

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 sixth issue of **ComMuniTy**, the annual newsletter of the Department of Communication, Media and Theatre (CMT) at NEIU. 2014-2015 has been a year of great change and success.

CMT continues to be one of NEIU's top 10 majors (#8)—a distinction we have held since 2010, and a distinction we owe to the interest and enthusiasm of our students, as well as the talent and dedication of our faculty and staff.

Stage Center Theatre had another exciting year of productions, including summer comedies *Boeing Boeing* and *39 Steps*, and fall semester productions of the quirky *bobraschenbergamerica* and Christopher Durang's political satire *Why Torture is Wrong and the People Who Love Them*. Spring productions included *Gregor and the Squonk*, a collaboration with playwright Dan Caffrey which featured original music by NEIU student Tyler Miles, and a modern classic, Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*. The Children's Theatre Workshop produced *Kindness* (Fall 2014) and another collaboration with a contemporary playwright, *Pirates! Theodore Thud and the Quest for Weird Beard* (Spring 2015).

Edie Rubinowitz, Alan Mace, Erika Monterroso, Abraham "Abe" Harb, and Jonathan Goldstein coordinated the first-ever CMT Internship fair. More than 15 employers attended, including representatives from the Chicago Tribune, Steppenwolf Theatre, and Univision. Although the coordinators anticipated 50 student attendees, more than 160 students attended the one-day event.

We continue to excel with student and faculty research. In April 2014, five CMT students (**James Fuentes, Nicholas Tognoni, Matthew Greenberg, Benjamin van Loon, and Daniel Gutstein**) participated in the annual Student Research and Creative Activities Symposium. In November 2014, six CMT faculty members (**Angela Sweigart-Gallagher, Cyndi Moran, Jim Blair, Ann Hartdegen, Wilfredo Alvarez, and Nanette Potee**) participated in the annual Faculty Research and Creative Activities Symposium.

Thanks to the continued generosity of Professor Emeritus **Bernard Brommel**, the CMT Department now offers five annual scholarships. Dr. Brommel has donated more than \$200,000 to the Department, which provides important financial assistance to our students. On July 31, 2015, NEIU will also celebrate Dr. Brommel's 85th birthday. Mark your calendar for this special event!

And speaking of generosity: Current graduate student **Carrie Reffitt** (B.A., 2011) and CMT alum **Nikki Nigl** (M.A., 2014) established a "Communicating Sexualities" scholarship available to CMT, Sociology, and Women and Gender Studies students. This is another commendable gift aimed at helping our students.



CMT faculty members at commencement (December 2014).

There are also noteworthy changes to the faculty and staff of the CMT department. After six years as Chair, **Katrina Bell-Jordan** now serves as an Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences. Administrative Aide **Karol Bayley** and faculty member **Jim Blair** retired after numerous years of service. **Tony Adams** took over as Chair, and **Alan Mace** is now the Office Administrator for CMT. **Lisa Cantwell** teaches and directs theatre for several Denver theatre companies, and **Melanie Bujan** took over as the Coordinator of the College of Arts and Sciences Education Program (CASEP).

Cyndi Moran received the Audrey Reynolds Distinguished Teaching Award, an award given annually to a faculty member who excels with instruction, maintains high academic standards, and has a positive impact on NEIU students. **Lisa Cantwell, John Bliss, Kristin Hunt, Dan Wirth, Angela Sweigart-Gallagher, and Rodney Higginbotham** directed productions for the Stage Center Theatre. **Shayne Pepper** received a Faculty Excellence Award for Teaching, and **Tony Adams** received a Faculty Excellence Award for Research. **Angela Sweigart-Gallagher, Tony Adams, John Ross Jr., and Kristin Hunt** all had books published in the last year, and **Shayne Pepper and Wilfredo Alvarez** published articles in prestigious academic journals. **Bob Ritsema, John Ross Jr., Tony Adams, and Seung-Hwan Mun** have been awarded educational leaves for the 2015-2016 academic year.

Even though we are in the midst of difficult discussions about budget cuts to state universities, we aim to find additional, innovative ways to support our students and maintain a curriculum that meets the needs of an ever-changing workforce. We also hope to expand fundraising for the department and the Stage Center Theatre, as well as engage in further community outreach and alumni relations.

FACULTY-STAFF-EMERITUS UPDATES

In February 2015, **Ron Mace** acted in a professional production of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice And Men* for the Bowen Park Theatre Company (Waukegan, IL). This play marked the 48th year in a row that Ron has performed as an actor. Ron is a proud member of SAG, AFTRA, and AEC.

Katrina Bell-Jordan was awarded educational leave this year to pursue research, teaching and professional development projects. She visited two of NEIU's partner institutions in China as part of an external evaluation team for the International General Education Curriculum Program. She was recently reelected for a second term on the Skokie, IL Board of Education (D. 68). Katrina was also recently appointed to Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences, and she thanks her CMT colleagues for their many years of encouragement and support.

Kristin Hunt's new book, *Drama and Education: Performance Methodologies for Teaching and Learning* (co-authored with Manon van de Water and Mary McAvoy), was published by Routledge in March 2015.

Richard Helldobler continues in his role as core faculty member for the American Council on Education's Department Chairs Leadership Academy. In December, he performed the role of Herr Drosselmeyer in Ballet Theatre of Toledo's *Nutcracker* in Toledo and Van Wert, Ohio. He is also one of 15 higher education leaders in North America to be invited by Penn State University to take part in the US-UK Senior Leader Dialogue: The Shifting Public Purposes of Higher Education (April 2015). At this event, leaders from the United States and the United Kingdom will come together to discuss higher education's value and contributions.

Angie Sweigart-Gallagher's edited collection, *Nationalism and Youth in Theatre and Performance* (Routledge), was published in July 2014. Last spring, she performed as Kate in Stage Center Theatre's *All My Sons*. She spent the fall preparing for Stage Center Theatre's production of *Gregor and the Squonk*, as well as performing and presenting at the American Society for Theatre Research's 2014 national conference.

The highlight of **Bernard Brommel's** year was returning to NEIU to team teach with Tony Adams. He misses students and being with young minds learning about communication. He also had the joy of attending the 100th anniversary of the National Communication Association (NCA) at the Hilton in Chicago. It was his 55th NCA convention. His advice to students: join professional associations in communication, media, and theatre when you graduate and stay current with your discipline. He is also in his second year of dialysis, and it is helping, but it is not exactly what he had planned to do in retirement!

Cyndi Moran served for the last 13 months as the co-lead negotiator for the NEIU/UPI contract, which was just approved by the NEIU Board of Trustees. That's pretty much all she remembers of the last year!

Shayne Pepper is enjoying his first year as the department's Director of Graduate Studies. In 2014, he published three entries in the *Encyclopedia of Social Media and Politics*, was awarded a College of Arts and Sciences Faculty-Student Research Grant to do archival research with CMT graduate students Benjamin Van Loon and Anthony Colon, and was humbled to receive a Faculty Excellence Award for Teaching.

Tony Adams published the collection *On (Writing) Families: Autoethnographies of Presence and Absence, Love and Loss* (co-edited with Jonathan Wyatt; Sense Publishers), and, with Carolyn Ellis and Stacy Holman Jones, the co-authored book *Autoethnography* (Oxford University Press).

Nanette Potee continues to love teaching and learning with our students at NEIU, even after 16 years. She is also Chair of the Advisory Committee for the Center of Teaching and Learning. Her favorite pastime is sharing her daughter Danielle's freshly baked goods with the CMT department.

Edie Rubinowitz was excited to coordinate the the first-ever CMT Internship Fair and was especially thrilled when student Erika Monterroso landed a sales job at the Chicago Tribune through a contact she made at the fair. Edie's son Max is getting ready for kindergarten, and is becoming a pun master.



2015 CMT Student Award Winners

Brommel Hanson Ijams Hayward Scholarship
Mario Mayorga

Brommel Kramer Barnitz Scholarship
Brian Cordero

Brommel Adams Bell-Jordan Scholarship
Benjamin van Loon

Brommel Denson Everson Snell Scholarship
Kathy Styer

2015 Brommel Levy Staniec Scholarship
Erika Daybook

CMT Distinguished Student Award
Andrew Pappas, Erika Daybook, Kathy Styer
Aubrey Fossen, Samantha Stawiariski

Anna Antaramian Excellence in Theatre Award
Tyler Wynd, Maciej Mardosz, Abraham Harb

A CMT Retrospective

By Tony Colon (M.A., 2014)

During NEIU's Graduate School Preview Night last spring semester, while serving as the CMT department's student ambassador, a prospective student approached me and nervously inquired, "If you could sum up the Master's program experience in one word, what word would that be?" I took a moment to ponder the question. With a slight grin on my face, I responded, "Daunting." After a brief pause, I jokingly continued, "Daunting just seems appropriate, and captures the right mix of grad school's intensity and overwhelming dread. But don't worry, it gets better. The crying stops after your first semester." I admit, maybe that wasn't the best sales pitch to offer this student prospect, painting an image of a graduate student studying in a pool of their own tears, but the student at least took one of the CMT flyers.

Another question I've often been asked, or some iteration of it is, "How hard is grad school?" Too often it seems that the conversation surrounding graduate school is reduced to a matter of difficulty. I can phrase it in any number of ways, but simply put, it isn't easy. I believe there's a student tendency to get caught up in a fail-succeed binary. But no single student merely "sinks or swims." For those who've already taken the dive into the deep waters of grad school, you'll already understand, and for those others maybe considering taking the plunge, you'll come to know this, with enough effort (and some pain), you acclimate to the pressure.

What has preceded is not intended to dissuade (a caveat maybe, but definitely not a discouragement). As I said, graduate school isn't easy especially given the turnaround on assignment deadlines, late night study and writing sessions often carry into the dawn, only to be repeated the following evening, and the evening after that. Yet with this preparation, we didn't passively sit through lectures. My fellow cohort and I were provided numerous opportunities to actively lead seminar discussions. And yes, sometimes you're required to be cooped up inside the library all weekend long, reading tomes of dense scholarly research, in which their meanings are at times comprehensible, and at others, less so. Nevertheless, these were incredible chances to build friendships, organizing study groups and using classmates as soundboards, taking advantage of the support of the CMT cohort system. And yes, I'll admit, throughout the program, with every plan I cancelled, every invitation I rejected, and every "no" that I uttered to ensure that I met those deadlines, it did feel as if I were delivering the death blow, the coup de grâce, to my social life (not that there was much of one to brag about in the first place). With this sacrifice, however, came great research opportunities and learning experiences.

When I initially entered the program, my intention was, and still remains, to use my M.A. to instruct at the college level. Taking **Dr. Nanette Potee's** summer seminar on college instruction, I designed my own college course (a film class), developed goals and objectives for the class, as well as a syllabus, various rubrics, lesson plans, and student assessments. Additionally, as I moved through the program, my research interests became increasingly refined. I opted to do an Independent Study on Fan Studies, which was very much a composite course, as I drew from Cultural Studies research, as well as from my Mass Communication Theory, New Media and

Comparative Performing Arts seminars. The independent study laid the groundwork for my future research.

Having also completed my B.A. in CMT at NEIU in the fall of 2010, and given how the curriculum is so hands-on (in my case, I stage managed a production for Summer Theatre, performed onstage at the Stage Center Theatre for Children's Theatre Workshop, drafted a television script for Writing the Sitcom, honed my public speaking skills in Voice & Diction, worked a camera and edited film in Introduction to Video Production, etc.) it does become challenging to identify the practical applications of graduate coursework, as you devote a significant amount of time to examining the theoretical, philosophical, and historical underpinnings of each of the communication, media and theatre disciplines. However, I did see theory and research in practice. I was fortunate to be awarded a graduate assistantship in the CMT department. My initial assistantship task was complimentary to the coursework in the Research Methods seminar, where I had the chance to more closely examine autoethnographic strategies, as I assisted **Dr. Tony Adams** with his research. Gaining a behind-the-scenes perspective of academic publishing, I had the pleasure of reviewing the manuscripts to his *Handbook of Autoethnography*, in which he co-edited with Stacy Holman Jones and Carolyn Ellis, and his next book, *On (Writing) Families: Autoethnographies of Presence and Absence, Love and Loss*, which he co-edited with Jonathan Wyatt.

I also had the ability to work with **Dr. Shayne Pepper** on his media research: a historical reinterpretation of HBO programming. I scoured the *New York Times* database, as well as the university's collection of *Variety* magazine's microfilm. In the summer of 2014, Shayne received a NEIU faculty research grant which allowed me to continue as his research assistant. Along with **Benjamin van Loon**, a fellow CMT grad student, the three of us examined the archives of the cable trade magazine, *Cablevision*, at Northwestern University and the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

I'm grateful to the CMT faculty for these opportunities. At the December 2014 commencement ceremony, when I heard the familiar tune of the pomp and circumstance graduation march, I felt a great sense of accomplishment for myself and my fellow cohort. As I stared face-to-face with the CMT faculty during the ceremony, I knew I was no longer looking at my instructors, but also peers and friends. And although the camera has faded to black, and the credits have rolled on my academic career at NEIU, just FYI, I'll be back for letters of recommendation.



Shayne Pepper, Tony Adams, and graduate students Lilly Allison, Carrie Reffitt, Nikki Nigl, Maria Bejar, and Arbella Al-bazi attend the NEIU Graduate Recognition ceremony (December 2014).



2015-2016 Stage Center Theatre Productions

Becky Shaw

by Gina Gianfriddo

Directed by John Bliss

October 1-3 and October 8-10

Wealth

by Aristophanes

Adapted and Directed by Kristin Hunt

November 12-14 and November 19-21

In the Blood

by Suzan-Lori Parks

Directed by Angie Sweigart-Gallagher

February 25-27 and March 3-5

Death Defying Acts

by Woody Allen, David Mamet, and Elaine May

Directed by Rodney Higginbotham

April 14, 15, 16 and April 21-23

Above: Cast and crew of *Gregor and the Squonk* (Spring 2015).

Below, top row: *The 39 Steps* (Summer 2014) and *Gregor and the Squonk* (Spring 2015).

Below, bottom row: *Why Torture is Wrong and the People Who Love Them* (Fall 2014)
and *bobraschenbergamerica* (Fall 2014).



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 \$4, \$40, or \$400! For more information, visit www.neiu.edu/giving. Also make sure to visit our webpage (www.neiu.edu/cmt), like us on Facebook (facebook.com/cmtneiu), and follow us on Twitter (@cmtneiu).