by Michael R. Jackson (right), a playwright, composer, and lyricist and the creator of A Strange Loop, winner of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Kelsey Pharr Jr. Speaker Series Spearheaded by theatre faculty Masi Asare and Roger Ellis, the series hosts artist-scholars who represent diversity and inclusion in the performing and media arts. In October, our inaugural speaker was award-winning theatre artist Lili-Anne Brown, who joined us virtually (see below). In winter we will welcome director Jess McLeod (GC14), followed by composer Brian Quijada in the spring. The series is named for Kelsey Pharr Jr., who was among the first Black actors to grace a Northwestern stage. The son of a Miami civil rights leader, Pharr performed in The Waa-Mu Show in 1937 and 1939, was featured in four Broadway shows, and achieved great musical success with the Delta Rhythm Boys.

LILI-ANNE BROWN

For the inaugural event of the Kelsey Pharr Jr. Speaker Series, Brown (C95), the former artistic director of Bailiwick Chicago whose work has appeared at the Goodman and Steppenwolf Theatres, discussed a wide range of issues—from her experience as the only Black woman in her performance studies graduating class at Northwestern to how to move the needle on representation and inclusion in theatre.

“I found out a Black musical had never been done at Northwestern, and I was like, ‘What? No!’” she said. “I mean, I should’ve known that if I was the only Black person in my class, then, well, of course this would be true, but still.”

After receiving rejections from campus groups, she decided to produce one herself. “I felt like I owed it to the ghosts, or whoever was coming behind me,” she said. “So I set out to self-produce a Black musical. I had to ask myself what I could afford.”

Brown ended up producing Ain’t Misbehavin’. The show starred Heather Headley (C97), who went on to win a Tony Award for the title role in Aida, and Sharif Atkins (C97), who would star as Dr. Michael Gallant on ER. Brown asked musician friends to play the score, and a production was born.

“Performance studies helped me be less of a consumer and more of a creator,” she said, “and more like, I’m just going to make it. If the thing does not exist, grab some friends and make it happen. That’s what I got from Northwestern. I don’t know if there’s a school anywhere in the country where students create and produce like they do at Northwestern. That certainly made me much more fearless, because it was so regular, to just be like, you can do it yourself. That’s how I ended up doing Bailiwick. I was being used and abused by these theatre companies. I was never allowed to direct. They’d straight-up steal my ideas and give them to other people and then shut the door. So, I put on my own shows.”
Mellon-Sawyer Seminar Series Made possible by a grant I was awarded from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in 2019, the series comprises three graduate seminars, taught over the course of a year, on the theme “Black Arts Archive: The Problem of Translation.” Visiting scholars will hail from all corners of the globe, and each series of symposia will cover a different geographic region: fall was Chicago, winter is the Caribbean, and spring will consider South Africa. For the fall event, associate professor Aymar Jean Christian (communication studies) and Mary Jane Crowe Professor Rebecca Zorach (art history) offered their seminar Black Arts Chicago: The Forgotten Story, with a corresponding virtual symposium in November. In February, with professor and chair of the Department of Performance Studies Ramón Rivera-Servera, I offered the seminar Black Caribbean Waters: Decolonizing the Archive with a corresponding symposium. This spring, professor emerita D. Soyini Madison (performance studies) and visiting scholar Athi Joja will offer the seminar Black Arts in Anti-Black Worlds: From Chicago to Cape Town, with a corresponding symposium on April 30 and May 1. Cosponsored by the Black Arts Consortium, the summer institute (Im)material and (Trans)mediation in the Black Arts Archive will take place June 21–25.

FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS

Puerto Rican Arts Initiative Professor Ramón Rivera-Servera launched this artistic residency program in 2017 to support, empower, and mentor Puerto Rican artists affected by Hurricanes Maria and Irma. The initiative was made possible by University and school funding as well as a sizable grant from the Mellon Foundation. Rivera-Servera recently received significant additional funding from the foundation to expand the program. This second phase will focus on curatorial practices in performance art with an emphasis on environmental politics, rights to the city, and community affects and infrastructure.

OTV | Open Television Associate professor of communication studies Aymar Jean Christian has enjoyed a banner year in advancing the mission and reach of his OTV distribution platform. Nominated last spring for a public service and activism Webby Award, OTV in August launched new mobile and TV apps, and its new subscription website began in June. OTV picked up the popular drag show Black Girl Magic, and in the fall it brought a MacArthur Foundation–funded 48-hour film festival to Brooklyn, Atlanta, and Oakland, California.

Center for Latinx Digital Media Professor Pablo Boczkowski launched in September a new center aiming to create knowledge about digital media in Latinx and Latin American communities. (See page 22.)

New faculty We’re delighted to welcome two theatre faculty members: lecturers Detra Payne and Tasia Jones (see pages 19 and 20). Payne is an award-winning actor and educator who joins us from the University of Texas, Arlington. Her experience, pedagogical mission, and expansion into other forms of theatre work will be a boon to our program and a welcome addition for our students. Jones (GC20) is a recent alumna of our MFA in directing program who memorably helmed the 2019 Wirtz Center production of Voyeurs de Venus by fellow alumna Lydia Diamond (C91). Jones will teach the new course Black Women in American Theatre and will coteach the first-year course required of all theatre majors. In performance studies, visual artist, scholar, and assistant professor Bimbola Akinbola (see page 16) will lend to the department her expertise in art, literature, and performance produced by women throughout the African diaspora.

And we look forward to fall 2021, when Tracy Conner (left) will join the Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. Conner’s research focuses on identifying differences versus disorders, particularly in the syntactic variations of children who speak African American English, which is often misdiagnosed as a language impairment. Her work will bring exciting and much-needed attention to an underserved and underresearched population, and she will be the department’s first-ever Black tenure-track faculty member.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

New MFA directing candidates We’re proud this academic year to welcome the first-ever all-Black cohort to the MFA in directing program: Manna-Symone Middlebrooks, Tor Campbell, and Jasmine B. Gunter. The candidates have
DIALOGUE WITH THE DEAN

“I think the way forward is actually understanding that just because that’s the way we’ve always done it doesn’t mean that’s the best way,” said dean E. Patrick Johnson in his first Dialogue with the Dean event, a conversation with John L. Jackson (pictured), dean of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. “We talk often about diversity and inclusion around racial and ethnic issues, but diversity is also about diversity of perspective. Equality is also about making sure that everybody is around the table. Inclusion is also about extending a helping hand.”

The 90-minute dialogue in October touched on their individual career trajectories, the challenges of leading academic institutions, and the responsibility of the media and scholars to accurately frame the national conversation about race, politics, and empirical truth.

“We need to get people to be more self-conscious about the role we all play in imbuing things with meaning,” Jackson said. “We want to believe that meaning emanates from things as opposed to being what we impose on them, right? Whether it’s a flag and what a flag means, or what kneeling means when someone plays the national anthem. It’s not just about how we get people to believe science is a real thing— I think it’s also about making sure people take responsibility for the role they play in producing their own discursive power, their own semiotic and symbol-making power.”

Jackson, who codirected Johnson’s documentary Making Sweet Tea, also talked about the difficulty in finding the right path to achieving more inclusion and diversity in academia.

“It’s often easy for everyone to rally around it at 50,000 feet in the air, when it’s very abstract. Once you try to pull it down to the bricks and mortar of your school and the people in it,” he said, it becomes more difficult to maintain a sense of commonality and consensus around what form it should take.

“One of the things I always emphasize about the multimodal work we’ve been doing at Penn is that all of the spaces we occupy—the annual Media Festival, all of the Media Labs we run—these are the most diverse spaces at the PhD level you will ever see at any institution. And that, to me, is about saying if we actually change—if we build a version of what it looks like to do scholarship that allows you to bring all the different skills and interests and passions you have to an academic conversation—if we build it for you, they will come.”

been working on the reimagined fall and winter Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts mainstage shows, including the Visions and Voices series.

Vision and Voices The Black playwrights reading series, presented by the Wirtz Center Evanston, features first-year MFA directing students and undergraduate and graduate actors. The directors, in consultation with faculty and the center’s managing director, chose three plays from hundreds of scripts. The stories are centered around racism in America, police brutality, anti-Blackness, the fight for justice, and the celebration of Black lives. Play readings included

• Wine in Wilderness by Alice Childress, directed by Jasmine B. Gunter
• A Few Short Plays to Save the World and What You Did by Steve Harper, directed by Tor Campbell
• Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World by Suzan-Lori Parks, directed by Manna-Symone Middlebrooks

MFA directing students (from left) Manna-Symone Middlebrooks, Tor Campbell, and Jasmine B. Gunter
THE
CHANGE
MAKERS

Get acquainted with a selection of School of Communication alumni, faculty, and students who tell us in their own words how they are using art and scholarship to work toward social justice, fight racism, and establish a culture of better representation and equity both here at Northwestern and in the world beyond. To read more of what these Wildcats have to say and to meet a few more, visit communication.northwestern.edu/changemakers.
BIMBOLA AKINBOLA
Assistant professor of performance studies

My interest in African diasporic cultural production has everything to do with my upbringing. Both of my parents were born in Nigeria, and I come from a family of artists. As a first-generation Nigerian American, I’ve always been interested in the complexity and nuance of diaspora, and as an artist I’ve always looked to the realm of aesthetics for answers. My work helps expand the performance studies department’s already strong focus on transnational performance and also connects us to the African studies program and the incredible Herskovits Library—the largest separate Africana collection in the world. I hope at Northwestern I can join the community of scholars expanding the ways we talk about Africa and its diasporas.

I also bring to my teaching my own movement and visual art practice, which allows me to offer students the opportunity to delve into their own creative process and more fully understand theory in practice. I think performance has historically been used to help people cope and make sense of the world in times of crisis. I see performance as particularly equipped to help us connect, process, and remember during difficult times. Performance is also such an important part of the history of protest in the US and around the world. Thinking about social change through the lens of performance allows us to continuously envision new ways to respond to our changing world.

“The most radical and antiracist thing about my teaching is that I honor the way all humans speak.”
—STAN BROWN

STAN BROWN
W. Rockwell Wirtz Professor, director of graduate studies for the MFA in acting program

When I was a graduate student actor, a world-renowned voice and speech teacher who was white took me aside and told me in private that the English language didn’t belong to Black people. She told me this would keep me from ever being able to speak Shakespeare’s words. She knew then, as did I, that if I reported her, not one person at the premier US regional theatre where this occurred would protect, defend, or even believe me. That’s how it was back then. I said nothing. She turned and walked away.

Years later, after being invited on multiple occasions to work with the voice department at the Royal Shakespeare Company in England, I wrote and published about how that dark moment in grad school opened my eyes to racism in actor training, in the American theatre, and in the entire entertainment industry. However, as hurtful as that moment was to my heart, mind, and spirit, it also helped to shape my professional goals. I knew there had to be a more humane way to teach.

Almost 20 years after I’d published about that dark moment, a younger generation of BIPOC and ally voice and speech trainers began to contact me to thank me for being the only BIPOC voice teacher writing about the issues that they too confronted in their training. I was shocked—not because the article had actually encouraged people, but that students a generation younger than myself were still struggling with the same issues.

The most radical and antiracist thing about my teaching is that I honor the way all humans speak. I honor spoken language as living and evolving. I expect vowels and consonants to sound different in the mouths of people who are different from one another, people who just happen to have access to the same language. Otherwise, how can the theatre seriously claim to reflect the world? Finally, I never perceive English as belonging exclusively to white culture, especially given white culture’s long history of appropriating from other cultures. Where blindness to white privilege is concerned, I’m often reminded of the quote, “How is it that a fish doesn’t know that it is in water?”

Northwestern is trying to learn and trying to learn how to learn. It’s not easy, but it’s possible.
MELISSA DONALDSON (GC17)
Senior vice president and chief diversity officer at Wintrust

Mine is a winding story, including a career mosaic of industries, disciplines, and experiences. The path was neither clear nor straight. There were highs, lows, and lots in between. My background spans sales, professional services, career consulting, learning and development, and now diversity and inclusion. I've felt firsthand the sting of unfair treatment, the joys of mentorship, the disappointment of being “not it,” and the loss of business due to lacking the right associations. I learned that people do business with people they like and who could help them meet their goals. A wise man once told me, “If you can’t change your environment, you change your environment.” Diversity and inclusion found me during my evolutions of change.

In retrospect, I benefited early in my career from what I now understand as formal inclusion practices. These included being tapped for niche initiatives and being invited to exclusive events designed to connect executives of color with like young professionals to impart wisdom on how to navigate the landscape. Those strong influences heavily shaped my outlook on corporate America. How could I make a difference for other first-generation college graduates and aspiring professionals of color like myself?

The linchpin occurred in 2005, when I pitched a business case to the CEO and CHRO at a technology services firm to start a formal diversity and inclusion practice in response to a changing marketplace. Every professional zigzag has led me to where I am today. I continue evolving with the work, even coining the mantra “inclusion drives business” as a reminder that it takes a village to build careers and achieve success. My resolve is to reinforce humanity in business, to challenge inequity, and to encourage emerging professionals to expand their capacity to learn and lead inclusively.

Toxic workplaces will undoubtedly destroy great talent if left unchecked. As a Black woman with height, I have at times been the target of unfair treatment, marginalization, and outright discrimination. I’ve received unmistakably racist comments and been penalized for my appearance. I’ve heard consciously biased characterizations of professionals of color and women as less capable and as unprepared for stretch assignments. These behaviors don’t disappear. They lurk in the shadows of every industry, regardless of workplace size. An effective diversity and inclusion practice is critical to the health and success of the contemporary employer.

Step one toward bridge-building is to engage in open dialogue, followed by a collective commitment to positive action. As a graduate of the program, I believe the school can leverage its master of science in communications curriculum (yes, I’m biased!), which promotes collaborative leadership, elegant communication, and managing complexities. Advancing diversity, inclusion, and equity calls for all three elements.

Northwestern University epitomizes possibilities and potential. Embark on lasting change by engaging faculty, administrators, and students in healthy discourse across cultural and positional identities to uncover perspectives, promote mutual respect, and explore promising outcomes.

JABARI EVANS
Doctoral candidate in the media, technology, and society program; prolific musician, known by the name Naledge, with Chicago hip-hop group Kidz in the Hall

My dissertation is an ethnographic project that focuses on Foundations of Music, a nonprofit organization that provides quality music instructors to Chicago public schools in low-income communities of color, looking specifically at the district’s Hip-Hop Songwriting and Production program. My three years of fieldwork were done at two of these schools and explored the utility of student-driven hip-hop artistic practices in the classroom as a means to reform music education in urban schools, a model for media literacy education, and a culturally relevant pedagogy for African American youth.

Ultimately, I’ve found that hip-hop as an artistic practice is a great way to bridge student interests and informal learning to formal literacies in academic spaces. These findings are important to offering new ways of thinking about hip-hop pedagogy’s role in approaching the learning equity gap that continues to impact the professional and academic success of Black children.

The value of hip-hop music to my own academic and professional pathways placed me in a position where my dissertation topic found me well before I was accepted into Northwestern. I worked as a student mentor for Foundations of Music for two years, and I kept tabs on their songwriting and producing program even as I entered my master’s program. I used to think of that series of events as luck, but now I see it as my preparation meeting my opportunity. Both of my
jobs are driven by personal curiosity about the social world. As a rap artist, I always have sought to understand human emotions, relationships, and behavior. I think writing a song has quicker (and more widespread) gratification, but both jobs have collaborative and personal aspects to the work process. I’m a qualitative researcher who primarily does ethnography work, so my personal interactions and observations are always at the front and center of the work—which almost mirrors my prior work as a songwriter.

CHELSEA FRANKLIN
Junior radio/television/film and creative writing double major with a minor in African American studies

I utilize my RTVF (screenwriting) and creative writing majors to write about the complexity of matters affecting marginalized and oppressed people. A recurring issue that my writing addresses is racism. Whether my story focuses on microaggressions, mental health, or generational trauma, I also use the knowledge from my African American studies minor to ensure my writing accurately amplifies Black stories and Black strength. While my background in research helps me thoroughly and accurately report on all my topics, the minor constantly reminds me how intricate my ancestors’ history is—it helps me depict Black people as they are, rather than how white media make them appear to be. I aspire to be a writer who motivates marginalized communities to stand against their oppressors, and I want my writing to make oppressors aware of their roles.

In 2020, I learned that my generation is one that won’t sit idly by while others try to oppress us. This generation of students has paid attention to history. This generation of Black people has listened to our ancestors. We recognize when we’re being treated unfairly, whether by the US government or the president of Northwestern University. My generation only inspires me more as I watch student-led groups (such as NU Community Not Cops) open the eyes of students, including myself, to the repeated dismissal of Black students by our university. They motivate me to do my part by opening the eyes of others.

MARYAM IKUFORJI
Junior communication studies major with a minor in legal studies and pursuing an integrated marketing communications certificate; photo editor of Blackboard magazine, a student publication catering to Black Northwestern students

I work toward achieving a more representative and equitable culture by creating. Whether it be through writing, photography, or visual arts, I strive to create projects that communicate the experiences of and beauty within underrepresented communities. More than anything, my time as a communication studies major has taught me the importance of developing strong narratives, which has only strengthened my belief in the power of visual storytelling.

More tangibly, I work to succeed in spaces not created with people like me in mind, so that those who come after me and hold similar identities know that there is someone like them who has done it—so they can too—and there is someone willing to support them in their journey. This support manifests itself in sharing the resources I have gained access to during my postsecondary experience, such as knowledge about this institution, clubs, grants, internship opportunities, and more—like those who preceded me did for me. However, I am also understanding that achieving representation and equity in our culture is not an individual task and the bulk of the work to ensure that both are achieved must be done by the institutions that hold the power to do so.

I am hoping to develop a mentorship program that promotes the creative development of Black youth. I think oftentimes what is forgotten in this cultural moment is that the nightmare that was 2020 is reflective of the experiences a number of people have faced for a very long time. The reality is that combating anti-Blackness is not new for Black people, housing insecurity is not new for the homeless, the fear of illness is not new for the immunocompromised—and the list goes on. This year has only illuminated the number of ongoing problems that marginalized communities have endured for centuries, whether it be racial injustice, medical inequality, or financial insecurity. And even while I recognize my privilege as a financially secure, college-educated, Black woman, there is a lot unknown regarding what the world will look like post-COVID.
My artistic mission is to create civic engagement and conversation through theatre and to promote positive societal change at the individual and community levels. As a director, I enjoy highly collaborative work that creates opportunities for community conversation and individual introspection and growth. That can happen working on a published play, devising something with an ensemble, or working with community leaders and organizations to address a specific need.

I think the way to improve representation is to improve representation—I think it’s that simple. Northwestern needs to improve its recruitment of Black and Brown students and the number of BIPOC faculty in the theatre department. Students will feel more welcome when they see themselves represented in the student body as well as the faculty and staff. Dean Johnson and the department chairs have begun the work of increasing representation in the faculty and staff, as evidenced by my being here. Now it’s time for the larger University to do the same work within their student recruitment.

Until then, the theatre department needs to acknowledge the lack of representation and listen to the needs of its Black and Brown students. Theatre makers (students and faculty alike) should think about what kind of theatre industry they want to go back to when it’s safe to do so and how theatre can be applied outside of the traditional regional theatre model. It’s become clear that many of our systems and processes are not working for us. We need to come up with more equitable ways of working that promote healthy lifestyles and provide greater access to artists and audiences. Our skills and talents can also be applied in so many different areas of our society. There’s lots of work to do if we expand our definition of theatre.

“The way to improve representation is to improve representation—I think it’s that simple.” —TASIA JONES

I’ve always been interested in the healthy development and well-being of children. Even as a premed student at Northwestern, I wanted to become a pediatrician. However, over time, it became increasingly clear to me that children’s healthy growth and development depend on many factors above and beyond what can be gleaned from their biological and physical health. Many of those factors exist beyond the children and their school and include the family and community, the sociopolitical context, housing and economic patterns, race and culture, and so on. All of these issues collide in schools, where children’s lives absolutely hang in the balance, because school success is tied to individual and generational health, prosperity, opportunity, and overall well-being. So what happens in schools matters a lot, and it matters even more for children who are vulnerable to failure in school.

In the US, arguably the academic skill that is most important to overall school success is reading, and the student populations most vulnerable to poor reading achievement and thus poor school performance are students with disabilities; students from racial, ethnic, and language minority groups; and students growing up in poverty and low-income households. In part, that is why my research, innovation, and engagement activities have always focused there. But it is also because I am very much aware that the student populations that tend to struggle the most in school are those I belong to and include my own children and my own family. I am also very aware that we have a great deal of knowledge, resources, capacity, and power to improve outcomes for those populations, should we choose to do so. Simply put, we often choose not to, and I cannot abide by those choices.

The factors that make children more vulnerable to poor reading achievement are present throughout the nation but are certainly more common and more pervasive in underserved and underresourced communities where many poor Black and Brown people live. These problems are complex and compounding and cannot be addressed within one academic discipline or profession, so they require a cross-sector approach to create sustainable change. That is why we take an
Dialogue  winter 2021

interdisciplinary, collective-impact approach to our work. Working collectively across sectors and disciplines is not without its challenges! But if your intent is to ensure that all children are reading and succeeding in school, then working in this way is nonnegotiable. Each of us has to show up with the talent, expertise, and resources available from our sectors and find ways to collaborate to achieve the same equitable outcomes for all our children, together.

DETRA PAYNE
Lecturer in the theatre department

My personal experiences as an African American female performer and teacher enable me to connect and relate to many students of color as well as other students with diverse backgrounds. As diversity and inclusion are integral to my teaching and creative endeavors, my approach to both is evident not only in the materials and texts I use in my courses but also in the focus and attention I give to identifying, recognizing, and introducing artists from marginalized groups to my students. The productions I have overseen or performed in and the plays I choose to direct reflect my personal commitment to showcasing and celebrating the stories of those who might otherwise be forgotten or overlooked.

What makes Northwestern students and our community uniquely equipped to improve the surrounding Chicago theatre culture comes from what I know of my colleagues in SoC. I believe I am fine to say that the school recognized it had a few missing voices in the song of humanity that was being expressed. Without those voices being heard and their stories being told, growth in the human condition cannot be complete. The faculty and students asked for change, and Dean Johnson has begun to implement these very welcome and embraced changes. The students will benefit from the adjustments and additions taking place, resulting in their graduating from their programs with a more well-rounded and thorough education—which in turn will effect necessary changes in the landscape of not only Chicago theatre but theatre around the country and beyond.

ANGELA D. R. SMITH
Doctoral candidate in the technology and social behavior program and researcher of emerging adults experiencing homelessness and their use of and relationship with technology

My research into homeless young adults’ technology needs and usage started out of happenstance, and I stayed because of the impact. In my second year, I collaborated with the Center for Behavioral Intervention Technologies and ultimately partnered with a local homeless shelter, interacting with the residents and hearing their experiences through my studies. Some of the more interesting findings are their distrust of technology, due to experiencing a number of perceived and encountered risks, and an overall preference to engage in person.

This population is often left out of the conversation. When thinking about individuals experiencing homelessness, we tend to think of adults, leaving this subset behind. While I have not experienced homelessness, I know the feeling of being excluded based upon uncontrollable factors. I hope my research provides an understanding of how systems fail people and the differences particular kinds of interventions can make.

Northwestern does not have a great reputation for community-based research. I have always felt my work was less important because it was not hot or trendy. When doing research with marginalized communities, making improvements should be a collaboration, both with and for. Northwestern and researchers doing this work need to ensure these relationships are mutually beneficial—we cannot simply go into communities and take. There is a long, documented history of taking from marginalized communities without giving back or giving credit.

“Northwestern needs to ensure these relationships are mutually beneficial—we cannot simply go into communities and take.”

—ANGELA D. R. SMITH
KANTARA SOUFFRANT (GC17)
Curator of community dialogue at the Milwaukee Art Museum

My professional mission is to use the arts as a tool for leaving the world a more equitable place, especially for BIPOC people and Black women. In the still-relevant words of the Combahee River Collective, “If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.”

My new role is equal parts program planning, curating, and building sustainable community partnerships that emphasize Black and Latinx audiences. For me, the position is fundamentally about cobuilding a more accessible, culturally relevant, and culturally responsive museum for all of Milwaukee. Having worked here previously, I came to know both the museum and people’s perceptions of the museum. Like other art institutions, MAM is racialized as predominately white and classed as a place for affluent visitors.

Beauty is political. Performance studies professor emerita D. Soyini Madison rightly observes that beauty is “liberatory” and “invokes deliberation.” A museum is a space for beauty, for gathering, for bearing witness, for imagining possible futures and the storied past. Access to these beautiful and reflective spaces is politically charged. What’s most exciting for me in this position is that I get to place this politically charged access to beautiful spaces at the center of my work.

Sometimes going to visit a museum is a luxury that can’t be afforded. Barriers for would-be visitors include the cost of admission, negotiating travel, learning the unknown cultural codes that need to be performed within museums so that you don’t feel “uncultured,” and the fear of being racially taunted or socially policed. These are real-life barriers that have prevented people from visiting museums or left them feeling unwanted and unwelcome. In this role, I get to live my professional mission of using the arts to make a public space of the future: a museum where people, regardless of their racial and ethnic background, income level, and schooling, feel welcomed, valued, and understood. People get to bear witness to the beauty and feel a sense of ownership over these spaces, to shape them in ways that serve their present needs while also looking toward the future.

NOLAN ROBINSON
Senior theatre and computer science double major in the music theatre certificate program; creator and star of the 2018 web series Where’s Noah, about a Black student navigating the challenges of attending a majority-white university

After creating Where’s Noah, I wanted my next project [a short film titled Grief Night Club] to combine what I have experienced through all my studies at Northwestern: music theatre, composing, choreography, writing, and acting. With this new film, my goal was to combine the talents of as many students and alumni—from various schools, majors, and backgrounds—as I could, to make this particular project as interdisciplinary as possible. I also wanted to integrate a message in my piece that surrounds the unspoken struggles that are seldom seen as those that Black men face: anxiety, depression, and grief.

In terms of writing the piece, one thing that I learned at Northwestern about race is that very few people experience the same level of feeling as I and other Black men do in regard to certain external circumstances and how to deal with those feelings when we need to. I had very few people to call on when I needed help figuring out the best way to craft a character whose grief lies in how the world perceives him and his relationship to that world as well as his own mortality. I had to draw from my own experiences, which at times became too difficult to sit with. The preproduction process felt lonely, simply because no one around me could be as helpful as I needed them to be, because the protagonist’s identity includes experiences that those in this very homogeneous community have never had.

I’ll say that during my time here, my knowledge about myself and the world has grown, which has subsequently lent itself to growth in social justice activism. This growth has certainly made me consider going into politics—Ha! Who wants to go into politics?—but I love entertainment, and my sanity, too much to do that to myself. However, it did allow me to discover the ways I can use my art politically and to advocate for the issues crucial to my own livelihood as well as for those who have been neglected by the government.

In my studies, and in the School of Communication in general, we learn how to communicate, how to be strong with our words, and how to seek out the truth. I have been defeated by the constant ignorance and misinformation I see spread through social media. How can I use the skills I’ve learned here to effectively promote the truth and get to share some of my light with the world in the process? I want to help grow our nation back. We’re in a dark spot and challenging times for sure, but what can I do to make us just a little bit better? Whatever that answer is, that’s what I’m going to do.
Professor to lead ICA

Noshir Contractor, professor in the Department of Communication Studies, will become the president of the International Communication Association in May 2022.

A prominent researcher of network science, computational social science, and web science, Contractor examines how social and knowledge networks form in business and healthcare settings, scientific communities, and space travel. He is the Jane S. & William J. White Professor of Behavioral Sciences in the McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science, the School of Communication, and the Kellogg School of Management and director of the Science of Networks in Communities Research Group.

As ICA president, Contractor will tap into his vast expertise in the creation and nurturing of diverse global networks.

“I consider ICA as being my perennial intellectual home since my days as a graduate student,” Contractor says. “It has given me a lot over the years, and I’ve seen it help a lot of people. And it has played a key role in conveying the significance of communication scholarship to the broader scholarly community, to policy makers, and to the public at large.”

ICA is the preeminent professional organization for communication scholars and researchers worldwide. Founded in 1950, it comprises about 4,500 members from 80 countries. While building on the organization’s past accomplishments, Contractor wants to expand opportunities for growth; as president-elect, he’s set a threefold agenda to broaden ICA’s international reach and representation, foster cross-divisional scholarship, and leverage technologies to reimagine professional and pedagogical development.

Contractor has joined the ICA executive committee and begun his role as president-elect-select; he will serve as president through 2022–23 and remain on the committee until mid-2026.

Latinx digital media center opens

The Center for Latinx Digital Media began last fall with an aim to promote and research digital media in Latin American and Latinx communities while bringing together students, scholars, and practitioners from across the world.

“If you think about the Latinx population in the US, it’s at 18 percent and growing and it contributes $2.7 trillion to the GDP. They are the fastest-growing sector as far as the economy goes,” says Pablo Boczkowski, Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani Professor of Communication Studies and the center’s director. “Yet the Latinx community has been sometimes less visible than it deserves to be. With this center, we’re hoping to bring more visibility and more attention to important aspects of this community.”

This academic year, the center is offering weekly seminars by leading researchers and professionals in the field, a monthly newsletter, and eventually a podcast to discuss issues. It will serve as a hub for researchers and practitioners to connect with one another. Supported by the School of Communication, the Office of the Provost, and the Buffett Institute for Global Affairs, the center has faculty affiliates on the Evanston and Doha campuses. It will also collaborate with the Center for the Study of Media and Society in Argentina, founded by Northwestern University and Universidad de San Andrés.

Boczkowski says the center’s goal is “really about creating knowledge about digital media in Latinx communities across the Americas.”

“And it’s not about erasing difference,” he adds. “It is about setting up a big umbrella and exploring areas of difference and areas of continuity.”

—Cara Lockwood
Study on remote data collection offers promise for research during pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic has had profound effects on the research community, both in terms of who is able to participate and how data are collected.

Assistant professor Elizabeth Norton has discovered one advantage in the resulting social separation: gathering certain data via video chats can be just as effective as doing so in person. This is not only a boon to Norton’s work with children and language development—it’s a step toward increasing access and equity when researching underrepresented and underserved populations.

“This came about a couple years ago when we were talking with our colleagues at [nonprofit advocacy group] LEAP about what their founder Kate Gottfred (GC73, GC79) calls ‘language wellness’: the idea that kids who are growing up in underprivileged environments hear fewer words than kids from more advantaged homes and neighborhoods,” says Norton, who is the Jane Steiner Hoffman and Michael Hoffman Assistant Professor and leads the LEARN Lab in the Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. “They were working on designing an app for parents to learn about and be reminded to give a high quality and quantity of language to their little kiddos. We started asking whether there was a way to see if the app was working. We knew it wouldn’t be as feasible for families from low-income neighborhoods to come into the lab in Evanston, so we said, ‘Why don’t we do this over video chat?’”

During a session, the parent and child play together; Norton’s team transcribes the child’s words from the video. Norton and her colleagues discovered that these chats worked as well as gathering data from families who came to the lab in person. She says the quality of the samples was often better, as the children were in their homes, speaking freely and comfortably and not confined by the parameters of standardized language measures. And researchers could collect the data at any time, not just when a family was able to come to the lab.

While the team had already planned to write a paper on both the data from and the effectiveness of the video chats in terms of tracking child development, the pandemic made focusing on collecting video data even more pressing. Now Norton’s research focuses on how the pandemic is affecting families: closures of daycares and schools can mean children are receiving less exposure to early vocabulary. While an increase in one-on-one time with parents might be a benefit, there may also be drawbacks—including extra stress for both children and parents—which could make focusing on language development difficult. Norton says parent stress might lead to fewer meaningful word interactions with children, as patience is stretched thin and families struggle with constant disruption of routines.

Norton and her team recently received supplemental funding from the National Institutes of Health to track how the pandemic is affecting language development in a diverse group of children already in her studies. She will continue to gather data remotely and use her findings to further understanding of child development.

–Cara Lockwood and Kerry Trotter

New Center for Human-Computer Interaction + Design partners SoC with McCormick

The McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science and the School of Communication have launched the Center for Human-Computer Interaction + Design (HCI+D).

The center’s vision and values build on Northwestern’s unique interdisciplinary, socially engaged, people-centered approach to interaction and design. HCI+D supports researchers in their pursuit of new interaction paradigms that will grow a collaborative, sustainable, and equitable society.

To achieve its goals, HCI+D leverages Northwestern’s history of research among diverse disciplines—including communication, computer science, design, learning sciences, medicine, psychology, and several areas of engineering.

The center’s leadership team reflects this collaborative spirit:

- Elizabeth Gerber, associate professor of mechanical engineering in McCormick and of communication studies
- Darren Gergle, John G. Searle Professor of Communication Studies with a courtesy appointment in computer science in McCormick
- Bryan Pardo, professor of computer science in McCormick and of radio/television/film

Through its broad support for research, educational initiatives, and events, the center aims to bring together and inspire the next generation of researchers to address important, real-world problems and develop solutions with tremendous societal impact. –Brian Sandalow
Imagine U partners with Washington’s National Theatre

Imagine U, which for the last decade has staged interactive children’s productions at the Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts, partnered with the National Theatre in Washington, DC, to provide a series of original virtual programming earlier this year.

The new series is an online edition of Saturday Morning Live! At the National Theatre, the beloved mainstay of the organization’s family programming.

“It’s an exciting partnership for us,” says Lynn Kelso, a lecturer and the founder of Imagine U. “Our series is called Life Now, and the three episodes all link to what life is like now.”

The Imagine U episodes feature original music and interactive segments created and performed by a diverse cast of Northwestern alumni and an MFA directing student.

“Our goal is to present engaging programs, working with artists to develop performances that will help young people and their parents as they attempt to negotiate these unusual times,” says David Kitto, the National Theatre’s executive director. “The programs are designed for children ages 4 to 10, and they give children and even adults strategies for how to cope. We aim to create substantive, meaningful programming that will entertain and soothe our audiences.”

The National Theatre, which mounted its first show in 1835, has offered the Saturday Morning Live! series for children for four decades. Like many theaters across the nation, it’s working to find creative ways to keep its audience engaged. The Imagine U performances aired on Facebook Live in January and February.

—Cara Lockwood

Buchholz reflects on enriching year at NU-Q

Larissa Buchholz, assistant professor of communication studies and researcher of the dynamics of global art production and movement, spent the 2019–20 academic year teaching, working on three research projects, and immersing herself in Qatari culture while on a visiting appointment at Northwestern University in Qatar.

“What was very exciting is that I taught a course on the globalization of culture, and I also learned a lot from students . . . about how they perceive [international influences] in Doha and how much they were concerned about the role of tradition and diversity,” Buchholz says. Having taught the same course in the US, she observes that “very different problems and discussions emerged here, and that was very meaningful.”

In Qatar, Buchholz worked on completing her book manuscript “The Global Rules of Art,” which traces how artists from non-Western regions achieve global success. A second project involved mapping the structures, networks, and flows in the art gallery market, explaining that these pertain to private galleries but not their nonprofit counterparts, such as museums. Buchholz notes that globalization in cultural
EPICS office to enhance student-alumni connections

Since its founding in 2013, the School of Communication’s Office of External Programs, Internships, and Career Services (EPICS) has been preparing students for careers in the creative arts and communication sciences through coaching, workshops, and events and outreach to employers, alumni, and friends of the University. As students adjust to the realities of virtual classes and events, the EPICS mission takes on new importance.

EPICS will be enhancing the existing School of Communication’s LinkedIn page to create a platform that allows students and alumni to build their network of professional contacts.

“EPICS helps empower students to embrace the connections of Northwestern, Evanston, and beyond,” says Michael Johnson, director of EPICS. “By utilizing the top networking platform, students can grow their connections instead of using multiple University databases to connect with relevant alumni.”

For alumni, the enhanced LinkedIn page will be a single place to search for fellow classmates and find relevant University information about careers, networking, and events. EPICS will promote the new LinkedIn page to both alumni and students.

Another phase of this effort is to find alumni who are interested in sharing their industry expertise with students.

“Students are always eager to hear how to practically apply their education and give context to classroom learning,” says Adam Joyce, executive director of transitional programs. “That transition from student to professional is always exciting, and alumni play a valuable role in mentoring students in that process.”

Alumni will receive an email in the spring to gauge interest in engaging with students and the school in industry-relevant career programming.

To learn more about EPICS, visit epics.soc.northwestern.edu. To connect with the School of Communication’s LinkedIn page, search for “Northwestern University School of Communication” on LinkedIn.

markets is usually associated with large-scale transnational corporations, but she says it is still possible to observe what she defines as a “networked, bottom-up globalization” among smaller cultural enterprises like art galleries, which challenges the perception that they are culturally myopic.

Her most important research, and the reason she came to Qatar, is a project on art collectors as a window into understanding cultural consumption in a global context. It is guided by one central question: what makes art collectors in various world regions interested in and engaged with contemporary art? By shifting the spotlight from mediators and artists to consumers, the project “compares different moments in the rise of new art patrons and collectors” in emerging marketplaces like China, parts of Latin America, and the Middle East.

Buchholz highlights the need to further challenge the clichéd notions in scholarship that high-culture consumption in non-Western regions is all about status and external validation: “We need to create more nuanced theories that attend to the interplay of local and transnational meanings in the shaping of cultural tastes and practices.”

–Hazim Mohamed

Visitors at a gallery in Doha
Masi Asare (PhD, New York University) launched the Voicing across Distance podcast for voice scholars and practitioners to discuss voices in the time of COVID-19. To date, its 10 episodes have been played nearly 1,000 times and featured 19 guests, including leading scholars of musicology, theatre studies, and media studies as well as linguistics and voice coaches and singers working in such genres as musical theatre, experimental music, and indie rock. Last summer Asare was invited to create a dedicated artist page for her songwriting on the website Broadway on Demand, which features rarely seen videos of her musical theatre writing along with new pandemic-era songs, all free to watch. Last fall her play The Strong Friend, and Company premiered in the virtual collection Days of Re-Creation—short plays by artists of color, available to produce free of royalties by arrangement with the theatre company Live & in Color.

Danielle Bainbridge (PhD, Yale University) was the writer, researcher, and host of The Origin of Everything, a history show produced by PBS Digital. The show’s 10-minute episodes cover such topics as the origins of the term “African American,” the science behind boy bands, and why people have pets. The show is billed as exploring every aspect of our daily reality, from the words we use and the pop culture we love to the technology that gets us through the day and the identities we give ourselves. Bainbridge, a self-described history nerd, filled each episode with little-known facts, historical photos, a scholar’s sense of discernment, and her wit. The show ended this winter; episodes are at pbs.org.

Danielle Beverly (MFA, Columbia College Chicago) completed a year-and-a-half film festival tour of her latest feature documentary, Dusty Groove: The Sound of Transition, which follows a Chicago used vinyl buyer and the people who sell him their prized record collections as they navigate both difficult and liberating life transitions. The film won for best music film at the Macon Film Festival and best feature at the South Georgia Film Festival. Beverly was also selected as a Chicago Screen Gem by Newcity.

Jeremy Birnholtz (PhD, University of Michigan) published two articles last fall in Social Media + Society about the online behaviors of gay men: “Layers of Marginality: An Exploration of Visibility, Impressions, and Cultural Context on Geospatial Apps for Men Who Have Sex with Men in Mumbai, India” and “Sensitive Sharing on Social Media: Exploring Willingness to Disclose PrEP Usage among Adolescent Males Who Have Sex with Males.” This study revealed...
that most participants would be unlikely to disclose on social media that they take medication to prevent HIV infection (PrEP), while some participants would disclose on platforms that their friends but not their families would see; disclosure was more likely among participants who thought their peers might be using PrEP.

Stephen Cone (BA, University of South Carolina) was a featured artist in the Criterion Channel’s “Three by . . .” series in August. Criterion screened Henry Gamble’s Birthday Party, Princess Cyd, and The Wise Kids, noting that the filmmaker “has quietly garnered a reputation as one of American independent cinema’s most thoughtful and compassionate artists . . . a true actor’s director, working intimately with a cast of regulars to tell naturalistic, deeply human stories about coming of age, coming out, and the intricacies of modern-day religion.”

**CREATING IN COVID**

Director Shana Cooper (MFA, Yale School of Drama) and set designer Andrew Boyce (MFA, Northwestern) were collaborating on Ibsen’s The Lady from the Sea at Chicago’s Court Theatre, with costumes designed by Linda Roethke (MFA, University of Iowa), when it closed in March just before the first performance. Boyce’s set design remained at the theater for seven months, frozen in time. Cooper and her fellow artists decided to capture photos before the set was taken down, tracking the journey and isolation of artists and theaters during the pandemic. The team is organizing the photos for a retrospective they hope to share soon.

Elizabeth Gerber (PhD, Stanford University) and her national initiative Design for America, which uses design thinking to tackle societal problems, partnered in September with the Watson Foundation, a union that will provide more opportunities for participants to collaborate and share their work. DFA also partnered with the World Design Organization and IBM to host a global design hackathon to address COVID-19.

**CREATING IN COVID**

Erik Gernand (MFA, Northwestern) had big plans for the 10th anniversary of the annual two-day filmmaking festival for incoming undergraduates. The event typically takes place over a weekend on campus: students are given a camera and prompts and then set loose to make films. Due to COVID-19, the event moved to a virtual format this year—which worked surprisingly well. Throughout September and October, six first-year producers each led a team of students who worked together during a weekend in October to create films virtually. On the final night, the group met together via Zoom to screen the finished products. Students joined from locations across the US and as far away as China and Turkey.

Cindy Gold (MFA, Professional Actor Training Program, Alabama Shakespeare Festival) performed in the Goodman Theatre’s 2020 radio-drama production of A Christmas Carol, directed by Jessica Thebus. Gold also welcomed Zoom guest speakers to her classes, including Broadway director Marcia Milgrom Dodge.

**CREATING IN COVID**

Ana Kuzmanic (MFA, Northwestern), with Jaharis Family Chair in Performance Studies Mary Zimmerman (PhD, Northwestern), led an exciting student project in lieu of the Prague Quadrennial, where they have taken students for its last several iterations. Eight MFA design students met together via Zoom to screen the finished products. Students joined from locations across the US and as far away as China and Turkey.
worked together with teams from around the world on theoretical design solutions for *The White Plague*, a 1937 piece by Czech playwright Karel Capek. The goal was to offer students, in the wake of canceled projects, a chance to find artistic inspiration through an 80-year-old play that eerily anticipated many of the dangers today. The Prague Quadrennial organizers asked participating artists: What is the relationship between traditional, text-based plays and performance design in 2020? How can performance designers engage with these texts to create relevant theatrical experiences for modern audiences? And how, as visual dramaturges, can performance designers assume creative leadership of a text-based production?

**Erik Nisbet** (PhD, Cornell University), Owen L. Coon Professor of Policy Analysis and Communication and director of the Center for Communication and Public Policy, received three awards last summer and fall to study the social media spread of misinformation about COVID-19 and the presidential election. With support from Facebook, Nisbet is examining how citizens’ exposure to a shifting mix of information of varying accuracy during the final months before the election shaped their perceptions of electoral integrity and fairness and their commitment to the democratic process. The second grant, from the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, allows Nisbet and coresearchers at Battelle Memorial Institute and Ohio State University to identify, quantify, and monitor risks associated with global misinformation spread about COVID-19. The third, from the National Science Foundation, targets the impact of COVID-19 misinformation on preventive health behaviors, policy attitudes, and people’s trust in science and government. “Misinformation—whether purposely or accidentally spread, whether from domestic or foreign sources—pollutes our political discourse and amplifies partisan discord that severely hampers our ability to deal with critical policy and health issues,” Nisbet says. “We are developing an automated early-warning system designed to identify and assess the risk presented by the spread of foreign, online COVID-19 misinformation for use by our government’s intelligence agencies.”

**Bruce Lambert** (PhD, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) and principal investigator Howard Kim, assistant professor of emergency medicine in the Feinberg School of Medicine, were awarded a five-year, $1.8 million grant to study physical therapy as an alternative to opioids in treating lower back pain in Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s emergency department. In nearly two-thirds of the million annual emergency department visits for lower back pain, opioids are prescribed—with consistently poor outcomes. Evidence suggests that using physical therapy as treatment may improve patient-reported functioning and decrease opioid use.

**Viorica Marian** (PhD, Cornell University) and her research team in the Bilingualism and Psycholinguistics Research Group shifted their data collection and project meetings to an online format during the pandemic. The group continues to study bilingualism, multilingualism, bidialectalism, linguistic diversity, languages, and dialects and, in 2020, has published studies in the peer-reviewed journals *Languages, Journal of Child Language, International Journal of Bilingualism, Journal of Neurolinguistics, Applied Linguistics, Language and Speech, Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology, Applied Psycholinguistics, Learning Culture and Social Interaction,* and others.

**Dominic Missimi** (LRAM, Royal Academy of Music) published *Nicky: A Memoir* about growing up in a “colorful” Italian American family in the 1950s. The book details his childhood, his Northwestern teaching career, and the joys of raising his children.

**Stephan Moore** (PhD, Brown University) collaborated on a performance piece that was nominated last fall for two New York Dance and Performance Awards. *The Last Audience*, by interdisciplinary artist collective a canary torsi, was nominated in the outstanding production category, and Moore’s score and sound design was one of four nominees for outstanding music composition/sound design. *The Last Audience* premiered in New York in October 2019 and has been adapted for virtual presentation by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

**Daniel O’Keefe** (PhD, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), the Owen L Coon Professor of Argumentation and
Debate, received the Outstanding Health Communication Scholar Award, jointly presented annually by the health communication divisions of the National Communication Association and the International Communication Association. The award was conferred at the NCA’s virtual annual conference in November.

*Lines of Exile,* the new short animation by *Eric Patrick* (BUS, University of New Mexico), was screened at festivals in seven countries, including at the Intermediaciones Muestra de Videoarte y Video Experimental in Medellín, Colombia, and the Animaevka festival of animated films in Belarus.

*Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature,* the 1984 book by *Janice Radway* (PhD, Michigan State University), was translated by Shuchen Hu into Mandarin and published in August in Beijing by YiLin Press. A chapter was also translated into French by Delphine Chedaleux and published as part of a special issue of the journal *Théorème* from Université Sorbonne Nouvelle–Paris 3.

**Creating in Covid**

Students of Delaney Family Research Professor *Michelle Shumate* (PhD, University of Southern California) in her undergraduate nonprofit communication management class produced two types of fall quarter final projects. The first was a nonprofit communication campaign; because they are scattered around the country, students produced campaigns for organizations in their hometowns, including New York City’s Bluelaces Theatre Company and New Mexico’s Barrett Foundation. The remaining students participated in a collaborative content-creation assignment, identifying how nonprofits have adapted during the pandemic, with a goal of producing resources for the sector.


*Elizabeth Son* (PhD, Yale University) received the Bonnie Ritter Outstanding Feminist Book Award from the National Communication Association, Feminist and Gender Studies Division, for *Embodied Reckonings: “Comfort Women,” Performance, and Transpacific Redress.*

Jessica Thebus (MFA, Northwestern), Shana Cooper (MFA, Yale School of Drama), and Julie Marie Myatt (BS, Appalachian State University) last summer and fall organized a series of pop-up theatre productions in Chicago that drew masked, distanced crowds to experience new works in non-traditional formats. “The Art of Spontaneous Spectacle” events brought artists, musicians, and puppeteers to Loyola Beach for theatrical processions and encouraged audience participation.

Performers and spectators gather at an “Art of Spontaneous Spectacle” event at Loyola Beach in September.
Chief diversity officer to have SoC appointment

Following a national search, Robin R. Means Coleman last fall was named Northwestern’s vice president and associate provost for diversity and inclusion and chief diversity officer, roles she began on February 1.

“I am deeply honored to join Northwestern University,” Coleman says. “I will have the great privilege of working with members of Northwestern’s campuses—as well as with alumni and our external partners—to advance the strategic goals of further improving campus climate, fostering belonging, increasing diversity, and evidencing accountability. Together we will work to make the experiences of every Wildcat—students, faculty, and staff—even better and ensure that we all thrive.”

Coleman comes to Northwestern from Texas A&M University, where she was vice president and associate provost for diversity and a professor in the department of communication. She is a nationally prominent and award-winning scholar of communication and African American studies, with a focus on media studies and the cultural politics of Blackness. She has written several books, including *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* and *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor*.

Coleman will hold a tenured appointment as the inaugural Ida B. Wells and Ferdinand Barnett Professor in the Department of Communication Studies in the School of Communication and courtesy appointments in the school’s Department of Radio/Television/Film and the Department of African American Studies in Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences.

“It is quite a coup that Northwestern was able to recruit Robin Means Coleman to be our next chief diversity officer,” says dean E. Patrick Johnson. “She has been a trailblazer in diversity, equity, and inclusion for many years. Now we will be the beneficiary of her deft leadership as we navigate our own journey toward a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive Northwestern. I’m also delighted that Professor Coleman will have a tenured appointment in the School of Communication, where our students and faculty will encounter her transformative scholarship and teaching.”

The film *Cassandra* by David Tolchinsky (MFA, University of Southern California) features the voice talents of radio/television/film professor Thomas Bradshaw (MFA, Brooklyn College) and production assistance and social media by Genevieve Kane (C20). It received awards for best short at Genreblast Film Festival, best horror film at Oxford International Shorts Film Festival, best thriller short and best editing at the Women in Horror Film Festival, and best director at Atlanta Underground Film Festival. Tolchinsky had previously won for best directing of a crime short at Anatomy Crime&Horror International Film Festival. The film was screened at the outdoor version of the Atlanta Horror Film Festival, the drive-in version of Blackbird Film Festival, and the online versions of five other festivals: Milwaukee Twisted Dreams, Vortex, Ravenna Nightmare, Galician Freaky, and London’s Unrestricted View. *Cassandra* is available to stream on the Alter platform, where it has received over 100,000 views.

Nathan Walter (PhD, University of Southern California) and fellow researchers were awarded a grant from the National Institutes of Health, with an administrative supplement from the Third Coast Center for AIDS Research in Chicago, to study social marketing campaigns that promote awareness of pre-exposure prophylaxis among Cook County adolescents. Teens and young adults account for over 20 percent of new HIV diagnoses in the US, most of which occur among members of minority groups. Social marketing campaigns have the potential to address these populations and generate better outcomes.

Adriana Weisleder (PhD, Stanford University) received support from the Delaney Family Fund for Research and Communication to study a pediatric-based intervention to reduce disparities in Latino children’s language development. She presented some findings from this work in October at a virtual meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics and won the best poster award at the presentations for the Council on Early Childhood.
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.

1960s

L. David Schuelke (C61) has retired from both the University of Minnesota and the University of St. Thomas (St. Paul). He is a member of Sigma Delta Chi, the National Communication Association, and the American Psychological Association. At Northwestern, he was a Medill Scholar before switching his major to speech education.

1970s

Susan Whitaker (C72), founding principal of Whitaker Travel and Tourism Strategies, has joined the board of the Columbia State Community College Foundation.

1980s

Catherine McBreen (C83), managing director and co-owner of Spectrem Group, announced her candidacy for Broward County supervisor of elections.

Gerard Harrington (C78) earned his master of science in health communications at Westbrook University in August. He is the marketing coordinator of HealthAlliance of the Hudson Valley in Kingston, New York, a hospital and nursing home system.

Susan M. Rubin (C78, GC80, GME93, GME94), medical director of the NorthShore Neurological Institute, was named Ruth Cain Ruggles Chair of Neurology at NorthShore University HealthSystem.

Alumnae win prestigious Northwestern awards

Judy Belk (C75), president and CEO of the California Wellness Foundation, was one of four recipients of the 2020 Northwestern Alumni Medal. Cal Wellness awards nearly $43 million in annual grants and program-related investments that promote health equity, justice, and advocacy for Californians whose well-being is often determined by their race, income, immigration status, or where they live. During Belk’s tenure, Cal Wellness has continued to lead in promoting violence prevention as a public health issue and funding gun-violence prevention efforts. Belk is a regular contributor to major news outlets on matters of organizational ethics and race and was inducted into Virginia’s Alexandria African American Hall of Fame. The three other medalists were Andrew C. Chan, Christopher B. Combe, and Gordon Segal.

Heather Headley (C97) was honored with the 2020 Alumnae Award, sponsored by the Alumnae of Northwestern University. The Tony Award–winning singer and actor most recently starred in Netflix’s Sweet Magnolias and NBC’s Chicago Med. The volunteer alumnae organization feted Headley during a virtual ceremony in October.

Allyson Rice (C86) created Fine, I’ll Write My Own Damn Song, a comedic rap music video message to her son, which won the best-of-festival award at the WRPN Women’s International Film Festival, among many other awards. It was chosen as an official selection at the Pittsburgh Shorts Festival, the video’s 19th official selection last year. It can be found on YouTube.

Stuart N. Brotman (C74) is the author of Privacy’s Perfect Storm: Digital Policy for Post-Pandemic Times. The book’s foreword was written by former FCC chair Newton N. Minow (C49, JD50).

Leslie Dukker Doty (C76) was named CEO of Women in the Boardroom, where she has served as chief strategy officer since 2019.
Alumni achievements

Wendy Beer (C88) was appointed principal of Cayman Islands–based alternative-fund governance specialists Danesmead Partners to head its New York office.

Lori Moore (GC89), former managing director at Deloitte, joined Bayer as vice president and head of pharmaceutical communications in the United States.

Tricia Rothschild (C89), former chief product officer and cohead of global markets for Morningstar, was named president of Apex Clearing.

Jai Khanna (C90) joined Husch Blackwell as a partner on its energy and natural resources industry team.

Sara Crate (C93) is chief commercial officer of DispatchHealth, a provider of in-home, high-acuity medical care.

Sophia Skiles (C94) (above) was named head of acting in the Brown/Trinity Rep programs by Brown University’s department of theatre arts and performance studies. She will join the program in the fall.

Matthew Siegel (C95), chief commercial officer at Sonos, was appointed to the board of directors at AAMP Global, a provider of vehicle aftermarket technology.

Jean Villepique (C95), whose TV credits include The Office, 30 Rock, Sharp Objects, and Better Call Saul, performed in Six Feet, an original, innovative play commissioned by nonprofit arts organization RiverArts and presented on Zoom in October.

Natsu Onoda Power (C96, GC99, GC05), a professor of theatre and performance studies at Georgetown University, is among 11 artists commissioned by 1st Stage to generate pieces of solo work during theater closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meredith Vuchnich (GC96) was a cowriter for Beans, which was screened at the Toronto International Film Festival and the Sheffield Horror Film Festival.

Sarah Butterfass (C99, KSM04) was appointed to the board of directors of Netgear. She is chief product officer at FanDuel and previously held the same position at Groupon.

Nicole Patton Terry (C99, GC02, GC05), the Olive and Manuel Bordas Professor of Education at Florida State University, was appointed director of the multidisciplinary Florida Center for Reading Research. (See page 19.)

Tim DaRosa (C01) was appointed chief marketing officer of Zadara Storage, an enterprise storage-as-a-service company.

Marni Usheroff (C01), a senior communications specialist at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, has led the institution’s COVID-19 media engagement since January 2020. She covers infectious diseases and epidemiology, among other areas, at Cedars-Sinai, which is one of 10 federally funded regional Ebola treatment centers.

Jennifer Room (GC02) joined the Michigan Retailers Association as vice president of communications and marketing.

Sanjay Sood (C02, McC07) was appointed to the newly created role of chief technology officer at CDW Corporation. He joins from HERE Technologies.

Erica Stuntman (C02, JD07), an attorney at Snell & Wilmer, was appointed to the Arizona Theatre Company board of trustees.

Roshni Nadar Malhotra (C03, KSM08), executive director and CEO of HCL Corporation, was appointed chairperson of HCL Technologies, where she was previously vice chairperson, taking over for her father, who founded the software company.

Storytellers move enterprise online

Anne Purky (C79), Stephanie Rogers (C89), and fellow producer Marya Morris operate Story Jam, a vibrant collective that pairs storytelling with original music written and performed by a 10-piece band led by Rogers. The events are humorous, poignant, and entertaining, often spotlighting themes of social justice, diversity, and inclusion. Before the pandemic, live shows were held at City Winery and Artifact Events in Chicago and at SPACE in Evanston. When the pandemic hit, Story Jam pivoted to offering online events and classes and developing a podcast. The reimagining included their annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day event, which was held virtually in January. The collective partnered with two national storytelling companies to create a memorable event and highlight racism and social justice in tribute to King. One of their featured tellers was Lynne Jordan (C85).
Jeffrey Q. McCune Jr. (GC07), associate professor of women, gender, and sexuality studies and of African and African American studies at Washington University in St. Louis, has been named director of the Frederick Douglass Institute in the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Rochester. He will facilitate cross-disciplinary collaboration in the study of the African diaspora and offer essential programming that explores and promotes African and African American studies at the university. He will also oversee the institute’s interdepartmental undergraduate major and minor programs as well as its graduate certificate and pre- and post-doctoral fellowships.

The Death of Robin Hood, a new play by J. S. Puller (C07, GSES11), was published by Stage Rights.

Brian Zellis (GC07) was appointed national sales director at Nissan North America. He will also oversee the institute’s interdepartmental undergraduate major and minor programs as well as its graduate certificate and pre- and post-doctoral fellowships.

Aisha Harris (C09) is now a host and reporter for NPR’s podcast Pop Culture Happy Hour. She joined NPR from the New York Times, where she was an opinion columnist and arts and entertainment reporter.

Abraham Benson-Goldberg (C11) and a group of fellow School of Communication grads formed the digital theatre company, Benson-Goldberg says their intention “is not to replicate live theatre during a pandemic but to create an entirely new type of experience.” Collaborators include ensemble members Kelby Siddons (C10) and Ray Rehberg (C12) and marketing specialist Thor Rudebeck (C09). The first season began in November with Cobbler: A Recipe, a new play by Ian August, which tells the story of brother and sister Peach and Cherry, whose relationship is repeatedly tested by both their life circumstances and the choices they make.

Hillary Bachelder (C12) directed the feature-length documentary Represent, which received its national broadcast premiere on PBS in October. The film was first released virtually through Music Box Films in August and received critical acclaim. Coproduced by Kartemquin Films and ITVS, the film is now available on Independent Lens, iTunes, and Amazon. Bachelder also shot and edited the film, which was produced by Anne Sobel (GC10) and Rachel Pikelyn (Medill05).

Rachel Kenney (C12) and Walls Trimble (C12) launched the weekly podcast I Have a Question with Rachel and Walls. In each of their more than 30 episodes, they check in on the state of the world, ask each other a question, and leave listeners with a recommendation for something to eat, drink, read, watch, or do.

Kelly I. Chung (GC13, GC18) joined Williams College as assistant professor of women’s, gender, and sexuality studies. She was previously a postdoctoral fellow in Asian American studies at Dartmouth.

Ziwke Fumudoh (C14), staff writer on Desus & Mero and Our Cartoon President, will produce and star in her own variety special Yearly Departed on Amazon.

Nayna Agrawal (GC15) worked last year on six animation shows with Netflix, Mattel, DreamWorks, and Apple. Her plays were workshopped and received readings with several Los Angeles and New York theatre collectives, and her radio play Plucker was featured in the Los Angeles Times and selected for production by LA’s Antaeus Theater Company. She was chosen to participate in the inaugural XYZ Salon for South Asian artists in Hollywood.

Christina Laur (GC15) joined West Liberty University as an assistant professor of speech-language pathology.

Marion Hill (C16) is the director, screenwriter, and producer of Ma Belle, My Beauty, which will premiere at Sundance Film Festival this year. Her feature film debut includes cinematography by Lauren Guiteras (C14). This year’s festival will be a hybrid of virtual screenings and socially distant in-person events.

Kantara Souffrant (GC17) was named the Milwaukee Art Museum’s curator of community dialogue, a newly created position to ensure that community engagement is at the center of adult programming. (See page 21.)
Alumni achievements

The thesis short documentary *The Women and the Sea* by Cami Guarda (GC19) won Best International Latino Short Film at New York’s Latin Film Market and the Latino Short Documentary Award at Texas’s Festival de Cine Latinoamericano. Guarda was invited to participate in the best international short competition at Chile’s Festival Internacional de Cine Antofagasta.

Exal Iraheta (GC19) was selected for the prestigious Playwrights Unit at the Goodman Theatre. His play *They Could Give No Name* was chosen as a finalist for the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center’s 2020 National Playwrights Conference, a finalist for the Judith Royer Excellence in Playwriting Award, and an honorable mention for the American Playwriting 2019 Foundation’s Relentless Award.

The thesis documentary *Redacted* by Naeema Torres (GC19) was screened virtually at the New Orleans Film Festival in November and won best documentary at Dayton Independent Film Festival and Black X Film Festival. Torres also coproduced the short documentary *Larry from Gary* with award-winning filmmaker Dan Rybicky, which premiered last summer at Indy Fest and was screened at the St. Louis International Film Festival.

Noni Bell (C20) was selected for the Television Academy Foundation’s prestigious 2020 Summer Fellows program. “Earning this fellowship gave me a lot of confidence in myself and my own talent, something that I’ve struggled with,” Bell said in a Television Academy statement. “I used to think that I was going to mainly focus on film, but taking courses on television writing at Northwestern, such as Working in the Writer’s Room and Formulaic Television, made me look at the medium of television differently. These courses helped me gain a better appreciation for television as a storytelling medium. I’m excited to grow as an artist within television!”

Mercy, a play by Felicia Oduh (C20) about a man’s wrongful conviction, was selected as part of Northlight Theatre’s Interplay showcase for new works by emerging artists. The development was made all the more exciting by the involvement of veteran actor, director, and producer Harry Lennix (C86), who directed the staged reading on December 13. “I think Felicia Oduh has written a play that’s extremely important, extremely present, and extremely precedent,” Lennix said in a post-reading Q&A. Lennix late last year announced plans to create the Lillian Marcie Center in an old warehouse on Chicago’s South Side. He told the *Chicago Tribune* that he wants the center to comprise two theaters to house, among others, the Congo Square Theatre Company and a new, nationally focused archive called the African American Museum of Performing Arts.

**2020 Tony Award nominees**

Northwestern was well represented among 2020’s crop of Tony nominees. They include John Logan (C83), nominated for best book of a musical for *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*; Erica Lynn Schwartz (C03), producer of *Moulin Rouge*, nominated for best musical; Jamie Joeyen-Waldorf (C18) and Debbie Bisno (C92), producers of *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, nominated for best revival of a play; and Andrew Restieri (C18), producer of *Sea Wall/A Life*, nominated for best play. Other alumni affiliated with nominated shows include Katie Spelman (C09), associate choreographer for *Moulin Rouge*; Annelise Baker (C14), ensemble member of *Jagged Little Pill*, nominated for best musical; and Maulik Pancholy (C95), who was in the cast of *Grand Horizons*, nominated for best play. At press time, the Tony Awards ceremony had not been scheduled.

Clockwise from top: John Logan, Debbie Bisno, Jamie Joeyen-Waldorf, Erica Lynn Schwartz
Thomas McClain, former Northwestern debate coach, died on October 6 at age 88 in Evanston. Born in Mississippi, McClain attended Bethany Nazarene College in Oklahoma, where he met Joy, his wife of 67 years. After serving in the US Army, he earned his master’s degree at Redlands University in California, followed by a doctorate at the University of Iowa. The McClains and their three children moved to Evanston in 1964, when he started as an assistant professor in the School of Speech and also served as debate coach. His team won the National Collegiate Debate title in 1966, and the next year he was named Collegiate Debate Coach of the Year. In 1970 McClain moved to New Trier High School in Winnetka, Illinois, where he coached the debate team until he retired in 1994. He is survived by Joy and his children, granddaughters, and brother.

Bradley Mott (C79), veteran Chicago stage actor, died on October 10 at age 64 in Chicago. Large in stature and spirit, Mott was a gifted comedic actor and a fixture in Chicago theaters, known for his work as the Cowardly Lion in The Wizard of Oz at the Court Theatre in 2002, as Toad in A Year with Frog and Toad at Chicago Children’s Theatre, starring opposite John Malkovich in Sam Shepard’s Curse of the Starving Class at Robert Falls’s Wisdom Bridge Theatre, and many turns as Mr. Fezziwig in A Christmas Carol at the Goodman Theatre. Born in New York City and raised in Greenwich, Connecticut, Mott landed on Chicago stages just after graduating from Northwestern. He was a beloved constant in the city until he moved back to the East Coast in 2008. He returned to Chicago shortly before his death from pancreatic cancer. He is survived by his wife, Susan Osborne-Mott, two children, two brothers, and his mother.

Tessa Dettman (C17), a promising music theatre artist, died on August 19 at age 25. Nominated for a Joseph Jefferson Award for her role as Jo March in Brown Paper Box Company’s production of Little Women, Dettman was involved in nine productions at Northwestern, including A Midsummer Night’s Daydream, American Idiot, and Into the Woods. A theatre major in the music theatre and integrated marketing communications certificate programs, she also acted in radio/television/film student projects. She is survived by her parents, Gary Dettman and Martha Basile.

Gerald Freedman (C49, GC50), a prolific stage director, died on March 17 at age 92 at his home in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Early in his career, he was assistant director to Jerome Robbins for the Broadway premieres of Bells Are Ringing, West Side Story, and Gypsy. He directed 15 Broadway productions, including the original production of Hai, King Lear with Lee J. Cobb, revivals of West Side Story, Arthur Miller’s The Creation of the World and Other Business, and two productions of The Robber Bridegroom, which earned him Drama Desk Award nominations for best director of a musical in 1975 and 1976. He received a 1960 Obie Award for The Taming of the Shrew, his first production for Joseph Papp at the New York Shakespeare Festival, where he was artistic director from 1967 to 1971. He was co-artistic director, with John Houseman, of the Acting Company from 1974 to 1977 and artistic director of the Great Lakes Theatre Festival in Cleveland from 1985 to 1997. In 2000 Freedman was the first American to direct Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in London. He taught at the Yale School of Drama and Juilliard and for nearly 20 years served as dean of drama at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. Isaac Klein’s book The School of Doing: Lessons from Theater Master Gerald Freedman, about his process as a director and philosophy of actor training, was published in 2017. The Lorain, Ohio, native earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees at Northwestern, where he studied under legendary interpretation teacher Alvina Krause.
Gwen K. Luecker (C37),
November 29, age 104, 
Northbrook, Illinois

Ruth M. Hanna (GC42),
August 25, age 102, Wilmette, Illinois

Bernelleyn Patchen (C46),
May 14, age 95, Vacaville, California

Shirley Silver (C48), May 26, age 93, Toronto

Alice Berkowitz (C50),
September 29, age 91, Longboat Key, Florida

Nancy Sergel (C50), October 7, age 92, Gurnee, Illinois

Barbara Vanduyne (C50),
August 25, age 92, Durham, North Carolina

Ann Lawson Weiss (GC50),
May 6, age 93, Chesterfield, Missouri

Barbara Winters (C50),
August 11, age 91, Houston

Carl D. Zurcher (GC50),
September 11, age 96, Huntington, Indiana

Horace H. Cobb (C51),
August 1, age 92, West Des Moines, Iowa

Richard L. Schiefelbusch (GC51),
September 23, age 102, Lawrence, Kansas

Mary L. Fox (GC52),
September 5, age 91, Illinois

Jeannette MacLeod (C52),
August 23, age 89, Columbia, Missouri

Sandra Campbell (C53),
June 12, age 88, Darien, Connecticut

Harold P. Fleig (C53),
September 1, age 89, Lincolnshire, Illinois

Alice L. Siegfried (GC53),
July 18, age 88, Oneonta, New York

Faith Stewart-Gordon (C53),
October 9, age 88, New Preston, Connecticut

Rita Petz Lucas (C54),
June 23, San Francisco

Regina Manser (C54),
June 3, age 88, Spokane, Washington

Charles R. Reeves (C54),
October 11, age 88, Williamsburg, Virginia

Richard Wingo (C54),
October 7, age 88, Wilmington, North Carolina

DeWayne S. Woodring (C54),
July 4, age 88, Texas

Jane Rondou (C55),
August 9, age 86, Green Bay, Wisconsin

Lee Aronov (C56), October 12, age 86, Corvallis, Oregon

Roger L. Minor (C56, L68),
September 7, Sahuarita, Arizona

Martin M. Kutnyak (GC59),
August 11, age 90, the Villages, Florida

Ruth H. Leeb (C59),
August 14, age 83, Skokie, Illinois

Molly Schwartz (C61),
June 27, age 80, Asheville, North Carolina

Diane J. Brezner (C65),
June 15, age 77, Houston

John Lee Jellicorse (GC67),
July 1, age 82, Greensboro, North Carolina

Marilyn N. Reed (C68), May 18, age 73, Brandon, Florida

Jaisook Ryu Bahng (GC70),
May 28, age 75, San Juan Capistrano, California

Phyllis Martinez (C70), July 1, age 72, Breckenridge, Colorado

Patricia Schreiber (GC80),
September 15, age 65, Herndon, Virginia

Ann C. Diamond (C81, GSESP96),
August 4, age 61, Bar Harbor, Maine

Wayne E. Robinson Jr. (C82),
August 1, Pembroke Pines, Florida

Mark T. Wohlgenant (C84),
August 15, age 58, Chicago

Barbara Ann Hunt (GC88),
July 29, age 89, Mississippi

Paul Frank (C89),
September 30, age 53, Los Angeles

James K. Samuelsen (C93),
August 1, age 48, Troy, Michigan
Pathways to the Professoriate

When dean E. Patrick Johnson began drafting his strategic plan for the School of Communication, building a more diverse faculty emerged as an urgent priority. A vital channel for creating a more representative community can come about by identifying and empowering promising postdoctoral scholars and PhD candidates.

“Finding and securing a tenure-track faculty position for a newly minted PhD can be an intimidating and complicated process—especially for candidates of color, who face added barriers due to lack of access, equitable distribution of resources, and mentorship opportunities,” Johnson says. “I wanted to create a pipeline where postdocs from underrepresented groups have an equal shot at tenurereeligible positions here at Northwestern, and in fact to guarantee that outcome.”

With generous support from an anonymous couple, Johnson’s vision is coming to fruition in the first program of its kind at Northwestern.

The David Mancosh Pathways to the Professoriate Postdoctoral Fellowship Fund, named for a mentor of one of the donors, will allow school faculty to strategically recruit new PhDs to become tenure-track faculty members, when positions are available, through a two-year process. The $500,000 gift comes with matching funds from the University. Set to launch this academic year, the program will closely vet candidates via methods and procedures consistent with tenure-track faculty searches. Once at Northwestern, candidates will be given access to resources and mentorship opportunities, and at the end of the fellowship period they will move seamlessly into tenure-track positions.

“During the first conversation with Dean Johnson, we talked about the importance of truly embracing candidates from underrepresented groups and letting them know, without question, we believe in them,” one of the donors says. “What a difference that makes—as someone who grew up with the cards definitively stacked against me, I know firsthand the importance of this support. We could not be more honored to be a small part of Dean Johnson’s vision.”

The fund is named for David Mancosh, a Pennsylvania educator who changed the course of the donor’s life. A scrappy kid from a steel town, Mancosh grew up to serve in World War II and then became a dedicated headmaster and loving father of four sons. He was widely respected as a strong leader with a heart of gold, who was devoted to developing the minds and character of students and teachers alike. He took pride in nurturing students and providing opportunities in cases of hardship or limited opportunity, working tirelessly to ensure students had access to financial aid and transportation to school. He died in 2014 at age 90.
Dialogue is published for the alumni of the School of Communication. Comments and suggestions may be mailed to Dialogue, Northwestern University School of Communication, Evanston, Illinois 60208, or emailed to dialogue@northwestern.edu. Please email all address changes to BioUpdate@northwestern.edu.

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