

THE SPEAK EASY

SUMMER 2025



TELLING OUR STORY OUR WAY

Faculty Updates

Annual Reports

Kleinau 2024-2025 Season

Class of 2025 and Many more

TABLE OF CONTENTS

03

SCHOOL DIRECTORS REPORT

Ever wondered what goes into making our programs thrive? Let's find out more from our school director, Dr. Rebecca Anderson.

05

GRADUATE COORDINATORS UPDATE

From applications to graduation gowns, the graduate experience is a journey. Our new graduate coordinator has been killing it!

06

UNDERGRAD COORDINATORS UPDATE

This year has been all about discovery, resilience, and transformation. In this column, we highlight the milestones and challenges in our journey.

07

STUDENTS ORGANIZATIONS NEWS

From hosting events to leading initiatives, our student organizations have been the heartbeat of our community.

13

FACULTY UPDATES

From groundbreaking research to impactful teaching and community engagement, our faculty continue to lead with passion and purpose..

28

EDITORS COLUMN

As the academic year comes to a close, this issue captures more than just updates—it tells our story.



REFLECTIONS FROM THE SCHOOL DIRECTOR

BY DR. REBECCA ANDERSON

It certainly has been quite a year in the School of Communication Studies, and indeed, across the nation.

As always, the school is witnessing some very exciting changes, and our accomplishments go beyond what the pages of a newsletter might fill. In my first year as director, I certainly had some successful shoes to fill, although Dr. Sandy Pensoneau-Conway left me in very good hands with her month-by-month deadlines and notes of encouragement.

Additionally, I know our school runs as smoothly as it does due to the outstanding institutional memory, knowledge, good graces, and unbounding patience of office manager Laura Sims. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Laura and Aimee for making my first year run so smoothly.

While you can read about most of the highlights of the past year as you scroll through this new edition of the Speak Easy, I do want to mark some significant news items for you. First, I'm excited to let you know about two long-term hires we were able to secure this year. The first is SIU alum **Dr. Shelby Swafford**, who joined us as a new Assistant Professor of Practice this past fall.

Shelby's work focuses on activist performance, reproductive justice, feminist and queer theory, health and disability studies, and autoethnographic and archival methods. A bit later in the year, we were able to offer **Dr. Dustin Greenwalt**, who has been serving as an Assistant Professor of Practice for us for the past few years, a tenure-track position as an Assistant Professor, starting in Fall 2025.

Operating at the intersections of continental philosophy, rhetorical theory, visual studies, and cultural studies, his work examines the 20th-century environmental movement, the contemporary climate justice movement, visual rhetorics of science and the environment, contemporary anti-fascist media, as well as food rhetorics and embodiment.

Additionally, this year marks the first year we will offer our completely online bachelor's degree in communication studies! While we are still offering both the general bachelor's degree in communication studies and the specialization in public relations in person, we are now also able to offer a version of the general degree completely online as well. We hope this will continue to keep us competitive with other programs around the country. Furthermore, we are nearing completion of finalizing our new undergraduate major in Communication, Advocacy, and Leadership and hope to roll that out sometime in 2026.

(Continued on page 4)

Last, we began offering a coursework-only option for our master's degree in communication studies this year, along with the traditional thesis and research report options.

Looking forward, we've been told that plans to update the Communications Building on campus, in which the School of Communication Studies is housed, are moving forward and building is expected to begin sometime in the Fall of 2025

While no major changes will be happening to our area of the building, we are excited about the updates to the building itself, which is currently one of the oldest on campus to not be renovated. I'd also like to take a moment to highlight some of the weekly or bi-weekly podcasts being offered by our faculty in the school, in case you might want to check them out.

As he has for the past five years, **Dr. Jonny Gray** continues to host his weekly radio show, *Isn't it Queer*, on WDBX, our local community radio station.

This weekly radio show addresses a variety of issues impacting the LGBTQ+ community and allies. You can find a link to episodes to download [here](#). Additionally, faculty member **Justin Young's** Saluki Games podcast (which was created in 2022) is still going strong. Its mission is to serve as a professional workspace for students interested in working with or writing about video games, from a professional standpoint within the industry or from a critical, academic perspective. You can find a link to the latest episodes [here](#).

Finally, new faculty member **Dr. Christina Ivey** recently started her own podcast related to her research into issues surrounding religion, gender, and sexuality, titled *Holy Spectrum*. You can find episodes of that [here](#).

I'm also very happy to report that due to many of your generous donations, we were able to support the travel of undergraduate and graduate students to the Plank Center Summit for Diversity in PR (Chicago), the Petit Jean Performance Festival (Arkansas), and a mini-ICON conference for PR students in Paducah, KY.

This is in addition to all the excellent work done by our students and faculty throughout the year in the Marion Kleinau Theatre season, through RSOs like PRSSA, and at national and regional conferences like NCA and CSCA. I hope you enjoy reading about all these things and more in the pages of this newsletter.

Finally, please don't be a stranger! If you are in the area, let us know so we can welcome you in person. If you have a moment, drop us a note and tell us how you're doing. If you use social media, follow us. You are an important part of our story.



Dr. Rebecca Anderson at the end-of-year awards

FROM THE GRADUATE COORDINATOR'S DESK

By Sandy Pensoneau- Conway, PhD

Academic year **2024-2025** was a very busy one for our talented and hard-working graduate students! In terms of research, as a group, our current graduate students gave over 25 conference presentations across five different academic conferences and festivals. These included trips to NCA, CSCA (Central States Communication Association), OSCLG (Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender), the Petit Jean Performance Festival, and the Theory in Plain English Symposium. Additionally, kudos to Folakemi Bakare, who has two poems published in the *SIU Grassroots Literary Magazine*, and India Hagen-Gates, who published an article in *Kaleidoscope*, and another one in the *Atlantic Journal of Communication*.

Our performance studies graduate students gave over 5 individual performances, including a number of solo-performances on the Kleinau Stage. However, they also shined backstage, as they did sound design, writing, directing, and graphic design for a variety of shows. Many of our students also took advantage of our podcast studio, co-hosting over 30 episodes of *Saluki Gamescast*. Shout out to PhD student Mario Sanders, who revived and now hosts the *Communication Studies* podcast.

Throughout the course of the year, our graduate students defended four research reports, successfully passed three sets of prelims, defended two prospectuses, and a whopping five dissertations. Congratulations to Dr. Anna Wilcoxon, Dr. A.B. Art, Dr. Patrick Seick, Dr. Caleb McKinley-Portee, and Dr. Janine Armstrong!

In their roles as teaching and research assistants, they taught over 75 courses, ran tech and produced 10 different shows and two guest lectures in the Marion Kleinau Theatre, and published a new edition of *Kaleidoscope*, our internationally recognized graduate student research journal. Our Speaker's Center, coordinated by T. Brown, served over 100 students as they learned to find their voice and deliver presentations.

We're grateful to alumni Dr. Lore LeMaster and Dr. Nico Wood, who visited with us and further connected our grad students to our discipline and those who came before

. Dr. LeMaster introduced us to her new book, *Pedagogies of the Enfleshed: Critical Communication Pedagogy, Otherwise*, and gave a talk on the U.S. settler colonialist history of our discipline and the role that critical communication plays in intervening in oppressive relations. Dr. Wood facilitated an insightful grant-writing workshop and provided incredible information on how to leverage a graduate degree in communication studies outside of academia.

It will come as no surprise to anyone that our graduate students are award-winning teachers, performers, and scholars. *In addition to our usual in-house annual awards and scholarships*, Irene Lutterodt and Folakemi Bakare were nominated for the Willis Swartz Graduate Student Scholarship, Monalisa Lamptey was nominated for the Graduate and Professional Student Council (GPSC) Outstanding Teacher Award, and Frankie Kimmell was nominated for the Outstanding Queer Research Award. We also had many students who received awards! Irene Lutterodt received the GPSC Outstanding Service Award, Folakemi Bakare received the GPSC Outstanding Teacher Award, T. Brown received a top paper award from the CSCA Performance Studies Division, Sean Maulding received a top student paper award from NCA's Caucus on LGBTQ Concerns, and Monalisa Lamptey received the CSCA Cooper Award for excellence in graduate student teaching. Kudos to all of you!

We were excited to welcome five new graduate students into our cohort last fall, and extend that same excitement to an additional seven (potentially eight) new graduate students who will join us in August 2025. Congratulations to all our current and incoming graduate students. I am grateful for the honor I have had of working with each of you as you fulfill your academic dreams!

UNDERGRAD COORDINATOR'S REPORT

By Dustin Greenwalt, PhD

It's been a great year to be a Communication Studies Saluki! We have maintained one of the largest majors in the College of Liberal Arts while offering numerous educational opportunities for our students both inside and outside the classroom. The 2024-2025 school year was also a year of change, as we have been looking to adapt our majors to the university reorganization as well as changing student preferences and expectations.

Our innovative public relations curriculum and the associated PRSSA chapter continue to be a major draw for students. Professors continue to offer innovative courses, including Professor Bardhan's DEI in Public Relations course. Our PRSSA chapter continues to do great things as it encourages students to implement the lessons learned from their classes in specific contexts.

Our courses in communication studies more generally continue to provide students with award-winning teaching and opportunities to critically examine and perform amidst the world around them. Of note, Justin Young's Video Games: The Art, Culture, and History of a Medium was a big hit in the fall. Undergraduate students also played a major role in productions at the Marion Kleinau Theatre, as many of our students take to the stage to express themselves and help tell innovative stories

Our program also continues to be at the forefront of SIU's mission in supporting student success and the university's emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI initiatives). With your help, we were able to award thousands of dollars in scholarships to our undergraduate majors! The scholarships we award are crucial to supporting student success, and we appreciate all that you do to help. Additionally, our school continues to emphasize DEI through course content, informal mentoring programs, and initiatives designed to help students navigate the bureaucratic university.

There are also big changes coming to our majors in the coming years as we seek to stay at the cutting edge of undergraduate education. We are particularly excited to offer a distance education major beginning in Fall 2025. The school, through the addition of new faculty and courses, is also aiming to expand our offerings in leadership as a potential area of study in order to give our students every advantage on the job market.

Finally, we are excited about forthcoming rearrangements of our curriculum, including the splitting of the Communication Studies program into two distinct majors, aimed at both making the university easier to navigate for students and actualizing our position as a standalone school with multiple programs. Stay tuned for more news in the near future.

PRSSA Y-I-R

The SIU chapter of PRSSA hit the ground running last fall with an ambitious collaboration that would define their entire academic year. **President Mary D'Haeze** unveiled a strategic partnership with Students for Kids' Sake International, positioning the chapter for unprecedented growth and community impact. With **Steven Flowers (Vice President)**, **Ava Steffens (Secretary)**, **Margaret Krupp (Treasurer)**, and **Hailey Eiffert (Director of Digital Media)** forming a powerhouse executive team, PRSSA quickly established itself as a force to be reckoned with on campus.



Our PRSSA chapter photographed with Alum Andrew Krause

Four chapter members participated in the prestigious Betsy Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations Conference in Chicago, Illinois, from November 6-8. This professional development opportunity facilitated connections with PRSA Chicago chapter members and international PRSSA representatives, strengthening the SIU chapter's position within the global professional network. Participants gained valuable insights into artificial intelligence applications in public relations and communications that would immediately elevate the chapter's campaign strategies.

The new year ushered in strategic leadership transitions that would propel PRSSA to new heights. **Margaret Krupp** took the presidential reins with **Ava Steffens** advancing to Vice President. The executive board expanded its capabilities with **Aaliyah Hawk** stepping in as Director of External Communication and **Makenzie Gaines** bringing fresh energy as Events and Programs Officer. Providing essential continuity during this transition, **Hailey Eifert** continued her exceptional work as Director of Digital Media.

PRSSA implemented two successful fundraising initiatives during the spring semester. The Double Good Popcorn campaign, conducted February 5-9, generated revenue through product sales with a 50% profit margin. Additionally, members created handcrafted merchandise, including artwork, accessories, and decorative items for sale at SIU's Valentine's Day craft event. Both initiatives represent successful diversification of the organization's fundraising portfolio.

Five chapter members attended the East Central District Conference in Paducah, Kentucky, from March 28-30. This regional gathering provided professional networking opportunities, skill development workshops, and industry knowledge that directly benefit chapter operations and member career preparation. The organization's year-long planning efforts culminate with the Dance-a-thon event scheduled for April 5, 2025. This signature fundraising initiative represents the strategic partnership with Students For Kids' Sake International and demonstrates PRSSA's commitment to community engagement and professional excellence.



From immediate right chapter Advisor, Dr. Sakshi Bhati, Mackenzie Gaines, Hailey Eiffert, Margaret Krupp, Ava Steffens, Addison Bean and Graduate Assistant Irene Lutterodt

SCO THROUGH SEASONS

By Alicia Utecht



On every step of my graduate student journey, I'm aware of my identity as a first-generation student. Beyond hidden curriculums that we try to expose to the light in the classroom, there are also things that we seem to just 'do' as graduate students in order to succeed in the long run. We participate in service on committees and attend meetings. We present at conferences. At the end of this journey, we hopefully get jobs. All of these were mysteries when I started graduate school, and so as SCO president this year, my biggest goal was to demystify and create opportunities to practice these elements of life as a grad student for our entire graduate student community.

In September, Drs. Christina Ivey and Sakshi Bhati co-presented a brown bag session about the academic job market. As the most recent faculty hires in the School of Communication Studies, they shared materials from their own job hunts when they were applying to academic jobs and spoke with us about behind-the-scenes decisions that they had made while applying and interviewing. They compiled their presentation materials into a OneDrive folder that they shared with SCO and which can be shared again as new graduate students enter the program and get closer to their own job hunts. We are so grateful for all of the work that they put into this brown bag for us!

As the National Communication Association conference in late November approached, I next organized a mock panel of folks who would be presenting at the conference. The benefit of this was two-fold. Everyone could experience a conference panel in a familiar space with the support of friends, asking questions about the hidden curriculum of conferencing. Meanwhile, the folks who would be presenting at NCA had to prepare our presentations while still in Carbondale instead of putting them together in New Orleans the night before presenting them at the conference.

India Hagen-Gates, Juno Blue, and I each rehearsed our presentations, and Dr. Christina Ivey served as respondent, giving each of us valuable feedback that we took forward to craft even stronger work for the national conference the following week.

With spring semester came the Central States Communication Association conference. While India, Juno, and I had all attended conferences before our mock NCA panel, Central is often the first conference for members of our graduate student community, and I felt that a mock panel before this conference was especially important as a result. T. Brown, Folakemi Bakare, and Monalisa Lamptey presented their work at the mock panel, and Dr. Christina Ivey once again served as respondent, supporting all three in creating presentations that contributed to the strong presence that our school had at the Central conference this year.

As I wrap up my term as SCO president, I would like to thank all of the SCO officers: T Brown, Casey Weaver, Folakemi Bakare, Reza Shirmarz, Frankie Kimmell, and India Hagen-Gates. I also want to thank all of the members of SCO who served on various committees: Folakemi Bakare, Frankie Kimmell, Irene Lutterodt, Mario Sanders, Juno Blue, Janifar Kamal Nova, and Casey Weaver. Without everyone volunteering and stepping up, none of what we do would be possible. Finally, I want to thank our faculty advisor, Dr. Christina Ivey, for always being ready and eager to do whatever she could to support our graduate student community. May next year bring even more success!



GROWING THROUGH INCLUSION: REFLECTIONS FROM THE PLANK CENTER SUMMIT

By Ava Steffens



Ava writes,

"Last fall, I had the privilege of attending the DEI Summit hosted by the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations in Chicago. It was an incredible opportunity to learn from and collaborate with a diverse group of PR professionals and students, each bringing unique perspectives and lived experiences to the table. Every conversation deepened my understanding of what it means to create inclusive, effective communication in today's world.

This experience challenged and expanded how I see my role as a future public relations professional. I walked away with a renewed commitment to honoring and amplifying voices from all backgrounds, cultures, and experiences—because good communication isn't just strategic, it's human.

In a time when DEI efforts are often questioned or minimized, this summit reminded me that real innovation comes from inclusive thinking. Organizations that commit to equity and representation are the ones that truly grow, adapt, and lead.

A heartfelt thank you to **Dr. Nilanjana Bardhan and Sakshi Bhati**, two outstanding mentors and PR faculty members, whose support made this experience possible. Their belief in us, both in and beyond the classroom, has shaped our growth as emerging professionals and continues to power the momentum of SIU PRSSA."

PETIT JEAN PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL

BY DR. REBECCA ANDERSON

In 2024, the School of Communication Studies was once again well represented at the Petit Jean Performance Festival. This performance festival takes place annually in October in the mountains of northwestern Arkansas at Petit Jean State Park. Each year, performers from around the country gather in these mountains for a weekend of community, rejuvenation, and performance. This year, Dr. Rebecca Anderson was excited to attend the festival for her 25th time and to bring several of our graduate students.

At the festival, students listen to a short talk from the festival leader and then are divided into groups with other undergraduate students from different schools across the country to work on creating a short group performance project over the course of a day and a half. Their groups are led by graduate students from around the country, including our SIU graduate students. Along with working on these performances, undergraduates share solo pieces in small workshops facilitated by graduate students, and schools bring snippets of larger cast and solo shows to share with the entire group over the course of the weekend. Two years ago, the role of Festival Director transferred from Dr. Jay Allison at the University of North Texas to SIU PhD alum, Dr. Andrea Baldwin at the University of Houston, Clearlake.

This year's festival leader was Dr. Laura Oliver from Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana. The festival theme was *Horries: Everyday Life Performances of Horror*. This year, SIU did not bring a show to the festival, but our students reported they thoroughly enjoyed the experience of getting to create and see so much other performance from students and faculty across the country. We were all excited to see SIU PhD alum **Dr. Colin Whitworth** travel to the festival to share a show created by students in his Storytelling class at Georgia State College and University and to be the first to witness fellow PhD alum **Dr. Gigi Perez-Langley's** new one-person show, *The Mat*.



From left: Alicia Utecht, Juno Bue, Dr. Rebecca Anderson, Jesse Snider, and T. Brown at Petit Jean Performance festival

FINE ART ACTIVITY FEE

GUEST ARTIST



Andrea Hahn

This year the School of Communication Studies was honored to welcome two guest artists. First, Local author Epiphany Ferrell (a.k.a. Andrea Hahn) shared their short-short fiction with directors and cast in an ensemble adaptation of their work in "Epiphanies."

Ferrell worked closely with Craig Gingrich-Philbrook and Shelby Swafford in consulting on the show

She also attended every performance and offered an open discussion about her work and its adaptation to performance after the final night

Finally, after the show built considerable interest in the short-short fiction form, Ferrell held a two-hour open writing workshop, including a still-active private online space for continued writing and sharing with workshop attendees.

Second, the School of Communication Studies was excited to welcome Dr. Sasha Sanders for a practitioner's presentation titled, "A Black Feminists's Guide to Fan Art, Comics, and Radical Imagination." Dr. Sanders is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies - (Multi)Cultural Performance Studies at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

Her performance scholarship and creative activity extends Black feminist aesthetics by using DIY art, such as stop-motion animation and comics, as forms of democratized knowledge production.

These guest artists are supported by the SIU Fine Arts Activity Fee. The School of Communication Studies was represented on the FAAF Committee by faculty member Jonny Gray and graduate student Alicia Utecht.



Dr. Sasha Sanders

kleinau 24-25

SEASON REPORT

The Kleinau Theatre had a robust season this year. With Alicia Utecht serving as Technical Director, Juno Blue serving as Assistant Technical Director, and T Brown as Publicity director, all of the performers were in good hands. The technical crew members were performers and creators in many of the shows as well

The fall semester included solo shows by Alicia Utecht and Juniper Blue. In "Comically Close," Alicia explores connections between fandom and family communication, using tropes of fan conventions to share autoethnographic narratives about family connections. In "Echo's Repertoire," Juno creates their own space opera in a narrative about social connections and difference, using alien identity and AI communication as tools for exploring aspects of transgender experience.



T.Brown performing a cult piece

From fandom-inspired narratives to experimental explorations of gender and grief, the stage pulsed with creativity and courageous storytelling.

The very full spring semester began with a Faculty Performance Spotlight featuring performances by Jonny Gray, Christina Ivey, Shelby Swafford, and Craig Gingrich-Philbrook. Craig and Shelby followed this by directing and adapting an ensemble performance of "Epiphanies," featuring the short-short fiction of local author, Epiphany Ferrell. This was followed by the third annual (but second time in the Kleinau) "Black Experience Showcase," presented by the Africana Theatre Lab. The Kleinau was also transformed by College of Art and Media MFA student, Jordan Bardgett, into a glorious technological tangle for an MFA thesis performance of "Gender Knob," an examination of voice through music, technology, and gender.



Alicia Utecht performing comically close

At the end of March, Sean Maulding's "Til Death Do Us Part" explored persona performance and drama therapy in an original story about a wedding planner's confrontation with mortality as a reluctant eulogist. The semester ended with T Brown's "Cult Piece," a multi-media performance art embodiment of a life impacted by 23 years spent in a cult.

The season also included excellent contributions by students in the fall's Graduate Student Spotlight and a Performance Course Spotlight at the end of each semester. As usual, after the spring Spotlight, the Kleinau Theatre Awards were presented, including the prestigious Marion Kleinau Award, which went to Alicia Utecht.



Juno Blue performing Echo's Reportoire

FACULTY UPDATES: NEW CHAPTERS, CONTINUED IMPACT

Each faculty member brings a unique light to our department. These updates are just a glimpse into the dedication and brilliance they pour into our shared learning environment. To our faculty, thank you for showing up, standing out, and staying grounded in your mission to inspire.

We begin with a heartfelt update from our new school director, Dr. Rebecca Anderson:



Dr. Rebecca Anderson and PhD student, Reza Shirmarz at our annual winter potluck

NEW NAME, NEW TITLE AND A WHOLE LOT OF LOVE

BY REBECCA ANDERSON

This year, I took on two big new roles. In May of 2024, I got married to Patrick Anderson in Maui with a small group of our close family and friends in attendance. This is why you'll see my name listed as Rebecca Anderson now. A few months later, on July 1st, 2024, I officially stepped into the role of School Director for the School of Communication Studies.

I have enjoyed transitioning into both new roles – wife and director—and learning more about my colleagues and our program along the way. Patrick and I continue to enjoy relaxing with our two cats and are currently looking for a house to buy in the area. We've also been lucky to be gifted some kayaks this year and are looking forward to exploring some of the rivers and lakes in the area with those this summer.



TEACHING, AND LIVING FULLY: A GLIMPSE INTO THE YEAR

BY NILANJANA BARDHAN

This past year, I continued teaching courses in public relations and intercultural communication, while also advising graduate students—something I find both challenging and rewarding. I was honored to receive the CMST Outstanding Teacher Award in 2024, my third time receiving this recognition, and I remain deeply grateful to my students and colleagues for the continued inspiration and support.

Beyond the classroom, I continue to serve on the board of the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations, where I co-chair the DEI Committee. Last November, we hosted the Center's 6th annual DEI Summit for PR professionals and students in Chicago. It was especially meaningful to see several of our undergraduate PR students attend and engage in those important conversations. I also remain active on the SIUC Chancellor's Task Force for Diversity and Inclusion and serve on the SIU Systemwide Diversity Advisory Council. In terms of scholarship, I'm currently completing work on a co-edited book titled *Leadership Communication: A Critical Introduction to Theory and Practice*, with my colleagues Sandy Pensoneau-Conway and Sean Eddington. I'm also in the early stages of developing a solo book project focused on leadership through the lens of narrative knowing—an area I'm particularly passionate about.

This fall, I look forward to teaching a special topics course titled *Intercultural Communication: A Peacebuilding Approach*. Outside of work, I love spending time walking, cooking, traveling, and enjoying life with my partner, friends, and our four-legged child, Billie the Kid.



Billie the Kid



With MA graduating advisee Irene Lutterrodt and committee member Dr. Craig Engstrom

PERFORMING CHANGE: ART, ADVOCACY, AND ADMINISTRATION

BY JONNY GRAY

It's been a busy and rewarding year for Dr. Jonathan Gray. In the fall, he stepped into the role of Assistant Director for the School of Communication Studies and now chairs the Planning and Development Committee. He has been busy working on and completing new operating papers for the College of Liberal Arts, the School of Communication Studies, and the Fine Arts Activity Fee.

In the summer Jonny attended and presented a paper at The Rhetoric Society of America's biennial conference in Denver, CO. During the fall gathering of Gay Spirit Visions, which was ultimately cancelled, he and several other early attendees were trapped in the North Carolina mountains by Hurricane Helene. In the fall he debuted a new performance class on *Performing Comics and Graphic Novels*. In the Spring, he offered a new class in *Communication, Activism and Social Movements*.

He remains the Faculty Advisor for the Marion Kleinau Theatre and has co-directed two solo performances: *Comically Close* and *Cult Piece*. He has been an active member of the curating committee for the Sharp University Museum installation: *Queer Stories/Spaces: Southern Illinois Histories & Queertographies*. The installation opened April 4 and will remain up through October 2025. In the spring Jonny was also the recipient of the *Lindell W. Sturgis Memorial Public Service Award*.



SABBATICAL SPARKLES AND THE SWIFTIE DREAM

BY SANDY PENSONEAU-CONWAY

She writes, "I've enjoyed gaining a fresh perspective on teaching and advising since returning to faculty on July 1, 2024. Stepping into the role of graduate coordinator for the program has provided a wonderful reconnection to our grad students and given me the opportunity to learn new ways to support our grad programs. Working with graduate students is something that I love to do!

In addition, I taught our undergraduate Interpersonal Communication course; I've been teaching for over 20 years, and this was the first time I taught that course, and I loved every minute of it.

In the fall, I attended my first conference sponsored by the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender, along with seeing colleagues and friends at the annual NCA convention—always a treat! Likewise, reuniting with Salukis and seeing students blossom at CSCA in April is something I always look forward to.

I was honored to co-author a book chapter, "Performing Female: Using Communication Accommodation Theory to Critically Interrogate Gender Identity Salience in Classroom Encounters," with my advisee Carli Álvarez. I was also incredibly proud of my advisees who earned their graduate degrees in the fall and spring. A spring sabbatical has helped me refresh and recharge for this next academic year. Off campus, my daughter and I had a dream come true when we traveled to Germany in July to see Taylor Swift's Eras Tour—we were enchanted to see it!

It's not every day that I have the occasion to wear a sequined skirt. I was also excited to join southern Illinois' first LGBTQ+ choir, Tesserae, along with several other folks from Comm Studies. It's been so fun to return to chorale-style singing.



Dr. Christina Ivey (they/she) had a great second year at SIU! The year was filled with learning all about our new graduate assistants and seeing them grow as budding teachers/scholars. She had fun teaching *Teaching as Performance* for the first time and especially enjoyed seeing all of her students' Academic Drag presentations.

For research, she sent out many potential publications into the ether and will soon see one in the *Journal of Autoethnography*. They traveled to many conferences and presented on academic divorce, Brat pedagogy, going 'no-contact' with a family member, and pedagogical impacts of grieving.

Outside of school, she has continued her work with the SOiL Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, becoming a fully professed member AND the new House Abbess! They are also participating more in local and Kleinau stage performances and even joined a queer choir. What a wonderful time full of volunteering, camp, and spreading the 'good' word. Berkeley and Bert are still doing well and have been fighting like any sister and brother :)

Christina Ivey



Sakshi Bhati



Dr. Sakshi Bhati began her tenure-track position and quickly took on leadership roles, serving as faculty advisor for both the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and the National Society of Collegiate Scholars (NSCS).

In April 2025, she presented a paper and participated in a panel at the Central States Communication Association (CSCA) conference, where she also chaired her first panel. Her research accomplishments include publishing "Analyzing the Message Complexity, Signal Words, and Readability of Medical Tourism Warning Messages" in the International Crisis and Risk Communication Conference Proceedings in August 2024.

Most recently, Dr. Bhati won the RSO Advisor of the Year Award and the CMST Outstanding Faculty Award. Looking ahead, she is set to attend the prestigious Teaching with Cases seminar at Harvard Business School in June 2025.

GLOBAL COLLABORATION, LOCAL CREATIVITY

BY RANDY AUXIER

I have continued to try to use the resources of the William and Galia Minor Chair in ways that benefit the university. We welcomed several speakers this past summer using the fund. Their talks can be seen [here](#):

I think you will enjoy these talks and others. These were part of the 2nd International Conference on the Thought of Suzanne Langer, a highly interdisciplinary sort of gathering. The Creativity Societies also helped to sponsor the fall Creativity Conference at the American Institute of Philosophical and Cultural Thought (the theme of process and creativity—the talks may be seen on the same channel as above).

I also continue to use these resources left by the Minor family in the building of the Cassirer Center for International Cooperation and Scholarship, which is serving as a vehicle for internationalizing the College of Liberal Arts with student and faculty exchanges, conferences, and gatherings, involving ten universities in seven countries. We managed to navigate our first full year of programming in 2024 and have commenced our second year, growing in a sustainable way. These activities absorb a good bit of my time and energy. But I have published some articles and presented some new papers, along with organizing the 17th International Conference on Persons in Berlin last July.

The year also saw the relocation of the Center for Process Studies physical home to SIU –this is the research center located in Claremont, CA, for over 50 years. And along with these materials came the Alfred North Whitehead papers, discovered not too long ago and now residing at SIU. The next International Whitehead Conference will be held at SIU in the summer of 2026. I suppose I was the prime mover in all of this as well, with the support of many people here at SIU, not least Sandy Pensoneau-Conway and Rebecca Walker Anderson, who facilitated (in a literal sense) the relocation of hundreds of boxes of archival materials.

These are now comfortably housed in Faner Hall and all are welcome to come and visit. So it has been a busy year, and this coming year may well be busier. In spite of all this, I do still find time to do my radio show on WDBX (24 years running) and play my music locally pretty often with my musical friends. We also find time to host Cousin Andy's Coffeehouse concert series at our home in Murphysboro.



TEACHING FROM THE HEART WITH:



JUSTIN YOUNG

Over the past year, Justin remained deeply engaged in both teaching and research. He taught a range of classes that reflected his interdisciplinary interests and commitment to student-centered learning. In addition to his classroom responsibilities, he continued developing his research agenda, presenting his work at several academic conferences, and serving as a guest speaker at a variety of events, where he shared insights on topics ranging from media production to digital storytelling. His ongoing projects included podcast production, original writing, and, on the lighter side, keeping up with the never-ending adventures of cat wrangling. He also continues to manage and contribute to SalukiGames.com, an evolving platform that showcases his passion for gaming, media, and community engagement.



JOSH HOUSTON

Josh Houston continues to teach online, asynchronous, video-sharing courses. These courses serve students in the School of Communication Studies, students pursuing other majors at SIUC, and students studying on the campus of SIU-Edwardsville. Other students are enrolled in locations across the USA and beyond, and their ages span multiple generations. Additionally, Josh is enjoying the interesting experiences provided by this unique learning environment and looks forward to the launch of the Communication, Advocacy, and Leadership online program and major.

A YEAR OF PERFORMANCE, PEDAGOGY, AND PRACTICE

BY SHELBY SWAFFORD



After coming back to CMST last year as contingent faculty, Shelby Swafford officially joined the faculty this past fall as an Assistant Professor of Practice for the Communication Core. She spent her year in the classroom teaching public speaking, business and professional communication, performing culture, and interpersonal communication—which quickly became a new favorite

In the fall, Shelby traveled with Sakshi Bhati, Christina Ivey, and Sandy Pensoneau-Conway to OSLG in Kansas City, where Christina, Sandy, Shelby, and SIU alum Janine Armstrong presented their work on feminist pop culture pedagogy. She also went to Louisiana State University with Craig Gingrich-Philbrook to co-present the Third Annual Place of Performance Lecture, *Hydrangeas and Lilacs: Intergenerational Collaboration and Mentorship in Autoethnographic Performance Studies*.

AT NCA, HER DISSERTATION WAS RECOGNIZED WITH THE INAUGURAL OUTSTANDING DISSERTATION AWARD FROM THE PERFORMANCE STUDIES DIVISION.

This spring, Shelby performed in the Faculty Performance Spotlight; co-directed *Epiphanies: Performances of Flash Fiction* for the Kleinau Theatre with Craig; traveled to CSCA to present an autoethnographic performance; stepped into leadership for the Performance Studies and Autoethnography Division of CSCA, which also recognized her with the 2025 Outstanding Book Chapter Award; and continued working on her ongoing research projects, including a co-edited book project with SIU alum Colin Whitworth on the personal and political effects of the U.S. Supreme Court and a co-edited special issue of *Text and Performance Quarterly* with SIU alum Elizabeth Whitney on performance archives.

Shelby's husband, Scott, and fur-children—Sammie, Dolly, Fenn, and Bilbo—are all doing well and loving their new home.

PERFORMANCE, PARTNERSHIP, AND PERSONAL TRUTHS

BY CRAIG GINGRICH-PHILBROOK



He writes, I recently assistant-directed Echo's Repertoire, a compelling work by Juno Blue, and co-adapted as well as directed Epiphanies—an evocative evening of flash fiction based on the writings of local author Epiphany Ferrell.

These creative endeavors were in collaboration with Shelby Swafford, with whom he also traveled to Louisiana State University to deliver that institution's annual The Place of Performance lecture, a prestigious platform for innovative performance scholarship.

In addition to my creative and academic engagements, I served on the university's Honorary Doctorate and Distinguished Service Award Committee, contributing to the recognition of excellence across campus.

Looking ahead, I will be on sabbatical in the fall, dedicating time to an in-depth project tentatively titled More Common Among Women: Spoiled Masculinity, Homophobic Violence, Functional Neurological Disorder, and Autoethnographic Performance.

This work draws from my personal journey navigating seizures, as previously shared in his performance Ways to Say Goodbye, and seeks to explore the rich intersection of performance studies and theories of the embodied mind and mindful body. Through this project, I continue to expand the field's understanding of how lived experience, identity, and embodiment intersect within performance practice and theory.

In addition to serving as Undergraduate Studies Coordinator this year, Dustin A. Greenwalt serves in the leadership of multiple disciplinary sections and organizations, including the Association for the Rhetoric of Science, Technology, and Medicine. He continues to teach courses in environmental communication, cultural studies, and rhetoric. He recently published a book chapter, has a forthcoming essay in *Rhetoric, Politics & Culture*, and also has a book project in the revision stage about food rhetorics, style, and affect amidst imperial crises.

He is also editing a special issue of the journal POROI, which should be published in December 2025. Beginning in Fall 2025, he will transition into a tenure-track assistant professor role and is excited to remain at SIU for the foreseeable future!

DUSTIN GREENWALT



TODD GRAHAM



Todd has been teaching Interpersonal Communication (CMST 262) and Persuasion (CMST 326), which have increased in importance in recent years. Students appreciate the renewed focus of Interpersonal Communication (face-to-face) as a balance to the growing rise of computer-mediated communication (e.g., messaging, social media, email). And the Persuasion course has never been more relevant.

The first section of the 326 Persuasion course examines different techniques and theories of persuasion while the second half of the semester addresses the recent upswing in the darker sides of persuasion (e.g., propaganda, disinformation, conspiracy theories, cults, etc.).

Finally, he continued his role as a contributor for CNN by analyzing presidential debates during the 2024 election cycle.



BOOK NOOK

*Alumni Stay Great
Even After They
Graduate*

Charles Parrott is an Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre & Performance Studies at Kennesaw State University. He is also an alumnus of the School of Communication Studies at SIU. Parrott graduated with his PhD in 2011, with a specialization in both performance studies and philosophy of communication. Today, Dr. Parrott is the director of the KSU Tellers, a student storytelling ensemble focused on solo performance, community engagement, and performance-based scholarship. Under his direction, the KSU Tellers have performed at regional, national, and international festivals and conferences. He has won numerous awards for his innovative teaching and mentorship of undergraduate research.

[This book is available for purchase online and through the publisher's website for \\$55.](#)

Charles Parrott's new book, *Personal Narrative Performance and Storytelling: A Method of Composition from Action to Text*, offers a practical method for composing and performing personal narrative stories for artistic and academic purposes. The following description comes from the publisher's website:

"It is designed to make storytelling accessible to seasoned performers and people who are engaging with the artform for the first time. The author's unique method of composing stories from action to text privileges oral composition over writing. It draws on anecdotes from the author's many years of coaching storytellers to illustrate concepts throughout the book, making it entertaining and user-friendly. The methods contained in this book can help students and scholars communicate theoretical and scholarly arguments about culture, gender, race, and the environment."

"Anyone looking to harness the power of personal storytelling to speak about the political and the personal - in a classroom or on a stage - will find *Personal Narrative Performance and Storytelling: A Method of Composition from Action to Text* of great use. Additionally, the book will be of interest to qualitative researchers and those applying autoethnographic and storytelling methods in communication studies and other related social science and arts disciplines."

2024-2025 GRADUATES

With pride, we celebrate you.



Graduating Senior, Aliyah Flowers



Dr. Rebecca Anderson hooding Dr. A.B Art



M.A. student Felix Enyan with Dean Jody Murray



M.A. student, Folakemi Bakare with Dean Jody Murray



Graduating Senior, Khalil Johnson



Dr. Craig Gingrich Philbrook hooding Dr. Caleb Mckinley Portee



Graduating Senior, Margaret Krupp



Dr. Sandy Pensoneau-Conway
Monalisa Lamptey & Felix Enyan



Dr. Janine Armstrong with Dr. Sandy Pensoneau-Conway



Drs. Patrick Seick, A.B Art, Janine
Armstrong, Rebecca Anderson, Caleb
Mckinley-Portee, and Craig Gingrich
Philbrook



Dr. Patrick Seick and Dr. Sandy
Pensoneau-Conway



Drs. Patrick Seick, Sandy Pensoneau-Conway
& Janine Armstrong

2024-2025 END OF YEAR AWARDS

School of Communication Studies Awards

Ronald J. Pelias Excellence in Graduate Student Service Award : Irene Lutterodt

Elyse Pineau Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching Award : Folakemi Bakare **(MA)**
: Reza Shirmarz **(PhD)**

John T Warren Excellence in Graduate Student Research/Creative Award: Sahar Abedikedenji

John T Warren Memorial Scholarship : Irene Lutterodt

Bryan Crow Memorial Scholarship : Paula Horton **(UG)**
: Folakemi Bakare **(MA)**

Outstanding Faculty in Communication Studies Award : Dr. Sakshi Bhati

Kleinau Undergraduate Newcomer Award : Paula Horton

Graduate Newcomer Award: Mario Sanders

Outstanding Artistic Contribution: Sean Mauling

Outstanding Technical Innovation and Creativity : Juno Blue

Excellence in Experimental Performance Award : TBrown

The Tekla Storey Award: Sky Bartnick

Marion Kleinau Theatre Award: Alicia Utecht



PHOTO GALLERY



Alum Dr. Lore Lemaster at Pro seminar



Jajuan Blankenship with his students during Halloween in their costumes



Mary D'Haeze, Scott Moeller, Andrew Kraus (class of 1992)
(Scott and Andrew co-own and run a marketing and communications firm in Chicago called AKA Partners)



Grant Deady (CEO of Zeno group US), Khalil Johnson, Marybeth Deady (Partner of Grant) with Drs. Sakshi Bhati and Rebeca Walker Anderson



Alicia Utecht, Mario Sanders with students at Playing for Pets at St. Francis Care



Grad students with friends at our annual welcome potluck

EDITOR'S GOODBYE

When I first took on the role of editor for our *Kudos & Celebrations Newsletter and annual Speak Easy Magazine*, I assumed I was signing up to throw the spotlight on achievements and milestones. I didn't realize I would be stepping into people's lives, their stories, their quiet battles, and bold breakthroughs.



This role stretched me in so many ways. Through it all, I have laughed reading your submissions, been inspired by the hard work and dedication, and sat in awe of the strength, creativity, and passion that live in our school. From students who found their voice to faculty who kept showing up despite everything. Each story touched me and our reader deeply. Honestly, there were days that felt heavy; however, every milestone and achievement reminded me to stay grounded in purpose.

Thank you for reading through this issue. Please know that every word, every highlight, and every celebration came from a place of deep love and gratitude for our school. Thank you again for trusting me with your stories. You made this year unforgettable.

With all my heart,
Irene Lutterodt

TEST YOUR COMM KNOWLEDGE

R	E	N	A	E	Q	A	U	A	L	A	U	R	A
Q	P	I	O	E	R	I	A	E	S	O	A	O	C
U	O	E	N	S	U	M	N	N	U	A	P	A	S
E	C	T	P	P	P	E	I	O	B	C	P	P	R
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R	O	E	T	A	A	P	L	T	I	R	R	D	D
C	D	C	L	K	I	M	K	A	S	O	F	A	N
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A	U	C	R	M	N	R	P	D	B	E	E	S	I

QUEER, CSCA, NCA, RHETORIC, SPEAKERS FORUM,
 DISSERTATION, GENDER, KELINAU, CULTURE, PERFORMANCE,
 KALEIDOSCOPE, POTLUCK, LAURA, SUBMISSION, PEDAGOGY,
 AIMEE, RAINBOW, PRSSA

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School: <https://academics.siu.edu/comm-media/>

PRSSA: <https://www.siuprssa.com/>

Charitable Giving

If you would like to contribute to a variety of school events, student professional and academic development opportunities, or any of our scholarship and award funds, please visit our school giving page at <https://cmst.siu.edu/giving/index.php> or contact school director

Dr. Rebecca Anderson
(r.walker@siu.edu). We have many more funds than what is listed on the page.

Our alumni and friends make a world of difference! Thank you

