Graduate Program Draws New Candidates

Rebecca Knicely is taking advantage of a new initiative in the School of Communication. The Corporate and Professional Communication graduate program has expanded its accelerated master’s program to include media studies majors, and Knicely signed on.

High-performing undergraduate students can earn both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in five years. Until recently most who applied to the graduate program were studying public relations. Then the school began recruiting accelerated students from media studies, offering a wider range of courses and giving all communication students the chance to take graduate classes for undergraduate credit.

The accelerated program targets sophomores and juniors who have at least 60 but no more than 96 credits. Students take some graduate courses to fill undergraduate electives. Applications require a recommendation from a School of Communication faculty member, a GPA of 3.25 and a B or higher in research methods and communication theory.

“I decided to do the accelerated program after hearing about it because, why not?” said Knicely, who is studying journalism. “I was already attending the university and I absolutely love it here. The accelerated program allows me to receive credit for both undergrad and grad classes while being an undergraduate student. ... So, not only am I saving money, but I am also saving time.”

Most accelerated students finish both their undergraduate and graduate degrees in five years.

“I realized that I was going to do a graduate program and it seemed like the perfect fit,” said graduate student Sheena Palmer. “It complements my advertising degree by making me a more ideal candidate for a future job.”

The classes are mostly in seminar format and the core curriculum consists of communication theory, communication research, organizational communication, public relations, and training and development. Students also have the option of pursuing either a thesis or non-thesis degree, based on their personal and professional goals.

New courses are being introduced from Media Studies faculty. Dr. West Bowers will be teaching interactive media during the summer term, and in the fall he will offer a course on change and innovation in media.

Most classes are held in seminar format once a week for three hours to help accommodate students who commute or work full-time. Along with the seminars, students have an opportunity to put lessons into practice.

“Seminar classes let you openly discuss your readings,” Palmer said. “But you also have your hands-on classes where you are out there in the field getting the experience you need. ... It’s so helpful and teaches so much.”

Neil Young and RU

Prof. Bill Kovarik’s research on the history of alternative fuels was highlighted in rock star Neil Young’s “Waging Heavy Peace” (Blue Rider Press, 2012). Young mentions Kovarik and Radford University on Page 22. “It’s my 15 seconds of fame,” Kovarik said of the fleeting moment of recognition by a rock star.
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION

From the Director

Building for Tomorrow

New Faculty, Classes to Benefit Students

Change is in the air. The University has started excavation near Main Street for an addition to the College of Science and Technology, and the student Health and Wellness Center that will be next to the Bonnie Hurlburt Student Center is rising from the ground. As we write this newsletter, we are waiting to find out the status of the proposed building for the College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences – a building that, if approved, will become the new home for the School of Communication.

We’ve not put activities on hold, however. This spring semester we completed searches for two faculty members, one in journalism and one in communication studies. Both Dr. Colin Baker, who comes to us from Wayne State University, and Dr. Twayne Kasoma, who has been teaching at Emory and Henry, have excellent previous teaching experience and active research agendas. Even as we still believe that excellent teaching comes first, the University is putting more emphasis on contributing to our fields through research and scholarship. Both are activities we encourage and support.

We also wrapped up our fourth successful Communication Week in April. Students packed the four evening “keynote” talks, all by alumni; several job seeking workshops during the lunch hour; and two Friday afternoon panels. In the future I hope that more of you can join us and share your experiences.

Another change that’s occurring in the School of Communication is the increase in classes we are teaching either totally, or partially, online. Last summer we discovered that the most highly enrolled classes we offered were the ones students could take online, from wherever they were spending their summers. Some classes are even taught online during our regular semesters because they offer flexibility for students balancing a full load of classes with a job to pay the bills.

I even dipped my toes in the water of cyberspace by offering a graduate class as a “hybrid” class in the fall. About half of the classes were spent online, with students discussing with each other and me the readings I’d assigned. We spent in-class time for presentations, guest speakers and problem solving. Although students indicated I needed to be tougher (me?!) about my expectations for online discussion, for a first effort I was pleased with how little different it felt to me.

Our graduate faculty have been busy making changes that will make our Corporate and Professional Communication program more appealing to students in the media studies major. Additional graduate classes are now also available in Health Communication (offered as a service course for the Nursing program, as well as for our students) and in Interactive Media, with both being offered online during the upcoming summer. Within the next several years we also hope to offer an online Certificate Program in Professional Communication Strategies and Tactics for working professionals.

I know many of you keep in touch with friends from RU. I would appreciate it if you would forward this newsletter to those alumni. We would like ALL of our alumni to have the opportunity to read about what is going on with the School by receiving SOC Talk. Through our social media and postcard efforts a month or so ago, we got updated emails from about 150 of you. Thanks to all of you who took the time to keep us up-to-date!

Have a wonderful summer,

Lynn M. Zoch, PhD
Professor and Director
School of Communication
Where Are They Now?

Alumna: ‘Choose Your Words Wisely’

Shelly Whitaker’s PR Coursework Led to Career Success

By Paige Quesenberry, ’13

On Dec. 1, 2011, Shelly Whitaker and executives from Advance Auto Parts Inc. traveled to New York to celebrate the retailer’s 10-year anniversary of trading on the New York Stock Exchange by ringing the closing bell.

It marked a huge achievement for the company. After touring the exchange, Advance CEO Darren R. Jackson was interviewed live from the trading floor. The company was presented with several awards, and Whitaker received a medal of her own.

While on the trip Whitaker arranged the luncheons, dinners, meetings and interviews. In recognition of her hard work, Jackson invited Whitaker to stand beside him as he pounded the gavel at the closing ceremony. She called it one of her “absolute career highs.”

Whitaker balances being a full-time mother of two with the responsibilities that come with being the public communications manager for Roanoke, Va.-based Advance Auto Parts Inc. Stress is a way of life.

Whitaker attended Wytheville Community College and then Radford University, where she graduated in 1995. Whitaker didn’t know what to study. She fell in love with public speaking and began taking communication classes. Whitaker also joined the Public Relations Student Society of America, where she met people who would help her down the road. She recently spoke to current student members about her experiences.

While at Radford, Whitaker enjoyed her public relations classes. “It was always something interesting and new,” Whitaker said. “Public relations really showed me what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go.”

After graduating, Whitaker moved to Richmond. She worked at Circuit City as a media buyer for almost four years. From Richmond, Whitaker moved to Roanoke, where she worked as an education and information specialist for the Roanoke City Police Department. She was the primary media spokesperson and handled PR, print publications, and other communication functions for the department.

After five years she left to become director of public relations for Angels of Assisi, an animal welfare group. Whitaker took charge of their website, newsletter, branding, signage, media outreach, donation-tracking system, and volunteer program.

While on maternity leave with her first son, Advance Auto called and offered her a job; she had been recommended by a member of the Public Relations Society of America. She has been with Advance Auto since 2007.

Whitaker has unlimited responsibilities for Advance Auto. While based in Roanoke, she works with news media nationally. The company has 3,600 stores in the United States, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, according to the web site. Whitaker not only acts as a spokesperson, she also sets up phone interviews, radio interviews, and television interviews for executives at Advance. She deals with any charities the company works with, handles investor relations and reports for Advance Auto’s annual shareholder meeting.

The job has Whitaker working regular business hours, but she is on call and accessible around the clock. Whitaker always has her work phone on her. “Flexible hours and a flexible culture are a must in the field,” Whitaker said. “But since becoming a mom, the company will give me some flexibility.” She has been able to cut back some on her travel schedule, but the demands on her time depend on the day and the work that needs to get done.

While working for Advance Auto Whitaker has learned one important thing, and that is how to answer questions. When working with the media or others, she says, “Choose your words wisely, and most certainly think before speaking.”

Whitaker likes to focus on being a credible spokesperson. While some outside the field may think public relations professionals only express propaganda, Whitaker works hard to prove otherwise. She demonstrated this often while working with the Roanoke City Police Department.

She found a balance in going from crime scenes to the media to report what happened. “You don’t want to tell too much, as well as not telling too little.” Whitaker walked a fine line, and that training has carried over help her credibility at Advance Auto.
Where are they now?

In the Driver’s Seat with Marty Smith

By Joe Rummel, ’13

Roland Lazenby, a professional sports journalist and current Radford University journalism instructor, remembers former student Marty Smith as an aggressive interviewer. “He wasn’t a straight-A student, but he didn’t back down from any interview.” I asked the Giles County native about his journey from Radford to the ESPN as a NASCAR analyst. What follows is an edited transcript.

How much did Radford play a part in getting to where you are?

I learned a lot of lessons the hard way — on the fly! But of course Radford played a substantial role for me, because I had people like Roland Lazenby, and I had the opportunities to find the platform, like the sports information platform, that let me get experience.

I came to Radford [for Communication Week 2012] and I stressed the absolute vital importance of getting real world experience as a student. While all my buddies were out getting wasted, I was taking 15 and 16 hours a semester — and working 50. And it has paid off for me, because I knew when I got into the workforce what it was really all about.

You wanted to play baseball. When did you know you were going to be a journalist?

I was born into a family that liked racing, but as a young high school kid I played football, basketball and baseball. My whole life I was going to be an athlete; the problem is that I had no talent. I was a decent athlete at a small school in Virginia, but I didn’t have the talent to be a big time. I was invited to try out for baseball and I ended up not making the team. There were a lot of nights where there would be a piece of paper on the door saying, “No class this evening, I’m with the Lakers.” And I’m thinking, “Man, I wanna DO that. I want to BE that!”

What is it like working at ESPN? And what’s the hardest part?

They hire you for a reason; they expect you to be great. And that’s the way it is. They expect us to be the best at what we do, and that’s what we strive to do every single day. We try to do work that stands out, that is journalistically sound, that is accurate and fair, and might be a little different than what somebody else does.

I started with ESPN in October 2006. I love working for ESPN. I love the people that I have the opportunity to interact with. But the hardest part is living in airports and being away from my family. The road is a grind. It will kick your tail to be on the road for 17 weeks in a row. I don’t care who you are, it’s exhausting.

What made you choose NASCAR?

At first, I didn’t want anything to do with NASCAR. I told my boss give me equestrian sports, intermural tennis, I don’t care — anything. But two laps into the first race I covered, I was in love. I loved the smell. I loved the sound. I loved the fury of the motors, and I loved the fan passion. Everything about it suited me.

What advice would you give an aspiring journalist?

Make sure you take the time to add depth to your questions. Don’t ask yes or no questions — don’t give them an out! That’s something ESPN really harps on, and it’s been very beneficial for me. Also, don’t be scared to make somebody mad. Always be fair. Don’t be malicious — malicious sucks. Malicious is very poor journalism.

And I should have said this before: One of the greatest attributes of great writers is making one’s self vulnerable. If you have the willingness to put yourself out there, and accept the possibility of negative feedback, it will make you a writer that you didn’t know you could be.

I was given an opportunity, and I kicked the damn door in. And to this moment, 15 years later, I still have passion for it.
Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Matthew Turner comes from a long line of Highlanders. His great-grandmother was a member of the first class to attend Radford, and his grandmother, mother, and two sisters have all been students here. Turner is not the only Radford professor in the family, either. Robert Turner, Matthew’s father, is an associate professor who serves as a reference librarian in McConnell Library.

Even with the Radford red in his blood, Turner didn’t always plan on being a professor here. During his time at Ohio University, where he earned a master’s in screenwriting and a Ph.D. in interdisciplinary arts, Turner focused on his love of film. When he saw the job posting for Radford, he initially wasn’t sure it was the right fit for his skill set. However, after recently becoming a tenured associate professor, he has clearly found Radford to be a good home for his academic and personal life.

The School of Communication has provided Turner with an environment that values his keen eye for visual storytelling, which he passes on to his students. For anyone who spends time in the video editing lab, it is not uncommon to hear students say, “Do you think Dr. Turner will approve this?” followed by a period of intense work to meet his high standards. Students clearly benefit from his critical perspective and numerous suggestions concerning their projects.

Turner’s academic interests span from analysis of classic Marx Brothers’ films to the origin of International Talk Like a Pirate Day, resulting in several conference presentations and publications.

Turner also spent time in Brazil prior to his academic career. This has enabled him to use his experiences abroad in his Brazilian Arts and Culture classes. He has been able to bring Brazilian culture to campus through guests like noted Brazilian poet Salgado Maranhão. His experience has helped get students excited about international travel through his work with the study abroad program.

Despite all his experience abroad, Turner is clearly committed to life here in Radford and to the students he teaches. His extensive knowledge of film and television, both here and abroad, give his students a unique perspective necessary for understanding and creating new media. The Turner legacy at Radford is strengthened by his current teaching and research, and in a few years, his 9-year-old twin daughters, Alexis and Mercy, and 6-year-old Adalynn may be part of the next generation of Turners to be part of the RU family.

On Jan. 14, Radford University School of Communication student Brandon Keith Brinkley, 28, passed away after a battle with cancer. Brinkley was originally diagnosed with stage four testicular cancer in 2006, and had been fighting hard to keep up with his disease, family and school.

In Memoriam: Brandon Brinkley

Brinkley studied journalism and had been working on his media studies degree for about 10 years. He left behind wife Lindsay, and a young son, Tristan. He was married to his wife on Sept. 9, 2009, and his son was born a few months later.

Whim wrote more more about this exceptional student. Read it here.
From Average Student to Driven Academic

French: Radford is a place where the ‘average’ student can become exceptional

Dr. Sandy French is the kind of professor who creates deep connections with her students, and it shows. The walls of her office are lined with pictures of students and even a plaque from one of her Leadership classes, which she received during a standing ovation.

She has been nominated for numerous teaching awards and has won quite a few of them. However, it is clearly the personal relationships made during her teaching that mean the most to her as she explains that she has kept every email and letter sent to her by those students she has affected.

She has long had an interest in the field of communication, going back to her days in high school where she competed in Maryland state forensics championships for persuasive speeches and dramatic interpretation. She knew she wanted to major in communication and found the perfect home at Radford.

Little did she know she would later return as a professor. Between her undergraduate days at Radford and her current role as a newly tenured associate professor in the School of Communication, French received a master’s in speech communication from Wake Forest, developed her professional skills in the business world, and earned a Ph.D. in communication arts and sciences from Penn State.

French’s research is in organizational behavior and leadership. A current study she is working on with a graduate student concerns the idea that introverts might make better leaders than extroverts. Her research has led to numerous conference presentations and publications in Business Communication Quarterly and the Southern Journal of Communication.

Despite such success in her research pursuits, French continually finds her focus shifting back to the “higher calling” of teaching. She attributes her teaching interest to her undergraduate education at Radford, where she was transformed from an average student to a driven academic by the quality instruction she received.

It is clear that French has had quite an influence on her students, but her academic life doesn’t stop at RU. Bringing her love of knowledge home, her two children, Soren, 9, and Phillip Hunter, 8, demonstrate a “voracious” appetite for knowledge.

Her Radford students are lucky to have a professor who works as hard to motivate and inspire as French does. She sums up her confidence and dedication to the Radford Community best in her teaching statement, “Radford is a place where the exceptional student can excel, and the ‘average’ student can become exceptional.”

A Taste of Student Media

Radford University has seven student media organizations, giving students ample opportunities to get involved.

The Beehive is the student-run yearbook that is the oldest publication on campus. It started in 1914 as The Radnor. This year it switched to a magazine format.

Exit 109, published every spring, is a student-run literary and arts magazine.

ROC TV is an acronym for Radford on Camera. It is a weekly broadcast on the University’s Reslife channel. The broadcast features a variety of genres including comedy, news, talk shows and short documentaries.

SMADs stands for Student Media Advertising Group, which was created in 2001. The objective of this organization is to provide advertising sales and design services for all student media organizations.

Whim is Radford’s student-run online magazine. Updated weekly, Whim focuses on opinion articles along with investigations on a broad range of topics that affect the 21st century student.

The Tartan is a weekly newspaper run by the students on campus. The paper is distributed 22 times a year and once during the summer.

Radio Free Radford is the Internet radio station for Radford University. The student-run organization has positions available both on and off-air and no experience is necessary.
Meet Our Students

Hard Work Leads to Scholarly Success

Hunter Thompson has managed to accomplish a great deal since he graduated from high school in 2003. School has always been a main priority, but it was put on hold when Hunter made the decision to join the military. He served in the United States Army for six full years.

He struggled to manage military life and attend school at the same time, so he made the decision to go back to school full time and major in media studies. He will be graduating from Radford University in spring 2013 with a long list of accomplishments.

With an interest in marketing, social media and design, Hunter volunteered to be president of Radford’s Advertising Club. Hunter puts a lot of time and effort into all that he does, spending a lot of time traveling and going to American Advertising Federation conferences and speaker events. He also completed an internship this spring with an interactive ad agency based in Roanoke.

While he enjoys this all, it is hard for him to find spare time to relax. But when he does find a free moment he enjoys spending time outdoors or with his friends.

— K.W.

Loving What You Do

Paige Quesenberry’s pursuit of higher education has certainly not lacked diversity. The Radford University junior is now at her fourth school in four years, following a transfer from Old Dominion University.

Originally from Maryland, the 21-year-old moved to Wythe County when she was just 6 years old. She went on to graduate from Fort Chiswell High School, where she excelled in basketball and was offered a scholarship to continue her athletic career at Bridgewater College.

Unfortunately, she suffered a serious knee injury that ended her basketball career when she was just a freshman. Without basketball, Quesenberry decided that she did not want to return to Bridgewater and enrolled at Wytheville Community College.

From there, she transferred to Old Dominion University, where she soon became homesick. This prompted her transfer to Radford University, where it seems she has finally found the right college for her. “I wanted to be closer to home, my friends are here, and I feel much safer on-campus,” she said.

Quesenberry is pursuing a degree in public relations. “I’ve always loved to write, talk, and plan things, and public relations is all about having that social relationship with people. I love meeting new faces and receiving and passing new ideas to others.”

She’s still undecided on whether she will attend graduate school or look for a career. However, she will be picking up valuable work experience during an internship with the advertising department at the University of Miami this coming summer.

— A.W.

Senior Hopes to Make His Mark in Ad Industry

Matt Williams is fun-loving and adventurous. He’s the guy who wants to go out and do something. “I don’t wanna say I’m the leader,” he says, but the 21-year-old advertising major is always the one thinking of something to do in his group of friends. He’s a friendly guy who loves to smile.

His motto is simple, but effective: “Stay positive.”

Growing up in Virginia Beach, Matt attended Kempsville High School. There he played soccer and volleyball. He’s maintained an active lifestyle and enjoys skateboarding and traveling.

Some people might be surprised to know that he also has a softer side. Matt enjoys gardening and writing poetry. His creative side is made clear by his aspirations. When asked what he wants to end up doing he simply says, “Something creative.” He goes on to say he might want to do creative advertising or art direction somewhere like North Carolina. For now he hopes to get an internship back in Virginia Beach or Denver after he graduates.

When asked what he would be doing if he weren’t in advertising Matt laughs and says, “Probably making pizza.”

When in it comes to what he wants in life, Matt has a clear picture. “I want it all,” he says. “Big house, white picket fence, … married to my girlfriend.”

— M.C.

Mastering New Skills

Junior Kirsten Thieman loves advertising almost as much dancing and enjoying a nice Mexican meal. This Virginia Beach native knew instantly when she came to Radford that she wanted to study advertising.

In addition to dancing and swimming in the river, she thoroughly enjoys listening to indie music. Working at the Comfort Inn she has dealt with customers and realized that she has different plans for her future. But it was that experience that got her foot in the door at Modea, a Blacksburg, Va.-based digital agency, where she began working part-time booking travel for the agency’s executives.

Before attending Radford University she attended Kellem High School in Virginia Beach, where she excelled in graphic design. During her high school days Kirsten was very big into dance. “There wasn’t a day when I wasn’t in the studio,” she says.

Now she is pursuing her dream of owning her own advertising firm.

— K.S.
Election News from the Microblogosphere
Radford University journalism students reported on the 2012 presidential elections in real time in November as they took their reporting skills to local polling places.
Many were assigned to live blog using Twitter, Qik and the cameras on their cell phones by joining the conversation on The Roanoke Times’ #SWVAnotes feed. They commented on the wait at the polls, and shared images and real-time video.

Communication Students Take Stage at Conference
On Oct. 26, Instructor Betty Kennan traveled with 12 communication majors to Liberty University in Lynchburg to participate in the Virginia Association of Communication in the Arts & Sciences conference. Kennan chaired and students were panelists for two one-hour presentations.

Morgan Barksdale, Kaitlyn Hermann, Amanda Smith, Amanda Daniels and Britt Taylor were in “Perceiving Others: Tendencies, Influences, Stereotyping and Language Abstraction.” Bailey Jennings, Reba Miller, Gabrielle Pidal, Robert Lambert, Jamie Keen, Katelynn Jones and Alex Garcia were in “Relationships Maintenance in Face-to-face Interaction and Through Social Media: Freindships, Romance and Family.”

Ad Students Learn from Pros at D.C. Conference
Radford University advertising students have fresh perspectives on their chosen careers thanks to the professional insight they received at the annual American Advertising Federation (AAF) Student Conference.
Two keynote speakers — Carter Murray, CEO of Y&R North America, and Daniel Maree, from McCann New York — inspired students to start working as advertisers today. Murray’s message to the students, who came from as far as Australia to hear him speak, was this: “Be a radiator, and do something.”

COMS Faculty Support Campus Free Speech
Professor Bill Kovarik taught a new class, “First Amendment and Higher Education,” in Spring 2013. The class was a response to concerns about issues such as prior approval requirements for posters, control of off-campus signs for fraternities and sororities, and limited “free speech zones.” In November 2012, Radford was given a “yellow light” rating by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education.

The class explored First Amendment history and free speech issues at universities globally. The class worked on producing an e-book, helped protests against prior restraint on campus, and presented their work during the undergraduate research forums.
Kovarik also has been working with the university’s Intellectual Property Committee to ensure that faculty rights are protected, especially with distance education courses. “If universities want faculty to help develop distance education, it has to be a two-way street,” he said.

Photographer Earns Notice
Lora Gordon, Radford University photographer and an adjunct instructor in the School of Communication, has an article published in the Fall 2012 issue of The Contact Sheet, the Journal of the University Photographer’s Association of America. “Journal Entry No. 51: The 2012 Miami Symposium” summarized Gordon’s professional pilgrimage to the annual meeting of the UPAA.
Gordon also has been named the association’s print judging chair for 2013.

Ad Students Pull All-Nighter for a Cause
Advertising and graphic design students joined the American Advertising Federation Roanoke chapter in September for a 24-hour marketing and public service campaign known as Createathon.
The event began at 10 a.m. on a Saturday, when about 40 volunteers offered their creative services to benefit nonprofits. Projects included radio spots, video spots, brochures, direct mail pieces, posters, web design, mobile site design and social media strategy and execution. Eight Radford students joined in the work-around-the-clock creative blitz on to help community organizations that had applied for help solving their marketing communication needs.
The American Advertising Federation, Roanoke Chapter, is a professional organization devoted entirely to the business of advertising.
Students attended recording sessions and photo shoots, wrote copy and helped with strategy and design. Their work was included in a presentation to clients at 9 a.m. Sunday.
“We got a chance to see the entire creative process step by step and work with professionals who do for a living what we’re studying in class,” said Hunter Thompson, an advertising major who is also president of the Radford Ad Club. “We got to contribute to a creative campaign that will impact nonprofits.”

Hunter Thompson (’13), left, and Anna Henderson (’14), represented Radford at the Createathon.