

# ComMuniTy

Department of Communication, Media and Theatre

I L L I N O I S U N I V E R S I T Y

Welcome to the fifth issue of **ComMuniTy**, the annual newsletter of the Department of Communication, Media and Theatre (CMT) at NEIU. **ComMuniTy** serves three purposes: (1) to maintain contact with CMT alumni, (2) to inform alumni and current students about the CMT program, and (3) to celebrate our successes as students, alumni, faculty, and as a Department.

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

CMT is one of NEIU's **top 10 majors** (#8). This is the fourth year we have maintained a top-10 distinction. We owe this distinction to the talent and dedication of our faculty and staff, and the interest and enthusiasm of our students. We work hard to offer a program that is timely and relevant, grounded in the best practices of our discipline, and that meets the needs of NEIU's diverse student population.

We had another exciting year of productions for the **Stage Center Theatre**, ranging from the comedy of *The Cherry Orchard* and drama of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, to the Children's Theatre production of *Fearless Females of Folklore* and the Studio Series tale of *Primrose*.

CMT students held **internships** at a variety of institutions, including Telemundo, Univision, WTTW, ABC-7, Black Ensemble Theatre, Mental Health America of Illinois, and the Cook County Clerk's Office. We are proud to support the professional development of our students.

The **Media Lab** continues to be a tremendous asset to our media production curriculum, providing students with experience in audio and video production. The lab recently received a significant upgrade, including new computers, editing software, and high definition cameras and lighting kits.

We continue to excel with student research. In 2013, four CMT students (**Mandie Prestinario**, **John Firak**, **Carolyn Bernal**, and **Caitlin Inman**) participated in the annual NEIU Student Research and Creative Activities Symposium. **Vita Schweighart** presented her research at the Central States Communication Association (Kansas City, MO). **Max Plumptre** published an essay in *Multicultural America*, and CMT alum **Jules Wight** received a national award for her graduate thesis, *...And sometimes T: Ideology and Injury in the It Gets Better Project*.

In November 2013, the CMT Department participated in the National Communication Association's (NCA) **Graduate School Open House**. This was an important recruitment opportunity for our Graduate Program. In 2013, the NCA also awarded the 16th annual **Bernard J. Brommel Award for Outstanding Scholarship or Distinguished Service in Family Communication**, an award that pays tribute to our esteemed NEIU Professor Emeritus.



CMT faculty members—*Cyndi Moran, Angela Sweigart-Gallagher, Shayne Pepper, Edie Rubinowitz, Wilfredo Alvarez, Katrina Bell-Jordan, Tony Adams, and Nancy McVittie*—at NEIU's May 2013 commencement.

Thanks to the continued generosity of **Bernard Brommel**, the CMT Department is pleased to offer two new scholarships starting next year (2014-2015). Endowing five annual scholarships, Dr. Brommel has donated more than \$200,000 to the Department, which provides important financial assistance to our students.

There are also noteworthy changes in and achievements by CMT faculty. We welcomed faculty member **Kristin Hunt** to the CMT community. **Angela Sweigart-Gallagher, Kristin Hunt, Rodney Higginbotham, Dan Wirth, John Bliss, and Lisa Cantwell** directed productions for the Stage Center Theatre. **Seung-Hwan Mun, Shayne Pepper, Angela Sweigart-Gallagher, Tony Adams, and Wilfredo Alvarez** published research articles, **Edie Rubinowitz** produced a story for WBEZ public radio about German POW camps in Chicago, and **Cyndi Moran** edited a short documentary about epilepsy research.

This summer, CMT realizes a long-term goal of offering **online courses**. We will offer the Department's first online course (*CMTC-300: Mediated Communication*), as well as a hybrid section of our writing-intensive course (*CMTC-200: Theories of Communication, Media and Theatre*).

In Spring 2014, we will host the fifth annual **North by Northeastern Media and Performance Festival** and the second annual **CMT Day**, an event to celebrate the accomplishments of our Department and community. We will also continue fundraising for the **Stage Center Theatre**, promoting the arts at NEIU, and engaging in further community outreach and alumni relations.

## FACULTY-STAFF-EMERITUS UPDATES

**Angela Sweigart-Gallagher** directed the Stage Center Theatre's fall production of *When The World Was Green*, and she continued her performance work with the Wandering Uterus Project. She also published a book review and a play review in *Theatre Journal* and edited the book, *Nationalism and Youth in Theatre and Performance* (forthcoming, Routledge).

**Shayne Pepper** adopted a beagle puppy named Busby, encountered his first polar vortex, and published an article titled "Subscribing to Governmental Rationality: HBO and the AIDS Epidemic" in *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*.

**Katrina Bell-Jordan** moderated the College of Arts and Sciences Roundtable, "Public Universities, Social Solutions: Re-imagining Food," as part of an ongoing dialogue about the role of public education in addressing social issues. She also continues to serve on the Skokie, IL Board of Education (District 68). Katrina is finishing her second term as Chair of the CMT Department and was awarded an educational leave this year to pursue research/teaching projects. Her son made his Stage Center Theatre debut as "Bert" in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*.

After spending the spring and summer writing a new version of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, **Dan Wirth** was pleased with his cast and the performances of the play for The Stage Center Theatre in October (2013). Dan is currently developing a course on Chicano Theatre, and he is excited to be directing Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for the Fury Theatre Company (June 2014; Indian Boundary Park in Chicago).

**Cyndi Moran** continues to serve as the Grievance Officer for the NEIU University Professionals of Illinois, and is co-leading current NEIU contract negotiations. This work makes her appreciate her great classes and talented students all the more! She is continuing production on her documentary, *Unexpected Mercy*, which examines sentencing for youth offenders.

**Anna Antaramian** has spent the last year working part time at Carthage College in Kenosha, near her home. She's taught several interesting classes and directed *As You Like It*. She also continues crocheting and reading, and she is working on a small reader's theatre production at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

**Seung-Hwan Mun** published "Reality Check: Rethinking the Global Software Piracy Problem" in *International Telecommunication Policy Review*. He also completed a historical survey of network television production and programming, which was funded by the Seoul Broadcasting System—the largest commercial television/radio network in Korea.

The highlight of **Bernard Brommel's** past few years has been to come back to NEIU to team-teach with Tony Adams. He hopes to get back each semester and continue contact with current undergrads. He is also on dialysis, three times a week for 4-5 hours—not fun, but he can arrange treatments in Chicago near his daughter's home in Arlington Heights.

Last summer, **John Bliss** had lots of fun directing *Blithe Spirit* for the Stage Center Theatre. This summer, he's looking forward to returning to the Stage Center Theatre to direct *Boeing Boeing*.

**Wilfredo Alvarez** published the article, "Finding Home in/through Latinidad Ethnography: Experiencing Community in the Field with 'My People,'" in an award-winning special issue of *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*. He was also proud to have been invited to speak at Northwestern University, the University of South Florida, and the University of Illinois Chicago on topics related to multicultural education and intercultural communication.

During her sabbatical, **Edie Rubinowitz** contributed to Chicago Public Media, WBEZ 91.5, and its experimental news project, Curious City. Her two-part series responds to a listener's question about German POW camps in the Chicago area. The audio stories, photo slide shows, and an interactive map can be found on the WBEZ website ([www.wbez.org](http://www.wbez.org)).

**Tony Adams** co-edited (with Stacy Holman Jones and Carolyn Ellis) the *Handbook of Autoethnography*, the first reference volume on autoethnographic research and practice. The collection includes more than 40 essays written by scholars representing more than a dozen academic disciplines, and it received the 2013 "Best Edited Book" award from the Ethnography Division of the National Communication Association.

**Richard Helldobler** performed as "Clara's Father" in Ballet Theatre of Toledo's production of *The Nutcracker*. The performance in Toledo was held at the historic Valentine Theatre, which he helped to rescue from the wrecking ball. Other professional obligations included participating in the American Council on Education's Leadership Development Workshops for Department Chairs.

If you value the accomplishments of and/or your experience with the CMT community, please consider a financial contribution to the Department. We appreciate ANY size donation, whether it is \$7, \$70, or \$700!

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## NEW FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: DR. KRISTIN HUNT

A native Louisianian, Dr. Kristin Hunt attended Hendrix College, a small liberal arts college in Conway, Arkansas (the namesake of country singer Conway Twitty—true story), graduating with a B.A. in Theatre. After a year as a technical writer for TCBY, she gave up free frozen yogurt to pursue an M.A. and Ph.D. in Theatre Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Upon graduation, she took a position in the UW Department of Theatre and Drama and the University's Integrated Liberal Studies program, where she taught courses in theatre, arts activism, philosophy, and art history for seven years.

Kristin joined CMT because the Department's focus on excellent teaching, interdisciplinary thinking, and vibrant creative work make it a perfect fit, and the faculty and students have created a wonderful community in which to work.

Kristin's research interests focus on ancient and classical theatrical texts with a particular emphasis on contemporary experimental approaches to these foundational elements of theatre. Her recent work explores the interaction of food and mimesis, both onstage and in high and lowbrow dining experiences. Her upcoming production of *Miss Julie* will feature a menu of custom-made candy that offers audiences a chance to connect with the themes of the show on a visceral level.

When not brewing beer or cooking, you might find Kristin in the weight room. After years of being unathletic, she realized that short people make great powerlifters. She is excited to call Chicago and CMT her new home.



## FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: JOHN ROSS, JR.

John Ross, Jr. has been a faculty member in the Department of Communication, Media, and Theatre since 2000. He teaches courses in public speaking, voice and diction, and human communication, and he holds a graduate degree in dramatic arts from Harvard University. What people may not know is that John is also a prolific scholar, a world traveler, a part-time amateur astrophysicist, and an alien translator.

John is the author of the textbook *iSpeak! uSpeak! weSpeak!: An Introduction to Contemporary Public Speaking* (2012), as well as six volumes of poetry: *Goat Troubles and Other Chicago Poems* (2010); *Ode To Boston Neighborhoods: The Emerald Necklace, Bunker on the Hill, and other Tanka-Cantos* (2011); *Where the Designer Came From* (2011); *Tao-Te-Ching: The Way of Virtue in Leadership and Life* (2012); *American Haiku* (2012); and *Cosmotrinity* (2013). He has a new book of poetry, *Prince Siddhartha: A Buddha's Life in Quatrains*, due out in June, and another book, *Anthropology of the Mind: The Essence of Human Thought*, to be published in December. He is also working on a textbook to accompany his already published workbook, *The Successful Voice: Strategies for Public Speaking, Acting and Everyday Conversation*.

John is an avid traveler, having recently visited Greece, Portugal, and Austria. His visit to Athens, Greece included research for his doctoral dissertation about 1st century Greek preaching and early Jewish religious rhetoric; and, in Vienna, Austria, he held a poetry reading with students at the University of Vienna. In 2014, he will travel to Norway to visit a few of the places that inspired his favorite Norwegian playwrights. This visit will complete his tour of major Scandinavian cities.

John's other hobbies include the endless pursuit of unifying equations and theories to join Quantum Mechanics and classic Einsteinian/Newtonian Mechanics, before anyone at MIT or Cal Tech nabs another Nobel Prize. And late at night, when the occasional insomnia beckons, he listens on his computer for possible alien signals on his highly sophisticated Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) software. So far no alien signals have been found.



## ALUMNI UPDATES

**James McDunn** (M.A., 1999) has taught Drama and Television Production at Larkin High School (Elgin, IL). He is currently teaching Music at Jack Benny Middle School (Waukegan, IL). He has enjoyed a moderately successful career in Community Theatre and Professional Theatre, including roles at Metropolis (Arlington Heights, IL) and Steel Beam Theatre (St. Charles, IL). He looks back at his years in the former Speech and Performing Arts Program as some of the happiest years of his life!

**Tim Wambach** (B.A., 1999) stars in the two-man stage show, *Handicap This!*, depicting his life-long friendship with Mike Berkson who has cerebral palsy. They journey the country performing at colleges, communities, and corporations. Tim is the co-founder of Keep On Keeping On, a charity benefitting the special needs community. This summer, he will marry Sarah O'Brien.

**Matt C. Abbott** (B.A., 2006) is a Catholic commentator who has been quoted in *The New York Times* and interviewed on MSNBC, NPR, and WLS-TV Chicago. He also workshop as a Program Assistant at Northwestern University.

**Jules Wight** (M.A., 2012) is a Ph.D. student in Communication Studies at the University of Minnesota. Jules was awarded the Top Master's Thesis Award by the Master's Education section of the National Communication Association (November 2013) and a Top Paper Award by the Graduate Caucus of the Central States Communication Association (April 2014). In 2014, Jules also published two articles: "Saving Private Manning? On Erasure and the Queer in the I Am Bradley Manning Campaign" in *QED: A Journal in LGBTQ Worldmaking*, and "Queer Sweet Home: Disorientation, Tyranny, and Silence in Digital Space" in *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*.

**Vershawn Ashanti Young** (M.A., 1998) is the lead author of the recently published book, *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African-American Literacy* (Teachers College Press). He is also the new proud father of a baby girl, Ari Zhah.

**Jorge Perez** (B.A., 1989) serves as Executive Director and Assistant Artistic Director of NEIU's Ensemble Español Spanish Dance Theater, which just celebrated its 40th anniversary. He has performed with the Ensemble throughout the U.S. and in Mexico, Puerto Rico, China, Poland and Costa Rica. He has worked closely with Ensemble founder, Dame Libby Komaiko, on many programs and projects, including the annual American Spanish Dance & Music Festival. His mentor, Dr. Bernard Brommel, established two scholarships in his name, designated for Ensemble dancers.

**Aaron Olbur** (B.A., 2009) is the regional manager at New Balance. He manages a fleet of field representatives across the Midwest and Southern states, and he educates sales associates and consumers about the brand.



Top left: Nicole Kashian (M.A., 2011), Jules Wight (M.A., 2012), Tony Adams, and Alexis Waters (M.A., 2011) at the 2013 National Communication Association conference (Washington, DC).

Top right: Jill Matel and Anna Antaramian at CMT Day (2013). Jill was one of the first recipients of the Anna Antaramian Excellence in Theatre Award.

Bottom: Cyndi Moran, Shayne Pepper, Vita Schweighart (M.A., 2013), and John Firak (M.A., 2013) at the 2013 NEIU Graduate Recognition Ceremony.

### 2014 CMT Student Award Winners

#### Brommel Hanson Ijams Hayward Scholarship

Katherine Anderson

#### Brommel Kramer Barnitz Scholarship

Daniel Gutstein

#### Brommel Adams Bell-Jordan Scholarship

James Fuentes

#### CMT Distinguished Student Award

Larissa Bocka, Ashley Campbell, Thomas Clyde, Daniel Gutstein, Jill Matel

#### Anna Antaramian Excellence in Theatre Award

Larissa Bocka, Mary Nano, Nickolena Sellen

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