Legally Blonde: The Musical
Music and lyrics by Laurence O’Keefe and Nell Benjamin
Book by Heather Hatch
Directed and choreographed by Chris Carter
February 14–March 1
Ethel M. Barber Theater

Danceworks 2020
Artistic direction by José Valdés-Martínez
March 4–8
Josephine Louis Theater

Peter and the Starcatcher
by Rick Elice
Directed by Nate Cohen
April 24–May 3
Ethel M. Barber Theater

89th Annual Waa-Mu Show:
State of the Art
May 7–12
Cahn Auditorium

Peerless
by Jeeha Park
Directed by Sara Li Glaws
May 15–24
Josephine Louis Theater

Information and tickets at communication.northwestern.edu/wirtz

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Message from the dean

I first learned about Northwestern’s summer National High School Institute (NHSI)—nicknamed the “Cherub” program—when I was a high school junior, listening to friends on the debate team who longed to attend. It was well known as one of the most intensive and effective programs for students who were very serious about improving their debate skills. I was intrigued but didn’t apply. However, my future husband, Daniel O’Keefe, did attend NHSI’s debate camp and thoroughly enjoyed being a Cherub. Declining an offer of admission to Northwestern (too close to home in the Chicago suburbs), he went to the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign with the intention of competing in college and becoming a debate coach. He and I met the first day of freshman year, even before classes began, when we ran into each other in the debate squad room. We remained at Illinois, each earning three degrees in communication and becoming experts in different aspects of argumentation theory.

And coming full circle, after long careers as scholars in communication studies, Dan and I will end our careers at Northwestern, mine as dean of the School of Communication and his as the Owen L. Coon Professor of Argumentation and Debate. During my 20 years as dean, we have met so many Cherub alumni—some who subsequently attended Northwestern for undergraduate study but also many who, like Dan, chose to study elsewhere. Yet whether they were theatre, film, or debate Cherubs and regardless of where they earned their degrees, they all see themselves as Northwestern alumni and are grateful for the way NHSI launched them toward success.

We have never before devoted an issue of Dialogue to the faculty, students, and alumni of the Cherub program, but this is the right time to acknowledge their contributions and devotion to Northwestern. As you will learn in this issue, NHSI has been the School of Communication’s most potent recruiting tool, bringing extraordinary people from all the communication arts to study and perform in Evanston.

Because of the program’s powerful appeal, five years ago we began developing a new Cherub format to bring new kinds of students into our community. Adam Joyce, the assistant dean who oversees NHSI, has worked with his staff to develop an after-school version of the program. For several years this new initiative has been offered in Chicago high schools that serve minority and low-income students, and last year we piloted the program in Los Angeles as well. The format’s success in bringing the Cherub experience—and the appeal of Northwestern—to entirely new communities has convinced us to make a long-term commitment to expanding our presence in Los Angeles.

This issue of Dialogue pays homage to the long history of Cherubs—including many of our most notable Cherub alumni—and lays out our plans for expanding this wonderful part of the School of Communication. We hope that the 21st-century version of Cherubs will help us become an even better 21st-century communication school. Stay tuned!

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

On the cover: Summer 2019 Cherubs in the National High School Institute’s theatre arts division perform Gao Xingjian’s play The Other Shore in the Josephine Louis Theater of the Virginia Widener Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts. To learn more about and to apply to NHSI, visit nhsi.northwestern.edu.

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From left: Zayd Dohrn, Brad Hall, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, and David Tolchinsky

School of Communication alumni are not only exceptionally talented and accomplished; they’re also engaged and often willing to swing by to say hello. On October 27 faculty and students in the MFA program in writing for screen and stage hosted Julia Louis-Dreyfus (C83, H07), Brad Hall (C80), and their son Charlie Hall (C19) for an informal chat about comedy, authentic characters, creating a productive writers room, and more. The three were in town to participate in the annual Chicago Humanities Festival.

“Brad and Julia broke down an episode of Veep—what was difficult about it, what was successful, the role of improvisation and planning in how the episode eventually came together,” says David Tolchinsky, codirector of the MFA program and professor of radio/television/film. “They talked about the role of failure and how certain failures led to other successes.”

The wide-ranging conversation included both technical details and career advice. “The students were thrilled to talk to such generous and knowledgeable alumni,” says Zayd Dohrn, program codirector and department chair. “It’s great to bring together these amazing writers, directors, and performers with our talented young writers, who will be making the film and TV of the future. And of course, so many of these top-rated artists are Northwestern alumni who are happy to give back.”

Louis-Dreyfus most recently starred as Selina Meyer on HBO’s smash-hit comedy Veep, also serving as executive producer; the series wrapped last spring after seven seasons. For Veep she won a record-setting six consecutive lead-comedy-actress Emmy Awards, tying her with Gloria Leachman (Ca8, H4) for the most acting Emmys overall at eight apiece.

National Theatre Live
Ethel M. Barber Theater

Present Laughter by Noël Coward
March 14

Flossing
written and performed by Phoebe Waller-Bridge
April 3

All My Sons by Arthur Miller
April 6–9
Each summer the School of Communication’s National High School Institute (also known as the Cherub program) draws high-achieving high school students to Northwestern’s renowned precollege programs in theatre, film, debate, and now neuroscience. NHSI has been one of the University’s most successful initiatives in its impact on the development of secondary school students. As a result, it has become one of Northwestern’s most successful marketing and recruiting tools.

Assistant dean Adam Joyce has found a way to reach even more gifted students and bring them into the Wildcat fold. After decades as a summer program, NHSI recently expanded to meet students where they are, giving them an opportunity to become part of the Cherub program in their own high school classrooms. The expansion started in Chicago-area schools and has extended to Los Angeles, in a strategic move to recruit new students to Northwestern and bring more purple power to the Golden State.
The rave reviews are in, and the School of Communication’s number one recruitment tool may soon be at a high school near you.

Alyssa Schwartz was among the select students at her Los Angeles high school to participate in NHSI’s new in-school playwriting intensive, and it completely changed her perspective about writing. “I was never good at writing essays,” she admits, “but when our theatre class had this playwriting intensive, we all had to write a 10-minute play, and I had a lot of fun with it. It helped me explore all parts of my mind instead of just a small part of it.” Because of her success in that program, Schwartz came to Evanston last summer to take part in NHSI’s film and video division; this fall she will enroll at Northwestern.

Part of a large, diverse, and vocal group of teens who are introduced to the University through NHSI, Schwartz was among the first group of students to participate in the program’s LA expansion, which opens doors to new populations at a crucial point in a high schooler’s college-choice decision-making. It also aims to capitalize on Northwestern’s robust network of alumni and connections in the creative industries.

NHSI director Jennifer Avery says the plan is working. “Every school we’ve worked in has wanted us back year after year. And word is getting out—other schools in LA have heard about the program and asked to participate. We’re only going to continue to grow.”

Expanding the Northwestern footprint

The summertime NHSI program—which welcomed its first cohort to Evanston in 1931 and has educated future Oscar, Emmy, Tony, and Pulitzer Prize winners as well as politicians, high-court appointees, CEOs, and leading researchers—continues to be a massive draw. Approximately 2,500 students come to Evanston annually for one- to seven-week sessions of college-caliber classes. They live in campus residence halls, eat in the dining facilities, and squeeze in a little fun amid the high curricular demands. (See pages 6 and 7.)

In 2016 NHSI launched a Chicago-area pilot program with Evanston Township, New Trier, and Senn High Schools and Chicago High School for the Arts (ChiArts) to offer an academic year playwriting intensive. The students take in-school courses, receive out-of-class assistance, and draft a 10-minute play. NHSI instructor and writer John Corwin teaches the program, now in 10 area schools.

“Playwriting will make every other type of writing better. The structure and form we talk about is the form of every other writing,” Corwin says. “It just makes you become a better communicator, and that skill will serve you in any number of ways. I think these sorts of expressions are needed in the world.”

ChiArts junior Daniela Morales participated in the playwriting intensive and then came to Evanston last summer for the five-week film and video division. “Without a doubt, I can say this past summer was one of the best I’ve had so far,” says Morales, whose script was produced as part of the Cherubs final projects. “I learned more about film and what goes on during production by being a part of it. The experience also made me want to get a camera and start writing and producing my own films.”

The success of the Chicago expansion prompted the strategic westward move. In 2018–19 the School of Communication launched the playwriting intensive in three Los Angeles–area schools, and this year it’s at eight: Alliance Leichtman-Levine, Beverly Hills High, Long Beach Polytechnic, Hollywood High, Carson High School, Windward, Alliance Judy ivy Burton, and Alliance Gertz-Ressler. The goal is to create new partnerships, establish a physical presence for Northwestern in LA, and introduce the innovative curriculum to a younger, broader audience—and to recruit a wider array of students to both NHSI’s summer programs and the University.

“The city of Los Angeles is an artistic and cultural hub, home to an incredibly diverse array of people,” says Ian
WHAT DOES NHSI TEACH? The Evanston-based summer programming comprises four divisions: theatre arts, film, video, debate, and neuroscience.

Students taking part in theatre arts must be rising high school seniors in the top third of their class with a demonstrated interest and evidence of experience in theatre—whether in acting, music theatre performance, dance, or writing. Core classes include voice and movement; electives can cover design, tech, and much more. The five-week program offers an optional two-week musical theatre extension.

The film and video division has similar academic demands but also welcomes rising high school juniors. Students choose to concentrate in acting on camera, production, or screenwriting; this determines the classes they are eligible to take. Although separate tracks, the concentrations are highly collaborative, as the actors star in the production students' final projects, which are sometimes based on screenwriters' work. The film and video division includes the two-week summer playwriting intensive, an extension of the Chicago and Los Angeles in-school program. The debate division demands high academic achievement and experience or interest in policy debate and is open to rising high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Debaters can participate in one, four-, or six-week sessions in which they take classes, research the annual debate topic, and attend lectures. Smaller labs give students extra attention and address specific needs; the Chicago Scholars program offers its own lab in this format. Success is measured by a marked improvement in students' skill sets and a noticeable uptick in motivation and preparedness.

The neuroscience division, new in 2019, invited seven Chicago students to campus for a one-week intensive (see page 12).

Merrigan, who manages NHSI in LA and teaches playwriting in the 10-week program at participating high schools: “As a high school student here, you grow up surrounded by the entertainment industry. By programming arts classes in Los Angeles, NHSI can connect its rich network of artists and educators, many of them Northwestern alumni, to students in their own communities. By providing a clearer pathway between Evanston and Los Angeles, we open the door for students and faculty from Northwestern and high school students in Los Angeles to take advantage of both locations’ wealth of resources.” This year NHSI is piloting a documentary media program in LA, training select students to use camera and audio equipment to film a short documentary on a topic of their choosing.

“This program is especially important because so much of the arts has been stripped away from schools,” says Northwestern University Entertainment Alliance West copresident Marcus Fólmar (C’16)—a regular performer with the Upright Citizens Brigade who has appeared in dozens of TV shows and wrote 2011’s I Hate LA as well as the web series Alley Way, which premiered in 2016. An NHSI teacher in two schools, he says the program gives students “an introduction to the arts. That might be something they consider doing professionally or maybe something they just use as a creative outlet. But either way, they can take it with them for life.” Fólmar says that students who may never have thought they could write now suddenly realize that, with a little effort, they can—and someday that might lead to a career.

“The future of the entertainment industry relies on content producers,” says assistant dean for planning and engagement Adam Joyce, who oversees NHSI. “Empowering these young people to develop a voice and a viewpoint will be so beneficial down the road—not just when it comes to bringing new, intelligent students to Northwestern, but also in sending them out into the creative industries with a strong skill set and the confidence to match.”

A floundering program on the left coast will extend ripples far beyond the Cherubs. NHSI LA has taken up residence in Burbank’s Garry Marshall Theater—co-run by former Cherub Kathleen Marshall LaGambina (C’90). The long-term plan is to build a Los Angeles presence to also support undergraduate and graduate program expansion. In Evanston the Cherub program uses the facilities developed to support the regular School of Communication curriculum; in Los Angeles the facilities to be developed for the precollage program will also serve as teaching and meeting space for students and faculty from Evanston.

“We are very excited about these potential opportunities for expanding our professional educational programs,” says Professor Madhu Reddy, the school’s associate dean for graduate programs. “Programs such as our master of science in leadership for creative enterprises would be of great interest to professionals working on the West Coast. Northwestern is already so well known around West Coast industry leaders that expanding our physical presence there is a thrilling possible next step.”

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CHERUB

Harrison High School senior Aidan Wohl of New York got his first taste of college life when he came to Northwestern’s Evanston campus as a Cherub last summer. He quickly learned that sleep and free time were in short supply.

“That first week, it’s a little bit of a smack in the face, because we all found ourselves working harder and longer hours than most of us did during the school year,” says Wohl, who spent five weeks in the film and video division. “But every Cherub is so passionate about filmmaking, and the instructors are just so talented, you don’t really want to have free time. You want to soak up all the knowledge from the instructors and all the creativity from your fellow Cherubs.”

Wohl would begin his day waking up in Allison Hall at 7:30 a.m. After a quick breakfast at Himan Dining Hall, he would head to his first core class at 8:30. Since Wohl chose screenwriting as his concentration, his first two classes of the day centered on that topic. In the afternoon, he’d be off to an elective, such as Personal Cinema.

“That class was all about taking personal experiences from your background—where you grew up, who your family is—and learning how you can use it to form a unique perspective in your filmmaking,” Wohl says. “The big takeaway is that filmmaking is a personal art form, and if you can’t be vulnerable in your piece, you might not be ready to make a film. When we analyzed the work of great directors and writers, we learned that making a film, they really leave a part of themselves on the screen.”

Evenings would often include screenings of instructors’ projects and other activities. The long day wouldn’t end until the RA meeting at 10:30 p.m. “I wouldn’t get back to my dorm until 11,” he says. “And by then, I was usually pretty conked out.”

In the final two weeks, students worked on producing their five-minute films. Wohl’s Cherub screenplay, Stop, is about a boy who wakes himself in the woods to learn more about himself but gets more than he bargained for.

“I think it took us 10 hours to film a five-minute production, and that’s not even counting the many hours it took to plan—for me to write and for the director and cinematographer to make the shot list,” says Wohl, who also had the opportunity to act in fellow Cherubs’ projects. “It really is such a group effort. It’s all about time, patience, and dedication. We all left understanding how much goes into so little.”

In the end, Wohl’s hard work paid off. “On the final day, the parents come to campus, and there’s a six-hour screening of all the films, and you can see what you made,” he says. “Seeing my work up there on that giant screen and watching it affect an audience was one of the best feelings I’ve ever had.”

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Wohl says held do it all again—lack of downtime and all. “It is a magical, transformative experience for anyone who’s passionate enough and driven enough to take it on.” He will enroll at Northwestern this fall.
A wider, smarter, more supportive net  
Geographical expansion is part of the School of Communication's determined efforts to widen the Cherub recruitment pool. The program hopes to increase student diversity, welcome new perspectives, and advance programs in a way that reflects societal and University values. But in recent years, NHSI has been doing this closer to home through strategic partnerships with Evanston Scholars, Northwestern Academy, and the Urban Debate League, which have lent fresh voices to University arts and rhetoric traditions. These relationships have helped identify talented students of color and facilitated their inclusion in the campus community through outreach and scholarship funding.

The Chicago Scholars program helps cultivate debate talent by sponsoring 12 talented Chicago-area students recommended by the Urban Debate League. Those students attend a four-week summer lab at Northwestern to sharpen their debate skills.

"Part of our mission is attracting a student body that reflects the larger demographics of the country," says Daniel Fitzmier, director of Northwestern's and NHSI's debate programs. "Programs like this—that break down a lot of the wealth and access barriers to high school students for participation in the University—help do that." Fitzmier has taken teams to the National Debate Tournament finals 10 times and has coached Northwestern to five NDT victories—in 2002, 2003, 2005, 2011, and 2015.

He says the NHSI program helps him identify potentially talented debaters and helps students prepare for college, whether they choose Northwestern or a different school. "We've found that we're impacting a group of students who are sharpening a set of characteristics that will help them succeed," says Fitzmier. "I don't think there's enough data to say that we're a causal factor in getting students into higher education, but there's certainly a continuity there for participation in debate. In my qualitative judgment, the students are better prepared to succeed when they get to college because of this program."

One significant net benefit of NHSI is harder to quantify: the sense of belonging that it engenders. Regardless of the location of the participating schools or the demographics of the students, Cherubs wind up being successful because they find themselves in a like-minded group of artists and thinkers. They support one another and find a safe haven amid a turbulent time in most teens' lives.

“These are creative students who are incredibly sensitive, but they're exploring their passions with students who feel like them, who are equally sensitive, or who are equally ‘other’ in their high schools,” says NHSI director Avery. “I love watching them, because they’re the cool kids here.”

The Northwestern pipeline  
Founded to expand recruitment for the School of Communication (see page 14), NHSI remains a pipeline for high school students who discover the Northwestern experience through its precollege programs. Cherub alumni are regularly accepted

“Empowering these young people to develop a voice and a viewpoint will be so beneficial down the road.”  
—Assistant dean Adam Joyce

CHERUBIC FACULTY  
Zayd Dohrn attended the NHSI film and video division and is now associate professor and chair of the Department of Radio/Television/Film. Assistant professor of theatre Halena Kays was a Cherub and returned to Northwestern as an undergraduate; theatre senior lecturer Laura Schellhardt taught in the program. Senior lecturer Mary Poole was director of the theatre arts division for years, and professor emeritus and former School of Communication dean David Zarefsky directed the debate division for more than a decade. Daniel O'Keefe, the Owen L. Coon Professor of Argumentation and Debate, began his forensic ascent back in 1967 as a rising high school senior.

“I remember the wonderful feeling of complete immersion in debate activities—time in Northwestern’s libraries, strategy sessions, practice debates, and so on,” O’Keefe recalls. “Of course, the schedule included nondebate activities that (predictably) we dismissed as ‘compulsory fun.’ But one of those activities remains an especially vivid and happy memory: a trip to the Ravinia Festival, where we heard the Chicago Symphony Orchestra perform Mussorgsky’s Pictures at an Exhibition under the direction of Seiji Ozawa. Compulsory fun indeed!”
between the country’s best universities, including Harvard, Brown, Yale, and of course Northwestern. Roughly three-quarters of the students who attended the 2018 Cherubs theatre program applied to Northwestern, about a third of those students enrolled in 2019–20. The acceptance rate of former Cherubs far outpaces the University’s overall acceptance rate of 8 to 9 percent.

Does Cherub participation give students an admissions boost? More likely, it allows the students to better articulate why they want to attend Northwestern. The experience stays with them.

Anushka Agarwala will be part of Northwestern’s class of 2024 and saw her NHSI summer as a “dress rehearsal” for college. “I went in nervous that I wouldn’t fit in because this would be my first experience with people just as dedicated as I am to creating good theatre,” she says. “When I left, not only was I eager to continue my career as a stage manager, but I also was certain that this was my calling in life.”

“I knew I wanted to attend a place just like Cherubs that taught me that my education is about more than just being an actor.”

—Nolan Robinson, class of 2021

Her father, Dhruv Agarwala (McC93), saw her experience as a new way to engage with his alma mater. “I was well aware of the rigor and intensity of the program and knew that if Anushka came out after seven weeks still excited and motivated, then she truly was meant to be in theatre,” he says. “As I saw it, it was a defining moment for her, because on day one Anushka felt completely at home as a Cherub.”

Northwestern junior Nolan Robinson, who grew up in Evanston and attended Evanston Township High School, was a theatre and music theatre Cherub. When he arrived, he had no intention of applying to the University, as he initially thought he wanted to go far away to a conservatory. The experience, and the exposure to Northwestern’s curriculum, changed his mind.

“I realized that for a Northwestern student, submerged in everything on campus, Evanston would feel like an entirely different world, and it does,” says Robinson, who recently produced the comedy web series Where’s Noah? He also created the podcast Of All Trades with Nolan Robinson, for which he has interviewed Northwestern president Morton Schapiro and provost Jonathan Holloway and plans to interview celebrity alumni. His successful Northwestern career, he says, all began with that first summer on campus.

“The actors in Northwestern’s theatre program receive efficient training, but we are also educated in the arts and sciences and are taught how to have something to say, not only how to say something,” Robinson says. “I knew I wanted to attend a place just like Cherubs that taught me that my education is about more than just being an actor.”

Finding students like Robinson—those with passion, drive, and an affinity for the Northwestern experience—is key to NHSI’s continued expansion. And with sights set on talented students of all backgrounds, the program will open the doors to the University’s even brighter future. “The wider the net we cast for these programs,” says Avery, “the better it is for Northwestern.”

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Lucas Hedges

Academy Award–nominated actor Lucas Hedges says that he struggled as a teenager, feeling like an outsider. But his summer as a Cherub changed that.

“I felt very lost and self-destructive in high school, and Cherubs was the first five weeks coming off of a low point in my life, when I was just injected with movement and play and light,” says Hedges, who earned an Oscar nod for 2016’s Manchester by the Sea and has starred in Boy Erased.

For TV and movie star Sharif Atkins (C97), his experience as a 1992 theatre Cherub totally clarified his course in life.

“I didn’t realize it till after the five weeks were over, but I had made two decisions based on my time there: I wanted to be an actor, and I wanted to begin the journey at Northwestern University,” says Atkins, who would go on to graduate from the School of Communication as a theatre major.

“The passion of [senior lecturer and then director of the Cherubs theatre division] Mary Poole and the encouragement and praise of the teachers began nurturing gifts that at that point I didn’t know I had,” he recalls. “If my four years at Northwestern were my foundation, then the Cherub program was the excavation needed to provide clarity for where my life was headed.”

Atkins would go on to star as Dr. Michael Gallant in the hit NBC drama ER. He has also played special agent Clinton Jones in The 4400, assistant US attorney Harrison Rivers in the CBS drama The Good Wife, and a Nova Corps sidekick, Omar, in the Broadway production of Guardians of the Galaxy. Atkins says the Cherub program was a life-changing experience for him.

Brad Weinstock

When future Broadway star Brad Weinstock (Co6) arrived on campus as a theatre Cherub in 2001, he immediately felt at home.

“The best thing about going to this program is you really do find your tribe, you find your people,” says Weinstock, who toured nationally in Jersey Boys and Wicked and currently stars as Aladdin’s sidekick, Omar, in the Broadway production of Aladdin. “A lot of people had participated in their high school theatre programs, but this was the next level—people who are super interested in this, people who want to pursue it down the line for their careers, people just as passionate if not more so than you. As a Cherub, for the first time I met people who knew every word to some of the cast recordings that I’d been poring over for years.”

Weinstock says he made great friendships, some lasting. “I still work with and audition for people who were in the Cherubs program, even though that was the early 2000s,” he says. “There’s a natural bond that you’ve both been through this, even if you attended in different years.” He adds that NHSI helped him focus on his career and really visualize what he might do as an adult.

“You get a real sampler platter of what life in theatre could be,” he says. “You do one play, but there are also nine other plays going on. I took a creative writing class, I did a class where you write monologues, I did a daily movement and voice class. It gave a great overview of what theatre could be, and all the things you could do in theatre that weren’t necessarily on stage.”

Michael Gottlieb

Michael Gottlieb (WCAS99), a lawyer based in Washington, DC, often finds himself in the thick of cases involving precedent-setting legal and national security issues. He has represented clients involved in crisis management, sensitive government investigations, congressional hearings, constitutional and antitrust disputes, and more, some even before the US Supreme Court. Before entering private practice, he served as associate White House counsel for President Barack Obama and helped start and manage an international civil-military task force devoted to rule-of-law issues in Afghanistan. Prior to being named one of Washington’s top 40 lawyers under 40, a rising star by the National Law Journal, and a legal trailblazer by Law 360, he was a two-time Cherub exploring his early passion for debate.

NHSI “was widely thought of as one of the best summer programs in the country,” says Gottlieb, who attended the Cherub debate division after his sophomore and junior years of high school. “And of course summer on the lake was an added benefit.”

Jayne Atkinson

Tony-nominated actress Jayne Atkinson (C03) remembers that soon after coming to Northwestern as a theatre Cherub in 1976, she sat down at the piano in her dorm.

“I didn’t really play, but I’d plunk around a bit, and I decided to play ‘Corner of the Sky’ from Pippin. I’d seen the musical and I’d taught myself the song,” says Atkinson, a Tony nominee for The Rattmacher and Enchanted April who’s also known for her roles in My Big Fat Greek Wedding and House of Cards. “People began gathering around the piano and singing, and it was just this beautiful moment. I love actors and artists so much, because we just burst out singing when we feel like it.”

Atkinson says the Cherub program challenged her in ways she didn’t expect. “It was interesting to work in a place where I wasn’t very well known,” she says. “In high school I got the leads, and now here I was with the crime de la crime of actors from other schools. That was very good for me—to be pushed, to be part of the ensemble, to have a smaller part. That influenced my work ethic and desire to work harder.”

She also fell in love with the Evanston campus. “I went home and only applied to Northwestern, because I knew that’s where I wanted to go,” she says. “The teachers were so amazing. They really pushed us to our limits. I remember watching one instructor, we were soaking up every word, because of course she was a working actor, and that’s what we all wanted to be. She talked about engaging your emotions. This is one of the biggest things for actors; we have to laugh and cry on cue. It’s one of the things that’s the most challenging. I remember she showed us she could cry at the drop of a hat, and we were all mesmerized.”

Atkinson’s Cherub experience made such an impression that her son Jeremy even followed in her footsteps. “The program should go on forever,” she says, “because it really is such a wonderful way for young actors to ground themselves.”

CHERUB MEMORIES

The substance and style of policy debate—where teams of two argue for and against a topic, often in sped-up delivery—lends itself well to a future in law. And Northwestern, with its ample resources and rich history as a leader in policy debate, offers an opportunity for high schoolers to see debate as a pathway to a rewarding future.

“We had outstanding instruction from some of the best teachers from college and high school debate and an extraordinary group of Cherubs to learn from and compete against,” he recalls. “Having access to Northwestern’s library, one of the best in the country, also enhanced the research aspect of policy debate.”

The lessons and connections linger. “On one of my first days at Harvard Law School,” he says, “an NHSI alum came up to me, and in conversation we realized we had lived in the same dorm as Cherubs.”
In 1931, just as the Great Depression was picking up steam, School of Speech theatre professor Garrett Leverton and Dean Ralph Dennis launched an exciting new plan: inviting high school students to campus for an early but immersive college-curriculum experience. As Dennis stated, the summer program would “bring together gifted young people and superior teachers in an atmosphere of affection, knowledge, and trust”—a mission still embraced by today’s National High School Institute (NHSI), fondly known as the Cherub program.

From the onset, Dennis saw this as an opportunity to introduce the School of Speech and its fields to impressionable high schoolers who might then apply to the University. The current economic climate was another factor; Northwestern had implemented two across-the-board salary cuts in the wake of the October 1929 stock market crash, and morale was low. A summer program would keep the faculty working and earning. Actually, the seeds for NHSI had been planted more than a decade earlier by an enterprising high school junior. After taking elocution lessons for eight years in Chillicothe, Missouri, Alda Blanche Moorman sought opportunities beyond those in her hometown. Her teacher recommended that she attend a speech school, reportedly telling Moorman’s mother, “There’s a fine one called the Cumnock School of Oratory at Northwestern University.” Moorman reached out to acting director Clarion Hardy about taking private lessons between her junior and senior years of high school. Hardy encouraged her to “not waste” her parents’ money but instead to take actual college courses for which she could get credit. Moorman heeded his advice that summer, and after completing high school the following spring, she enrolled in the School of Speech, graduating in 1921.

The program that Dennis and Leverton created for the first official cohort in 1931 (initially called the High School Institute in Speech) recruited outstanding students from 16 schools to take part in four weeks of immersion in every aspect of speech and drama. Courses included acting, play production, shop, and makeup, culminating in a series of one-act plays produced by and starring the participants. Also including courses in debate and public speaking, the jam-packed days started at 7:30 a.m. and lasted until rehearsals finished at 10 p.m.

By 1934 the program had swelled to 90 students from 30 states. They had the option of taking part in four- to eight-week sessions; tuition for the five-week session was $60, and room and board in a University dormitory was $60.50. That year, Northwestern’s Medill School of Journalism launched its own program, and by 1940 the two had merged to offer tracks in dramatics, debate and public speaking, and journalism.

Eventually Northwestern’s Schools of Music, Education, Business, and Engineering offered NHSI programs of their own, but today only the communication and journalism programs continue. They remain close campus partners, although a decade ago the journalism program officially withdrew from the National High School Institute to become the Medill-Northwestern Journalism Institute.

Once NHSI started, it wasn’t long before the students came to be known as Cherubs. But when and how did that term arise? A 1936 Summer Northwestern story was headlined “Cherubs Attend Play at Glencoe Tonight,” with no reference to how or why they acquired that name. According to one bit of lore, one of the institute’s directors had called the students cherubs ironically “because they acted like little devils.” And in another old story, Dean Dennis allegedly spotted an amorous couple in the bushes near Annie May Swift Hall and said, “They certainly don’t look like cherubs.” There was no going back after that.

The program was an immediate and lasting success, and the curriculum has continued to evolve and grow. Today NHSI comprises the divisions of theatre arts, film and video, debate, and neuroscience, with playwriting intensives offered in select Chicago- and Los Angeles-area high schools. Future plans may include a documentary media curriculum and additional participating high schools.
Since 1931, thousands of talented students have passed through the National High School Institute. Not surprisingly, many went on to extraordinary careers and achievements—with quite a few also earning Northwestern degrees. Take a spin through just a sampling of the School of Communication's Cherub alumni and their accomplishments (in addition to those on pages 12–13), listed by the year they attended NHSI.

1935
Jennifer Jones (C39) won both an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for The Song of Bernadette, released in 1943. She was also acclaimed for her performances in Since You Went Away (1944), Love Letters (1945), and Duel in the Sun (1946), among dozens of other films.

1942–43
Clint Eastman (CA2, H4) shares the record (with fellow alumni Julia Louis-Dreyfus for winning the most acting Emmys. She also won an Oscar for The Last Picture Show in a career spanning seven decades.

1945
Sander Vanocur (C50) was an actor, comedian, correspondent. He went on to cover the Kennedy-Nixon presidential debate in 1960, and served as a White House press secretary for the first televised Kennedy-Johnson debate in 1963. In addition to those on pages 12–13), listed by the year they attended NHSI.

1960
Frank Galati (CBS, G67, G77) discovered an old love for Northwestern while a Cherb, returning as an undergraduate student, and, from 1970 to 2005, professor in the Department of Performance Studies. Now-professor emeritus, he’s won two Tony Awards for directing and starring Steppenwolf Theatre Company’s The Grapes of Wrath, in addition to a Tony nomination for directing the musical Regine and an Oscar nomination for the screenplay of The Accident Tourist. Winner of 10 Joseph Jefferson Awards for his work in Chicago theater, he has also directed productions at Lurie Opera of Chicago and the Metropolitan Opera.

1966
Shelby Long (E79) won an Emmy and two Golden Globes for playing the iconic role of Diane Chambers on NBC’s hit comedy Cheers.

1967
Merrick Garland is the chief circuit judge of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. After receiving highest honors as an NHSI deke, Garland went on to Harvard University and Harvard Law School before embarking on a brilliant career that included high-profile investigations, government appointments, and a nomination from President Barack Obama to serve on the US Supreme Court.

1971
Cherry Jones has received five Tony nominations, with two wins: for the 1995 revival of The Heiress and the original 2005 production of Doubt. She also received a 2009 Emmy for outstanding supporting actress in a drama series for playing Alison Taylor on Fox’s 24. She appears in the second season of Succession.

1979
Virginia Madsen boasts numerous television and film credits, including her hit indie film Sideways (for which she received 2004 Oscar and Golden Globe nominations) and her starring role on ABC’s Desperate Housewives.

1983
David Schmittlein (C88) played Ross Geller on the smash-hit NBC sitcom Friends, which ran for 10 seasons and netted him a 1995 Emmy nomination for outstanding supporting actor in a comedy series. In 2016 he received a second Emmy nomination, for outstanding supporting actor in a limited series or movie, for playing Robert Kendrickson in The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story. Born out of Northwestern, he cofounded Chicago’s Lookingglass Theatre Company with seven other Northwestern graduates, including several fellow 1983 Cherubs.

1986
Charmaine Craig achieved success with her very first novel, The Good Alien, a national bestseller that was translated into six languages. Her second novel, Mira Burn, was longlisted for the 2017 National Book Award for Fiction and the 2018 Women’s Prize for Fiction. Unrelated to her writing, Craig was the live-action reference for Disney’s animated film Poohshnton.

1987
Tim Blake Nelson is known for starring in a musical for Jerry’s Last Jam. She also received Tony nominations for Play On and Caroline, or Change, winning a 2005 Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award for the latter. On television, Pinkins starred in Madam Secretary and All My Children.

1989
Robert De Niro took an Oscar and Golden Globe for his portrayal of Professor Harold Hill in the critically acclaimed Broadway revival of The Music Man. Bierko’s many plays of Professor Harold Hill in the critical-acclaimed Broadway revival of The Music Man. Bierko’s many

1991
Lindsay Jones composed the scores for HBO Films’ Oscar-winning short documentary A Note of Triumph. The Golden Age of Norman Corwin and Sony Pictures/Lifetime Television’s pilots Family Practice. Jones has received five Joseph Jefferson Awards and fifteen nominations, two ASCAP Plus Awards, an OuterCrit Award and three nominations, an LA Drama Critics Circle Award, a San Die Go Drama Critics Circle Award, a Tony Holder Award, and a Chicago Stage Talk Award, among many others. Her scores have been featured at Cannes, SIFF, Flamenco, the Mid East International Film Festival, and more.

1996
Christopher Rice made the New York Time bestseller list with his first novel, published at the age of 22. By age 30 he added three more books to the Times bestseller list. Son of bestselling author Anne Rice, he has won a Lambda Literary Award and was named one of People magazine’s sexiest men alive. His supernatural suspense novel The Revenours was named one of the year’s best books by the Washington Post, Philadelphia Inquirer, and Houston Chronicle, and was a New York Times bestseller. With one of his first novels, he became the only openly transgender woman signed by the IMI Worldwide talent management group and was named to the Business of Fashion’s BoF 100, an index of people shaping the fashion industry. Rice made her debut novel at 2015’s New York Fashion Week, walking for Eshlo Katta, Hood by Air, and David Setlak. Nominated for 2016’s Model of the Year Award, she became the face of the Gucci Bloom fragrance and has appeared in advertising campaigns for L’Oréal and Hugo Boss.

1998
Noah Wyle won acclaim as Dr. John Carter in NBC’s JR and Tom Mason in TNT’s Falling Skies. He has also appeared in the films Donna Darks and TNT’s The Liberation franchise.

2001
America Ferrera won Golden Globes, Emmy, and Screen Actors Guild Awards for her starring role as Betty Suarez in the ABC series Ugly Betty. Currently starring in NBC’s Supernova, she has also appeared in several films, including Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants.

2002
Sarah Kramer won a Hollywood Makeup Artist and Hair Stylist Guild Award for her work on BBC Two’s King Lear, starring Anthony Hopkins. Many other makeup credit includes, 1977, Denver, Root and Furious Hobbs and Shaw, and the hit HBO series Succession.

2005
Hacky Sack became the top selling cargo during the 1990s. At age 17, the award-winning top dancer appeared with legendary performer Brenda Bufalino, Sandy Minn, Harold Simms, and Savion Glover in a star-studded skate at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. At his Cherb’s summer, he went on to win a Bessie Award for his starring role in the Broadway musical Bring in Dono, Bring in Dono, Bring in Dono, Bring in Dono. His scores have been featured at Cannes, SIFF, Flamenco, the Mid East International Film Festival, and more.

2013
John Cusack took an Oscar for 2014’s Horrible Bosses. He also starred in the CBS reboot of All My Children, appearing in The Incredible Hulk, O Brother, Where Art Thou?, and O Brother, Whore Art Thou? On television he can be seen in HBO’s Watchmen.

2020
Nina Dobrev was named the year’s best books by the Washington Post, Philadelphia Inquirer, and Houston Chronicle, and was a New York Times bestseller. With one of his first novels, she became the only openly transgender woman signed by the IMI Worldwide talent management group and was named to the Business of Fashion’s BoF 100, an index of people shaping the fashion industry. Rice made her debut novel at 2015’s New York Fashion Week, walking for Eshlo Katta, Hood by Air, and David Setlak. Nominated for 2016’s Model of the Year Award, she became the face of the Gucci Bloom fragrance and has appeared in advertising campaigns for L’Oréal and Hugo Boss.
Berlanti endows professorship

A new dramatic writing professorship at the School of Communication will significantly expand course offerings and teaching opportunities, thanks to a $1 million gift from the Berlanti Family Foundation. The new Barbara Berlanti Professorship in Writing for the Screen and Stage marks the foundation’s largest philanthropic commitment to any organization to date.

Greg Berlanti (CA90) is a writer, producer, and director of television and film. He and his husband, Robbie Rogers, established the Berlanti Family Foundation to improve the lives of all LGBTQIA people and their straight allies through education, the arts, medicine, and other social services. In addition to the professorship, the foundation has supported such efforts as GLSEN, which creates safe education environments for LGBTQIA youth; Fck Cancer, dedicated to cancer prevention and early detection; and to providing emotional support and guidance to those affected by the disease; and the National Immigration Law Center, whose mission is to defend and advance the rights and opportunities of low-income immigrants and their families.

The gift to the School of Communication will create the Barbara Berlanti Professorship in Writing for the Screen and Stage, named in honor of Berlanti’s mother, who passed away in 2017. The gift also commemorates Berlanti’s 25th reunion year and counts toward We Will The Campaign for Northwestern.

“My mom, Barbara Berlanti, was a lifelong champion of the arts and my mom’s greatest advocate and patron,” says Berlanti. “She placed an old typewriter in front of me at 10 years old and told me to start writing all the stories that were in my head—instead of just talking her ear off—and I haven’t stopped since. Our family is so proud to have a professorship in her name dedicated to helping Northwestern continue its great legacy of fostering the next generation of humane, diverse, creative and talented students.”

The endowed professorship will build on the success of the school’s signature writing programs by increasing teaching capacity and bolstering a curriculum that prepares students to work across media and genres—and encourages them to engage and create work by and for diverse global audiences. The professorship will be housed in the school’s Department of Radio/Television/Film, which offers robust writing curricula for graduate (MFA in writing for screen and stage) and undergraduate (modules in creative writing for the media, playwriting, comedy arts, and more) students. Berlanti previously endowed Northwestern’s playwriting program. The new professorship will result in further expansion of this programming and its screenwriting counterpart.

“Northwestern is determined to be at the forefront in finding and developing new voices and helping them tell their stories,” says Dean Barbara O’Keefe. “To do that, we must build a faculty that reflects and respects diversity. Thanks to Greg, Robbie, and the Berlanti Family Foundation, the new Barbara Berlanti Professorship will play a major role in helping us attract leading artist-educators to our faculty who can, in turn, recruit and nurture students from underrepresented and undersupported groups and help transform the creative industries.”

The professorship was supported in part by alumni Patrick G. (EB59, H09) and Shirley W. (WCAS61, H19) Ryan through the Ryan Family Chair Challenge, which matches gifts made by other Northwestern supporters to establish new endowed professorships or chairs.

From left: Theatre professor emeritus David Downs, Dean Barbara O’Keefe, and Greg Berlanti

First acting MFA class

In September the School of Communication welcomed its inaugural class of students in the MFA program in acting. The eight talented actors from across the country join graduate artists in a suite of complimentary MFA programs—design, directing, writing, and documentary media. All these programs will be housed in the performing and media arts center currently taking shape in Abbot Hall on Northwestern’s downtown Chicago campus.

The two-year program is fully funded, so the MFA candidates pay no tuition and receive an annual stipend. The students will analyze text, learn techniques for interpretation and rehearsal, and gain mastery of movement, voice, and speech through production experience. The curriculum was designed to prepare these nimble performers for the rigor and demands of the rapidly evolving creative economy.

“I was actually preparing to head to another program when I learned that Northwestern was kicking off the inaugural acting MFA class,” says Chicago-based actor Al’Jaleel McGhee, one of the new MFA candidates. “A few weeks later, I’m sitting with the Anna Shapiro at Steppenwolf talking about the world-class faculty, the brand new facilities, and the opportunity to join the ‘Northwestern mafia’ and make history with the inaugural MFA acting ensemble.”

Chicago, he argues, is the best place in the world for theatre—and “I’m more than happy to fight about this. Equity, non Equity, storefront, huge house—if you’re an artist with something to say, an artist who wants to ‘shake the table,’ an artist who wants to create something beautiful and ugly, uplifting and tragic, something visceral, something real, honest, then Chicago is where you should be.”

“I think that we have a real duty to the future generations to provide the best possible education and training for the next generation of actors,” says Crawford. “Our acting MFA students will be housed in the performing and media arts center currently taking shape in Abbot Hall on Northwestern’s downtown Chicago campus.”

Ralph and Jean Sundin Endowed Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders Victoria Marian and associate dean for research, professor, and Hugh Knowles Center fellow Sumit Dhar received the 2019 Editor’s Award from the Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research for their paper on top-down effects in the auditory network.

Our community

Hearing researchers honored

Ralph and Jean Sundin Endowed Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders Victoria Marian and associate dean for research, professor, and Hugh Knowles Center fellow Sumit Dhar received the 2019 Editor’s Award from the Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research for their paper on top-down effects in the auditory network. They were assisted in their work by postdoctoral fellows Sayuri Hayakawa and Tian Lam.

The team found that hearing speech with or without seeing corresponding lip movements changes how the human ear processes sound. Before auditory signals reach the brain, sound waves in the ear are amplified through the movement of specialized hair cells—a process that itself generates sounds known as otoacoustic emissions (OAEs).

“By measuring the level of OAEs, we discovered that speech sounds are amplified less when the listener can rely on visual information to help determine what is said,” Marian explains. “This finding suggests that the brain exerts top-down control over the mechanical functions of the ear in order to efficiently distribute the labor across modalities.”

Dhar sees his partnership with Marian as integral to success. “It is quite satisfying for our work to be recognized by the editors of the top topical journal of our field,” says Dhar. “However, it was even more stimulating to be able to collaborate with my colleague Victria Marian on this project. We had often discussed possible connections to the brain at work and how it would be advantageous to be able to control the input going to the brain while it was busy. This work provides exciting evidence that indeed the brain does modulate incoming sensations selectively to focus on tasks. The fact that this seems to be happening by essentially controlling the gain applied at the very first stage of hearing is quite extraordinary.”

Performance studies and honors and awards

Faculty and alumni of the Department of Performance Studies received numerous honors and distinctions in 2019.

Northwestern's Puerto Rican Arts Development Initiative was recognized at the September 19 annual gala for Chicago's National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Cultures. Performance studies doctoral candidate Pepé Alvarez (right) presented the inaugural Resilience in the Arts Award on behalf of professor, department chair, and initiative founder Ramón Rivera-Serrano to La Espectacular artist residency founders Nibia Pastrana and Gisela Rosario, who received a grant through the Hambroyn Arts Fund and the NMPRAC to support their work. The initiative helps preserve and recover the island's artists and art by supporting select Puerto Rican artists in developing their work in contemporary performance.

Carlos Montemusa Professor of Performance Studies and African American Studies
E. Patrick Johnson was awarded a $322,000 Sawyer Seminar grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to lead the seminar series “The Black Arts Archive: The Challenge of Transition.” The 2020–21 series will comprise three transnational seminars and a summer institute. The grant will additionally fund fellowships for two graduate students and one postdoctoral student. “The Black Arts Archive” Sawyer Seminars will explore challenges in documenting black art production and will seek to create models to improve archival access and translation. Johnson is the founder of the Black Arts Initiative, an interdisciplinary effort to engage and involve artists, scholars, practitioners, and community members to strengthen Northwestern’s involvement in black arts. Joining Johnson as Sawyer Seminars conveners are performance studies department chair Ramón Rivera-Serrano, art history associate professor Harry Copeland, the Arthur Andersen Professor of Performance Studies, and arts and media scholar and writer M. Noshir Contractor. Performance studies professor earns prestigious honors

In November, associate professor Joshua Chambers-Letson’s book After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life (NYU Press, 2018) won the American Society for Theatre Research Emil Hill Award, which recognizes a work of outstanding scholarship in African American theatre, drama, and/or performance studies. In September, After the Party won the Association for Theatre in Higher Education’s Outstanding Book Award, which honors a work showing the potential to inspire, ignite, or challenge theatrical practice and teaching. For the author, After the Party was a labor of love and grief. In 2014 he lost two close friends—both queer men of color—to AIDS, and this stark reminder of mortality prompted a dialogue. “I began to write this book to them, as if I could write them back into existence by writing about all those millions of different ways that queens and women of color have used performance to sustain their death and to make a different world in which their dearly departed might have lived on,” he says. “The book is done now, and their ghosts still cling to me. But I hope that the people who find it will find it useful as they continue the everyday work of making a dying world more livable.” This was Chambers-Letson’s second Outstanding Book Award; the first was in 2014 for a Race So Different: Latinx Identity in African America (NYU Press, 2013). He is the only scholar to have won the award twice.

Associate professor Marcela Fuentes convened the Summer Institute in Performance Studies, “Bring It In: Transnational Feminisms in Practice,” which received applications from graduate students worldwide and featured scholars and artists from Argentina and Puerto Rico. Her book Performance Constellations: Networks of Protest and Activism in Latin America was published in October by University of Michigan Press. Also in October, she delivered the keynote address “The Little You Gave Us: Performance Constellations” for the University of Southern California’s First Forum 2019 graduate student conference, “Constellations: Connections, Disruptions, and Imaginations in Cinema and Beyond.”

Noriko Conant—professor of communication studies, the Jane S. and William L. White Professor of Behavioral Sciences in the McCormick School of Engineering, and professor in the Kellogg School of Management—was elected a 2019 fellow of the Association for Computing Machinery, the world’s largest educational and scientific computing society, and the American Academy for the Advancement of Science, the world’s largest multidisciplinary science society. Conant was one of five Northwestern faculty members named to AAAS last year and was the University’s only 2014 ACM fellow. He is a leading researcher in the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of social knowledge networks, including those in business, science, public health, and virtual communities. Head of Northwestern’s Science of Networks in Communities (SONIC) lab, he has published hundreds of scholarly articles, earned numerous awards and fellowships, and received research funding from NASA, the Air Force Research Lab, the Army Research Institute, the National Science Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and more.

Communication studies professor earns prestigious honors

One noteworthy effect of Conant’s scholarship is how it has lent credence to the field of communication as a scientific discipline. His work often straddles computer and social sciences, examining how society affects technology and vice versa. By incorporating communication into what is often the “isolated academic silos,” he says, his research has contributed to opening up the field—and is earning honors for doing so.

“AAAS is what I would call a pandisciplinary recognition—it’s not restricted to a single discipline,” Conant says. “The people who are making the decision about this are saying that my scholarship or my engagement is something that is not restricted to a single discipline but in being recognized for impacting people across disciplines. It also has the component of outreach built into it, that is me significant.”

Conant and the other 2019 AAAS fellows—including Northwestern faculty members Jennifer Cole, Vicky Kalogera, Michael Mikulic, and Farhad Yasu Zadeh—were inducted at a February 15 ceremony in Seattle. ACM will recognize Conant at its annual awards banquet on June 20 in San Francisco.

Fun Home actress comes home

The compelling campus performance of Fun Home at the Elhel M. Barber Theater on November 22 brought audience members to their feet—but they promptly returned to their seats to enjoy a postshow Q&A with Actors’ Equity Association president Kate Shindle (Cp91), who starred in the Tony Award-winning musical’s national tour. Chatting with faculty and the cast on stage, she discussed the value of a Northwestern education, her appreciation of the production’s student actors, why Fun Home spoke to her, and artists’ traits that the industry needs most.

“Every year I think there’s something to be said for being part of a show that’s just good,” said Shindle of her time playing Alison. “What makes Fun Home so special and made me want to do it so badly is that I really felt compelled to telling this particular story across America at that particular moment.”

Shindle was crowned Miss America in 1990 and wrote about her experience in the memoir Ring Miss America. Behind the Rhinestone Curtain. “In terms of what experiences served me well at Northwestern, they all did, including the stuff I didn’t get, including learning that I shouldn’t be a costume designer or that producing isn’t for me,” said Shindle. “I fundamentally believe that when you are in a place that makes you study not just theatre but all kinds of other humanities and sciences, that makes you a better artist. You cannot convince me, no matter how hard you try, that taking a sociology class doesn’t directly relate to your work on stage.”

Shindle offered students a few key words of advice about acting: continuously work on technique, work harder than anyone else (because someone has to get that role), and be a good teammate. “There’s this myth of a tempestuous leading actor who throws everything into chaos but when opening night comes, they’re brilliant. But nobody wants to work with that person,” she said. “So be the person people want in the room.”
New “Aesthetic Emergency” series explores intersection of art and politics

A dramaturg and opera stage director from Croatia. A scholar who explores the relationship between theatre, immigration, and national identity in Turkey. A filmaker who captures New Yorkers’ fears of a future threatened by climate change. These distinguished artists and scholars are just a few of the dozen featured speakers presenting their work on campus this academic year as part of a new School of Communication initiative, Humanities on the MAP (Media, Arts, Performance).

Two recent studies by communication sciences and disorders faculty are making waves well beyond the scientific community.

Hugh Knowles Chair Nina Kraus, professor of neurobiology and otolaryngology, and her colleagues have found that playing sports can give an athlete a quieter brain. The study showed that athletes’ brains have less neural static, allowing them to tune out background noise better than nonathletes. Working with nearly 500 Northwestern student athletes and 500 nonathletes, Kraus and her Brainvoicls lab measured and compared brain waves in response to the sound syllable “da.” Suggesting that individuals struggling with sensory processing may benefit from playing sports, the findings also bolster Kraus’s ongoing efforts to detect and manage concussion through sound processing. “Making sense of sound is one of the hardest jobs we ask our brains to do,” she says, “because sound ingredients move in time, requiring the brain to make computations on the order of fractions of milliseconds.”

Assistant professor Elizabeth Norton, in collaboration with her LEARN lab and with partners in the Institute for Research on Learning and Technology and the Feinberg School of Medicine, found a significant link between children’s severe temper tantrums and language delays. Tantrums and language delays are both early risk factors for later-in-life mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. The study looked at more than 2,000 parents and their children between 11 and 38 months old. “We knew from many other studies in older children that language problems and mental health problems occur together more frequently than would be expected, but we didn’t know how early this relationship began,” Norton told Northwestern Now. This research helps Norton and colleagues assemble guidelines for parents and caregivers on “when to worry” about language development and irritability.

Research breakthroughs in communication sciences

The initiative aims to examine current issues of urgency and importance; the theme for the inaugural series is “Aesthetic Emergency.” School of Communication faculty are curating events for each quarter of the 2019–20 academic year and expect to present a new theme annually. This year’s series began October 25 at the Block Museum of Art with perspectives on horror by scholar who explores the relationship between theatre, immigration, and national identity in Turkey. In addition, frequent on-camera performer Jen Spyra (GC13), stand-up comedian Emmy Blotnick (C10), and Colbert were among the program’s nominees for outstanding writing for a variety series. Achyia Nicole Black (GC08) and Nicolle Silverberg (C13) were nominated for outstanding writing for a variety series for their work on Full Frontal with Samantha Bee, which was also nominated for outstanding variety talk series. Black is now a writer on NBC’s This Is Us and a writer and cast member on the HBO comedy series A Black Lady Sketch Show, created by Robin Thede (MEd11). The Tri-TV series Billy on the Street, starring Billy Eichner (C00), was nominated for outstanding short form variety series. This was Eichner’s fourth nomination. Beyond the show, he enjoys a thriving career in TV and film, including his recent appearance as Timon in Disney’s live-action The Lion King.

Fox’s Rent, produced by Kenneth Ferrone (C04) and directed by Michael Greif (C81), was nominated for five awards, including outstanding variety special (live) and outstanding production design for a variety special. Greif won acclaim and a Tony nomination for directing Rent on Broadway.

Jill Leiderman (C93) is the executive producer of Jimmy Kimmel Live!, a nominee for outstanding variety talk series. NBC’s American Ninja Warrior, with David Markus (C05) as executive producer and Anthony Storm (C92) as executive producer, was nominated for the fourth straight year in the outstanding competition program category.

RuPaul’s Drag Race, with Bruce McCoy (C92) as executive producer, was nominated in several categories, including outstanding competition program and outstanding directing for a reality program.

Seth Meyers (C84, H16) and frequent on-camera contributor Jenny Hagel (GC09) and Ally Hood (C05) were nominated for outstanding writing for a variety series for Late Night with Seth Meyers. He was nominated in the same category for Documentary Now!, also a nominee for outstanding variety sketch series with Meyers as an executive producer. In addition, Meyers and Eli Bolin (C10) were nominated for outstanding original music and lyrics for Documentary Now!.

NBC’s This Is Us, with KJ Steinberg (C95) as executive producer, was nominated for the third consecutive year for outstanding drama series.

Alumni receive Emmy nominations

School of Communication alumni were well represented among the 2019 Emmy Award nominees at the 71st annual ceremony on September 22.

• CBS’s The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, hosted by Stephen Colbert (C86, H11), was nominated for outstanding variety talk series, outstanding directing for a variety series, and outstanding interactive program. In addition, frequent on-camera performer Jen Spyra (GC13), stand-up comedian Emmy Blotnick (C10), and Colbert were among the program’s nominees for outstanding writing for a variety series.

• Ashley Nicole Black (GC08) and Nicolle Silverberg (C13) were nominated for outstanding writing for a variety series for their work on Full Frontal with Samantha Bee, which was also nominated for outstanding variety talk series. Black is now a writer on NBC’s This Is Us and a writer and cast member on the HBO comedy series A Black Lady Sketch Show, created by Robin Thede (MEd11). The Tri-TV series Billy on the Street, starring Billy Eichner (C00), was nominated for outstanding short form variety series. This was Eichner’s fourth nomination. Beyond the show, he enjoys a thriving career in TV and film, including his recent appearance as Timon in Disney’s live-action The Lion King.

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• NBC’s This Is Us, with KJ Steinberg (C95) as executive producer, was nominated for the third consecutive year for outstanding drama series.

Joseph Jefferson Awards honor alumni and faculty

Winners at Chicago’s 2019 Equity Joseph Jefferson Awards included faculty member Amanda Dehnert (with Andre Plau) for The Straw Hat Tie Solder (original music in a play) and alumni Lili Anne Brown (C05) for Caroline, or Change (director, mid-size musical). Michael Mahler (C09) for Misrule (new work—musical), Bruce Norris (C4) for Downstate (new work—play), and Armen Sanjancio (GC13) for Photograph 51 (scenic design—large). Other Jeff nominees included faculty members David Catlin (C88), Haleya Kays (C06), Ana Kuizmanic (GC04), Todd Rosenthal, and Mary Zimmerman (C84, GC08, GC14) as well as alumni William Bole (GC13), Daria Cameron (C06), Amber Mak (C05), Jen McLeod (GC4), Jordan Ross (C43), Joe Schermolny (C07), Scott Weinstein (C10), and Jonathanas Wilson (GC8)’. Victory Gardens Theater received three nominations for Indecent, which featured the work of faculty member Cindy Gold and alumni Mara Blumenfeld (C34), Matt Detichman (C13), Noah LaPook (C18), Catherine LeFever (C08), and Andrew White (C08).

Nina Kraus with former Northwestern football player Chad Hansen (WCAS18, SP119)

Our community
Clayton Brown (MFA, Northwestern), with Monica Long Ross (GC03), coordinated the documentary film We Believe in Dinosaurs, which will receive its broadcast premiere as part of PBS’s Dinosaurs documentary film We Believe in… hosted by Tel Aviv–based Cinephil, for international distribution. The spring-summer production featured scenic design by Daniel O’Neill (GC10), costume design by Sully Ratke (GC16), lighting design by William C. Kirkham (GC12), stage management by Mary Hungerford (C16), dialect coaching by senior lecturer Linda Gates, and a cast that included Cordelia Dewdney (C16) as Mary Shelley.

Masia Asare (PhD, New York University) wrote Mirror of Most Value. A hit Marvel Play for Marvel Spotlight, a new series of one-act plays aimed at teens, it received its world premiere at Chicago’s Lookingglass Theatre. The spring-summer production featured scenic design by Daniel O’Neill (GC10), costume design by Sully Ratke (GC16), lighting design by William C. Kirkham (GC12), stage management by Mary Hungerford (C16), dialect coaching by senior lecturer Linda Gates, and a cast that included Cordelia Dewdney (C16) as Mary Shelley.

Larissa Buchholz (PhD, Columbia University) is spending 2020–21 on Northwestern’s Qatar campus, where she is teaching communication courses. Also at NUQ is assistant professor João Queiroga (GC16), an MFA documentary media graduate teaching courses in documentary media production.

Stephen Moore (PhD, Brown University) again curated the annual sound art exhibition Sonic Innovations, which reopened on June 15 at the Carrie Ann0w Center for Music and the Arts in Katonah, New York. Last spring his hand, evidence, released its fifth full-length album, Go Where Lapel Is, as a cassette and digital download on the Philadelphia-based label Dead Ends. An installation version of the album was created for the Kohnau Museum of Art.

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Anna Shapiro (MFA, Yale School of Drama) will direct the Chicago run of the new Eton John musical The Dev Il Wears Prada before taking the show to Broadway for the 2020–21 season.

Elizabeth Son (PhD, Yale University) won the 2019 Outstanding Book Award from the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender for Embedded Reckoning: “Comfort Women,” Performance, and Transnational Abuses. In addition, the book was a finalist for the Theatre Library Association’s George Fred Blyden Memorial Award.

David Tolchinsky (MFA, Yale University) was named best director of a crime short at Greece’s Anatomy: Crime & Horror International Film Festival in Athens for his film Casandra. The film also screened at Nightmares Film Festival in Columbus, Ohio, garnering a best-actress nomination for 15-year-old Ruby Dalton. Tolchinsky was intervie wed about Casandra and teaching horror for the podcast Cakey-Castor Razors. Tolchinsky’s script for the in-development TV series Heal won the best TV pilot grand prize at the Rhode Island International Film Festival and was nominated for best short sitcom at the Houston Comedy Film Festival.

Last summer, four of Roberts’s student lab participants attended the 2019 world congress of the International Association of Parkinsonism and Related Disorders in Montreal—the largest student contingent of any lab represented at the conference. Two won travel awards, and one won a poster award.

Speech, swallowing, and Parkinson’s disease

Angela Roberts (PhD, University of Western Ontario) authored the revised Parkinson’s Foundation Speech and Swallowing patient education booklet, published in 2019. Available to family members, those living with Parkinson’s disease, and healthcare professionals, this internationally distributed publication serves as the primary educational source to guide care choices and symptom self-management for the speech and swallowing issues affecting 90 percent of those living with Parkinson’s disease.

Last fall, Roberts was the leadoff speaker for the Parkinson’s Foundation in Series, the webinars for which are broadcast around the world. The previous fall at the first Parkinson’s Foundation Caregiver Summit, she delivered a live keynote that was broadcast in Spanish and English across seven countries and is now available on DVD in both languages through the foundation.

Roberts is collaborating with Alice Gabrielle Twyford Professor Bonnie Martin-Harris and engineering professor John Rodgers on developing a strategy that most often result together to tackle social issues and teaching communication intervention for those with Parkinson’s disease.

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.

Alumni achievements

Stuart N. Brotman (CS74) is a 2019–20 fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC. He is based in the center’s science and technology innovation program, focusing on digital privacy policy issues.

Felicia Shaw (CS73) chairs the board of directors of FOCUS St. Louis, an area leadership organization. She is the executive director of the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis.

Robert Conrad (CS65) received the Early Settlers Association of the Western Reserve’s annual Hertick Memorial Award in July in recognition of his work promoting the city of Cleveland. Conrad is the president and co-founder of northeast Ohio’s classical music station WCWE on the air since 1961. He has been the producer and commentator of the Cleveland Orchestra radio broadcasts since 1986, likely making him the longest-serving national classical music commentator in the history of American radio. In 2013 he and his stockholders donated WCWE to Cleveland’s public broadcast mediator to preserve classical music radio in north-east Ohio.

Robertson and Northwestern clinical faculty Kristen Larsen, in partnership with Pamela Palmeterra and Linda Egan of the Parkinson’s Disease and Movement Disorders Center at Northwestern Medicine as well as with Chicago’s Second City, are launching a speech and communication intervention for those with Parkinson’s disease that uses improvisational theatre techniques to teach speech and communication strategies. The program for people with Parkinson’s and their partners may help foster increased voice and better quality of life.

Judith Sheppard Missett (CS68), founder and CEO of the Cleveland-based Center for Great Voice, authored the book Building a Business with a Beat (McGraw-Hill Education, 2019), offering insights into how she pioneered the aerobic fitness movement.

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Kim Kellely (CS64) is the company manager for the musical Hades- man, playing at Broadway’s Walter Kerr Theatre. At the 2019 Tony Awards ceremony, the show won eight Tony’s, including the award for best musical.

Scott Tyree (CS64) became the world’s 25th master sommelier and the first from Maine. A wine consultant, Tyree began his career at Chicago’s Craw House, then was the wine director at Zuni, and later moved to Michelin-starred Sepia. His industry honors include Wine Spectator’s grand award and an unprecedented three Joan Banchet Awards as best sommelier. He was also a James Beard Award semifinalist for outstanding wine service.

Rahm Emanuel (SC85), former mayor of Chicago, has resumed his role as an investment banker, joining New York’s Centerview Partners as a senior counselor to establish a Chicago presence for the firm. Emanuel is also an on-air contributor for ABC News, a contributing editor to the Atlantic, and founding executive chair of the National BAM Advisory Council, which advances the national expansion of independent film. In 2019, Emanuel was selected as the inaugural recipient of the National Music Division’s Award for Excellence in the Arts.


Actress and producer Alixson Rice (CS68) directed and starred in a music video for her comedic “revenge rap” song “F***, I’ll Write My Own Damn Song”—aimed at her rap-star son, Zane Taylor, whom she inspired to perform in the video. The film’s features include the Hollywood Reel Independent Film Festival, which will also feature her son’s video for “Get Away.”


Jodi Hartman (CS83) was elected to the board of the Retail Liti- gation Center, the legal arm of the Retail Industry Leaders Association. He is general coun- sel and chief risk and compliance officer at Best Buy.

Mike Sands (CS89, KSM89) is chief investment officer at Alpine Consolidated, a Washington-based investment firm. He most recently co-founded and served as CEO of Signal, a software-as-a-service technology company.


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1965s

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1970s

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1980s

Tricia Guggenheim (CS82) joined the board of directors of the American Traditions Vocal Competition. She has taught in elementary and middle schools for 31 years.

Dewayne A. Gab (CS83) is associate judge of the Seventh Judicial Circuit of Illinois. Previously, he was with the Sangamon County state’s attorney’s office in Springfield.

Peter Basik (CS68, KSM63) was named chief product officer of the newly merged Montage, a solution to engaging, interview- ing, and hiring candidates, and Shaker International, a provider of predictive talent assessment.

1990s

Rahm Emanuel (GC85) was elected to the board of the Retail Liti- gation Center, the legal arm of the Retail Industry Leaders Association. He is general coun- sel and chief risk and compliance officer at Best Buy.

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1950s

Rebecca O’Grady (CS90) serves on the board of La-Z-Boy as a member of the audit and the nominat- ing and governance committees. She has held senior leadership roles at General Mills, Global Haagen-Dazs, and Yoplait USA.
Alumni achievements

Dialogue winter 2020

From left: Curtis Moore, The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel’s “Silver Bells,” Lenny McClain, and Thomas Mizer

Chuck Casey (C02) launched Compadré, a creative marketing agency. Previously Casey was executive vice president and managing director at the marketing agency mOrange.

Thomas Mizer (C90) and writing partner Curtis Moore (B03) wrote five original songs for season three of Amazon’s award-winning series The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel. Three of the five songs are featured on the third-season soundtrack, available on Amazon Music.

Alma Locke (C95, KSM07) was appointed to the board of directors of Synapsis, a developer of human interface solutions. She serves as a global business unit head for Ericsson.

Atica Locke (C95) has won critical acclaim for her latest novel, Heaven, My Home (A Harper 39 Novel), published in September. The New York Times praised its “bewitching story and luscious language,” and the Wall Street Journal called it “atmospheric.” Locke previously wrote Blue Bird, Blue Bird, a 2018 Edgar Award winner. Leonard, winner of the 2016 Harper Lee Prize for Legal Fiction, Edgar Award nominee Black Water Rising, and the national bestseller The Cutting Season, recipient of the Ebert Gaines Award for Literary Excellence. The former radio/television/film major’s screenwriting and producing credits include Netflix’s When They See Us and the upcoming Hulu adaptation of Little Fires Everywhere. Additionally, Locke will serve as showrunner and executive producer for the forthcoming Netflix limited series From Scratch, adapted from her sister Toba Locke’s memoir.

Marcus Folmar (C96) has debated the second season of his award-winning web series Alway Way. The series follows Briner (played by Folmar), a down-on-his-luck TV writer who seeks inspiration in the alley adjacent to his apartment. Winner of a 2017 Los Angeles Web Series Festival award, Alway Way features John Marshall Jones (C94) and Emmy nominee Naomi Grossman (C97), Shari' Franklin (C97) directed two-second-season episodes. “I didn’t do any auditions for Alway Way,” says Folmar, who founded the Booking Room in 2009 to offer audition coaching. “Between working with people, attending friends’ shows, and my clients at the Booking Room, I’ve already got some of the best talent I could ever hope to find right in my personal contacts. Alby Way allocates me an outlet to let them shine.” Folmar is copresident of the Northwestern University Entertainment Alliance West and performs regularly with the Upright Citizens Brigade.

Tina Ventura (C96), senior vice president for investor relations for Horizon Therapeutics, was honored last May as a 2019 Healthcare Businesswomen’s Association Luminary at the 30th annual HBA Woman of the Year event in New York.

Lin Classon (GC01) was named to Grant’s Chicago Business’s 2019 Tech 50 list, which highlights emerging Chicago tech stars. Classon is the head of public cloud product at Evisio, a computer services firm.

Russell Heller (C01) joined the Burr & Forman law firm as an associate in its creditors’ rights and bankruptcy practice group in Wilmington, Delaware.

Jordan Horowitz (C02), the Academy Award–nominated producer of La La Land is set to produce an untitled election comedy for Amazon Studios starring Larisa Oleksiy, who cowrote the script with David Stassen. Horowitz is also producing I’m Your Woman, starring Rachel Brosnahan.

Ryan A. Swift (C01) was sworn in as an associate judge of the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit in Illinois. He was previously affiliated with Altamore & Associates in Rockford.

Jeff Deutchman (C05) is executive vice president of acquisitions and production for Neon and previously held senior positions at IFC Films and Paramount Pictures. Over the course of his career, he has championed and acquired such films as the Oscar-winning I, Tonya, the Oscar-nominated The Lobster, Palme d’Or winners Paradise and Blue Is the Warmest Color, and documentary hits Three Identical Strangers, Case of Triggerfish Dreams, and Apollo 11. Over eight years he moonlights as creator-producer of the ongoing Election Day Series of feature documentaries shot all over the United States on presidential election days.

Casey Osterkamp (C05) was appointed director of the personnel division for the state of Missouri. She was recommended by Governor Mike Parson and confirmed by the Senate.

Kelly O’Sullivan (C05) wrote, executive produced, and starred in Saint Francis, an independent film directed by her partner, Alex Thompson. Winner of the 2019 SXSW Narrative Feature Audience Award, Saint Francis is due for a 2020 theatrical release. O’Sullivan and Thompson were featured among Filmmaker magazine’s 17 New Faces of Independent Film 2019.

Elna Ullsøy (GC00) (above) is the author of the 2019 book He Cheated, She Cheated, We Cheated: Women and Infidelity (McFarland). Drawing on 50 interviews with US women of various ages, racial backgrounds, educational attainments, and sexual orientations, the book is the most comprehensive and diverse published study of women and infidelity to date.

Lamisa Elti (C07) joined the Taft Stettinius & Hollister law firm as an attorney in its intellectual property litigation practice.

Blake Spence (C07) is the director of musical theatre at Madison (New Jersey) High School. The school’s 2019 spring musical, Bright Shae, received 21 nominations for the 2019 Paper Mill Playhouse Rising Star Awards, which honor achievement in high school musical theatre throughout New Jersey. Bright Shae won six awards, including outstanding production of a high school musical and Spence’s win for outstanding achievement by a teacher or outside director. Paper Mill Playhouse’s producing artistic director is Mark Hoebee (C02).

Karen Attiah (C08), the global opinions editor for the Washington Post, was named 2019 journalist of the year by the National Association of Black Journalists at its annual conference in Miami in August. She was praised for her “bold, fearless, and timely work.” In addition, longtime CBS Chicago reporter Dorothy Tucker (C78) was named the new NABJ president, a post she will hold until at least 2021.

Tyler Beatrice (C09) cowrote the music, lyrics and tunes for the new musical Blizzard, which premiered in January at Seattle’s 5th Avenue Theatre.

Ashley Nicole Black (GC08) cowrote in HBO’s A Black Lady Sketch Show, created by fellow alumna Robin Thede (Medill ’01). The premiere showed August 2 at critical and viewer raves and was promptly picked up for a second season.

Morgan Elise Johnson (C15) was named one of Variety Chicago’s 2019 Chicago Screen Gems. With Tiffany Walden (Medill ’11), Johnson cofounded the TiBBiE, a Chicago-based media outlet with a mission of amplifying young African American voices.

Luis Sotelo (C15) was promoted to vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion at Duane University. Previously he was its chief diversity officer.

Jennifer Grace (GC12) was promoted to clinical director of the Newport Mesa Audiology Practice - Ear Institute, where she has served on the staff for eight years.

Scott Kozak (GC12) was appointed director of investor and media relations at Assure Holdings, a Colorado-based company providing intraoperative neuromonitoring services. He previously served in management roles at Children’s Hospital Colorado and FTI Consulting.

The Great Purple Way

Playbill.com released its annual list of the 15 Most Represented Colleges on Broadway. Northwestern again made the list, this year at number eight. The cited alumni actors for the 2018-19 season are from Fosse/Verdon (C98) and Brian d’Arcy James (C99) (above) (The Ferryman), Kate Baldwin (C99) (Hello, Dolly!), Antoniatt Cohen (C00) (Wicked), Jeremy Cohen (C04) ( Ain’t Too Proud), Anna Elmesfeld (C05) and Brian Ogilvie (B05) (Pretty Woman), Ben Estus (C11) (The Book of Mormon), Penny Fuller (C95) and Mary Beth Peil (B00) ( Anastasia), Adam Kantor (C09) and Katrina Lenk (B00) (The Band’s Visit), Erik Lorchfeld (C04) (King Kong), Scott-Mikita (C98) (Carrington Vineyard (B00) and Jim Wallack (C08) (The Phantom of the Opera), Kristine Nielsen (C77) (Gary), Nad Noyes (C09) (The Way That Girl Went), Amber Owens (C02) and Brad Weinstock (C08) (Aladdin), Shona Tucker (C05) (To Kill a Mockingbird), Jonathan Wagner (C05) (School of Rock), andWill Carney (C13), Madeleine Weinstein (C14), and Alex Weinstein (C10) (Harry Potter and the Cursed Child).

Jacqueline Osterkamp (C05)

Tina Ventura (C96)

Marcus Folmar, John Marshall Jones, and Naomi Grossman in a scene from Alley Way

Brad Weinstock (C08) (left) and Raymond J. Lee (C04) have come a long way since the Dolphin Show. Last summer Lee landed the role of Iago in Broadway’s Aladdin, costarring with Weinstock, who plays Omar; Amber Owens (C02) is in the ensemble. Lee left Aladdin in September to join the cast of the critically acclaimed Soft Power at the Public Theater; the off-Broadway musical was written by David Henry Hwang, composed by Jeanine Tesori, and directed by Leigh Silverman. Lee can also be seen in the Oscar-nominated Noah Baumbach film Marriage Story, starring Scarlett Johansson and Adam Driver, which premiered in select theaters and on Netflix last fall.
The short documentary Stay Close, which premiered at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival, was selected for inclusion in the New York Times Op-Docs series and was one of 15 films shortlisted for an Academy Award nomination in the documentary short subject category. Written and directed by Shelby Fan (GC16) and Luther Clement (BC17), produced by Nave Shinar (GC17), and coproduced by Ashley Brandon (BC17) with music by Xiaoming Sun Lin (GC17) and sound mixing by Lianna Quilliance (GC18), the film tells the story of Brooklyn fencer Keith Smooth’s odyssey journey to a silver medal at the 2018 Olympic Games in Tokyo. Stay Close was funded in part by the Tribeca Film Institute and is featured in PBS’s POV Shorts.

The play They Could Give No Name by Evai Iraitha (GC16) will be produced as part of the 2019 Ignite Festival at Chicago’s Victory Gardens Theater.

Correction: The 2019 summer issue of Dialogue misidentified the actress pictured on page 15 as Charlotte Roche. We regret the error.

Heroes of the Fourth Turning, a play by Will Arbery (GC15) that ran last fall at New York’s Playwrights Horizons, was selected in October as a New York Times Critics’ Pick. The play focuses on four alumni of a conservative Christian college grap-pling with current events and how to reconcile their education with the broader culture.

This Party Swicks, a play by Sofya Levitvsky-Wells (GC16), was named to the Kilroys List of 2019 most recommended plays by female writers.

Nick Lehmann (C16) wrote Like Sun, Like Father, a play about a comedy that is being developed by NBC. The story centers on an out and proud young man who must mentor (and live with) his newly out father. Lehmann will eventually produce the show alongside Matt Hubbard.

Sueh, a film by Brigitte Shyne (GC14), was one of 12 Sundance films awarded a Sundance Institute Short-Take Studio for Change grant.

Stay Close, starring the immensely talented Kimberly Nelson (C12), was previously general manager of Kemin Textile Auxiliaries and star of Dropout, CollegeHumor’s CollegeHumor sketch that caught on among the channel’s fans and continued as a running gag in subsequent sketches fea-turing Marovich.

Kimberly Nelson (C12) is president of the Kemin Textile Auxiliaries business unit of Kemin Industries, a global manufacturer of products for the agricultural and animal nutrition industries. Based in San Martin, California, Nelson was previously general manager of Kemin Textile Auxiliaries in India.

Alumni achievements

NUEA West

On August 27 NUEA West members enjoyed meeting top-tier entertainment industry professionals at the New Hollywood Mentorship Event, a one-of-a-kind opportunity to join like-minded content creators in a small group setting and seek advice from professionals on career-advancing strategies. Director Richie Kenen (C96) (It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia, Fist Fight) was the event’s NUEA West liaison and one of the keynote mentors.

On October 1 NUEA West was one of the main hosts of Hollywood Now, a mixer that gathered alumni from top entertainment schools. Industry professionals from NYU, USC, Emerson, UCLA, AFI, and Chapman joined Northwestern alumni at Hollywood’s exclusive No Vacancy bar for an evening of drinks and socializing.

In an October 18 NUEA West theater outing, Hollywood’s Hudson Guild Theater presented a benefit performance of the new musical Good Fishermen Know a Lot about Sex (C96) in a lead role. Proceeds went toward opioid abuse prevention efforts in Los Angeles and Chicago.

On November 7 NUEA West presented the 14th installment of its successful Storytelling Event series. Ten brave Wildcats shared true autobiographical stories live on stage, each story relating to the central theme “Scars!” Produced by Joe Hauler, this edition of the biannual series featured performances by Jake Daniels (C19), Terry Franklin (C84), Zack Hall (C03), Bryan Holdman (C34), Lisa Kaminir (C82), Max Kliman (C19), Tim Smith (Medill’75), and Chambers Smith (C16) as well as stories by the show’s directors, Rati Gupta (WCAS08) and Jackie Laine (C08, KREM17). The 90-minute show was followed by a reception where the storytellers mingled with approximately 80 attendees, all of them NUEA West members.

In memory

Roy V. Wood, the School of Communication’s dean from 1972 to 1988, died on October 1 at age 80. Wood grew up in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and earned his undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral degrees in communication studies at the University of Denver. At NBC, a retreat shortly after earning his PhD, Wood met—and impressed—James McMillian, then dean of Northwestern’s School of Speech. McMillian invited Wood to join the Northwestern faculty in 1969 and named him assistant dean. Upon McMillian’s retirement in 1972, 32-year-old Roy Wood became Northwestern’s youngest dean. As dean he expanded faculty recruitment, addressed imbalances in faculty compensation between the School of Speech and other University schools, and championed a more robust strategy to engage alumni. But he is best remembered for a dramatic addition to the school’s facilities.

Shortly after becoming dean, Wood spearheaded a campaign to fund what would become the Theatre and Interpretation Center, now the Virginia Wadsworth Wirt Center for the Performing Arts. This sprawling, beautifully equipped facility fundamentally changed the school’s theatre education. To celebrate the center’s opening, Wood rallied faculty, trustees, administrators, and alumni to produce the 1980 televised gala The Way They Were. Co-hosted by Chariton Heston and Ann-Margret and featuring many of the school’s most celebrated alumni, it was syndicated nationally and seen in three prime-time broadcasts. Northwestern’s emergence as a dramatic-arts powerhouse was hailed into countless American living rooms, and the impact was immeasurable.

Wood left Northwestern to become the provost of the University of Denver, where he retired at age 75. He also served on Colorado’s Independent Ethics Commission and the Denver Board of Ethics for Members of the City Council of Ethics and, among many other affiliations. Survivors include his wife, Consuelo Bennett; daughters (with first wife Mary Alice Tudor) Angela (GC98) and Shelley Wood; stepdaughters Alicia, Carolyn, Jennifer, Monica, Courtney, and Meredith; sister Shirley Lohse; and grandchildren Eliot Wood, Elizabeth Parker, Willoughby DeLisle, and Luca, Elisa, and Nico Rodriguez; and great-grandchildren River and Henry.

Sander vanocur (GC50), long time television journalist and NBC’s White House correspondent during the Kennedy administration, died on September 16 at age 91. As a TV newswoman, Vanocur was especially prominent during the turbulent 1960s—reporting from the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, interviewing Martin Luther King Jr. at Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church, and conducting one of the last interviews with Robert Kennedy before his assassination. Vanocur may be best remembered as one of two finalists for the first general-election presidential debate—the first of the four tele-vised 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates.

Vanocur was born in Cleveland and raised in Pocahontas, Illinois. After graduating from Northwestern, he served in the US Army and attended the London School of Economics before beginning his journalism career covering city news for the New York Times. He then made the leap to TV, spending nearly two decades at ABC. After new positions at PBS and the Washington Post, he served as a correspondent for ABC News until 1993.

Vanocur was married to writer and fashion designer Edith Pick until her death in 1975. He later married Virginia Bakstus Vanocur, who survives him, along with his two sons, Chris and Nicholas, and his stepdaughter, Daphne Wood Hicks.

Robert M. Rechnitz (C54) founder and executive director of Two River Theater, died on October 12 at age 89. After receiving his bachelor’s degree in communication from Northwestern, where he studied speech and theatre under Avina Krause, the Colorado native earned a master’s degree in English literature at Columbia University, enrolled in the famed Actors Studio as a student of Lee Strasberg, and earned a doctoral degree in American literature at the University of Colorado Boulder.

He then joined the faculty of New Jersey’s Montclair State College (now University) where, he taught for 35 years, eventually rising to full professor. With his wife, Joan, he founded Two River Theater in Red Bank, New Jersey, in 1984. The company was itinerant until opening its permanent home in 2005. Rechnitz directed the theater’s complex debut production and cowrote Lives of Reason, pro-duced by Two River in 2016. He is survived by his wife, Joan; their children, Adam (Elizabeth Park); and their grandchildren, Max and Fiéla Paladino and Esma Rechnitz.

Andrea Gronwall (C76), a film critic for the Chicago Reader, died on September 4 in Chicago at age 67. Gronwall wrote for the Reader for 15 years, filing her last review shortly before her death. A Chicago film critic, Gronwall previously served for 17 years as a producer (often mediat-ing between battling critics) for At the Movies, the syndicated Tribune Entertainment show that originally started film critic Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert. She left the show in 2003 and joined the Reader as a critic in her own right the following year. A native Chicagian, Gronwall (above at lower right) majored in radio/television/film at Northwestern before embarking on a career in public relations. She is survived by her brother, Jeffrey.

Winter 2021 Dialogue
In memory

Constance Ratcliffe (C41, GC41) on June 13 at age 92 in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida
Mary Jean Waddell (C41) on June 8 at age 93 in Grand Rapids, Michigan
Virginia Boyd (C44) on May 31 at age 95 in Chicago
Mary Frances Larsen King Moor (C44) on July 6 at age 96 in Bellevue, Washington
Lyla M. Anderson (GC47) on September 17 at age 96 in Minnesota
Mary J. Baumer (C47) on September 16 at age 94 in Scottsdale, Arizona
Al Burton (C48) on June 1 at age 88 in Doral, Florida
Roger C. Hill (C48, GC50) on October 31 at age 95 in Asheville, North Carolina
William B. Branch (C49) on November 3 at age 92 in New Rochelle, New York
Jack D. Clay (C50, GC54) on September 2 at age 92 in Seattle
Anne Crane (C51) on September 29 at age 90 in Des Moines, Iowa
Joan Sorgel (C51) on June 11 at age 88 in Brentwood, Tennessee
Beverly I. Klein-Simon (C52) on June 1 at age 88 in Chicago
Ann Krenkisch Lebed (C55) on August 15 at age 85 in Scottsdale, Arizona
Robert L. Maurais (C55) on July 5 at age 88 in Mount Dora, Florida
Gilbert E. Erickson (GC56) on June 25 in Wisconsin
Diana D. Vorlander (C56) on July 14 at age 86 in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina
Louise Fidel Pongetti (C56) on May 10 at age 84 in Albuquerque
Janet M. Eason (C57) on October 21 at age 84 in Zionsville, Indiana
Valda H. Carter (C59) on July 10 in California
Carol Mikedes (C59) on May 18 at age 81 in Morristown, New Jersey
Susan Maria Vardon (C62) on July 29 at age 78 in Auburn, California
Marjory H. Catoire (GC63) on July 2 at age 70 in Overland Park, Kansas
Scott L. Lange (C63) on August 14 at age 78 in Santa Maria, California
Sally D. Robinson (C69) on August 14 at age 72 in Columbus, Ohio
Mary (Casey) Pastore (GC70) on July 28 at age 71 in Loves Park, Illinois
Celeste Cenham Jr. (GC81) on June 25 at age 68 in Warwick, Rhode Island
Mark E. Leipold (C82) on October 12 at age 76 in Oak Park, Illinois
George C. Nelson (GC90) on September 3 at age 66 in Evanston

Communicating gratitude

Robert Hiatt never forgot his first summer at Northwestern.

"The Cherubs program launched him," says his widow, Kaye Hiatt (WCAS57). "The opportunity that afforded him made all the difference."

Bob Hiatt (C53) grew up a middle-class kid in Evanston, where Northwestern loomed large but wasn't a viable option for him financially. Then he spent a summer as a Cherub, winning an Edgar Bergen Scholarship to attend the University, where he studied radio/television/film and served as president of his fraternity and a member of the student governing board.

Right after graduating, Bob was hired by Procter & Gamble. "They said they really never hired undergraduates who didn't have business degrees," Kaye recalls. "That was the beginning of his career, and he attributed so much of it to his time at Northwestern." He moved up the marketing ladder to positions at Playtex, Kentucky Fried Chicken, American Cyanamid, and Maybelline Cosmetics, where he served as CEO until his retirement. Bob went on to share his expertise as a member of the School of Communication's National Advisory Council.

He reconnected with Kaye Karlan Chapman at a 1993 Northwestern reunion. The following year they were married in Northwestern's Shakespeare Garden. They moved to Mill Valley, California, in 2002 and traveled extensively until his death in 2018.

Kaye earned a JD at National University in 1994 and previously ran a small San Diego–based manufacturing company. Passionate about philanthropy, she has devoted time to women's and children's causes as well as the California Historical Society, the Marin Community Foundation, and the Marin Theatre Company, where she served on the board of directors.

In 2017 the couple established the Robert N. and Kaye Karlan Hiatt Endowed Cherub Scholarship Fund to support students enrolled at Evanston Township High School and/or residing in Evanston. The gift was made in honor of their 60th class reunion.

"We think about having an impact, and we want this to make an impact on the right students so that this may make a difference in the rest of their lives," says Kaye. "Cherubs, for Bob, was extremely meaningful, and I hope this would be equally so for future recipients."

In addition to the Cherubs fund, in 2007 the couple instituted the School of Communication's Robert and Kaye Hiatt Fund for Research on Media, Technology, and Society. More recently, Kaye established a comedy arts bequest in her name and that of her late daughter, Cynthia Maryl Chapman, who was known for her quick wit and one-liners. For students interested in comedy, the fund will help provide the kind of transformative experiences the Hiatts enjoyed on campus.

"Northwestern," she says, "is a place we hold dear."