Communication Studies students share work at RIT Undergraduate Research Conference

By Lauren Palmieri

In what has become a spring semester tradition in the Communication Studies Department, a group of students and faculty traveled recently to the Rochester Institute of Technology for the 2012 Communications Undergraduate Research Conference.

The annual event held at RIT gives undergraduate students a chance to share their research with individuals outside of their own institution.

This year’s group consisted of mostly seniors, though a few juniors and sophomores also attended. Projects included research completed in courses such as, Media Theory, Research Methods, Senior Seminar, as well as some seniors honors theses.

CMS professors Mark Barner, Kalen Churcher, Brian Murphy and Doug Tewksbury accompanied the students on the trip. After three or four years of guiding the students through the world of communications, the professors got to sit back and observe as students set out to share all the skills and knowledge attained.

The 12-hour day began with a quick trip to Dunkin’ Donuts for coffee before the gang hit the road and arrived at RIT just in time to set up posters to present to conference attendees.

The majority of participants presented posters outlining the details of their research projects; however, senior Amy Young and sophomore Scott Reilly opted to provide oral presentations in a panel setting.

Once the first shift of presentations was over, the group enjoyed lunch, and former NU student and current RIT graduate student, Rianne Farrugia, met the group for a tour of the campus. Farrugia also showed the group RIT’s sports television production, SportsZone, where she is currently the associate producer.

After lunch and the tour, it was time for another round of presentations.

(Continued on page 2)
Junior Molli Zahm and senior Lauren Merrick won top poster awards for their individual research projects. Zahm appreciated the experience as she prepares to enter her senior year. “Being a junior about to be required to do research of my own very soon, I was very fortunate to be able to go and see what other students have done before me, and what kind of research is out there,” Zahm said. “I think it will help me decide on a realistic topic for next semester – something on which I will be able to gather significant research and draw conclusions.”

After all the awards were given, the conference came to a close and before heading back to NU the group shared dinner at a local restaurant. The post-conference dinner has become another annual tradition, and the professors and their students shared stories and reminisced on the years they have spent together. “I really enjoyed being with a good group of the communications department, students and faculty, and being able to learn more about each other,” Zahm said. “It was a long day but I really learned a lot and was given a lot to think about.”

Churcher, who served as the adviser for many of the graduating seniors, described the day as bittersweet. “It’s great to see how far the students have come in four years,” she explained. “I remember some of them as nervous freshmen, and now they’re confident young adults. I’m thrilled to see them move on into their careers, but it’s still a bit sad to see them go. “It won’t be the same in the fall.”

**Lauren Palmieri is a member of the Class of 2012. She will attend RIT for graduate school. Additional photos Page 11.

Intrigue abounds in the CMS Department

By Anna Kate Beigel

What department can say that all of its professors made it onto Niagara University’s ‘Random: The 20 Most Intriguing Professors on Campus’ magazine list? The Communication Studies Department can.

NU students nominated the winners on this list and the magazine was put together by the staff of The Index, Niagara’s campus newspaper.

The intriguing CMS quartet includes of Doug Tewksbury, Kalen Churcher, Mark Barner, and the number one spot holder, Brian M. Murphy, chair of the department.

“I am honored. I think all of us are,” Murphy said. “We have all talked to one another, all 20 (intriguing professors). It is a very sweet thing that the students did; it is nice.”

Murphy’s article tells of his world traveling and adventures. He has worked in the European journalism world and has lived in South Africa.

After all the excitement, Murphy enjoys his time at NU and getting his students to have as much fun as he does. Tewksbury, an assistant professor of communication studies, made the list with his skills on the keyboard and guitar.

And also because he is an awesome teacher. Tewksbury delights in seeing his students grow intellectually, and he enjoys the chance to grow himself when talking with and learning from other professors.

Churcher also an assistant professor, might have made the list because she has spent time in prison. No, not because she was a criminal; she was there to study inmate-produced media for her research. Using this experience and her previous experience as a crime and courts journalist, Churcher offers real-life experiences in her classes, including Mass Communications Law and Politics in the Media.

No joke – Barner, an associate professor, made the list in part because of his humor and wit. Barner is a connoisseur of video production and it shows when teaching his production classes. He is also an avid consumer of sci-fi movies.

With his unique interests and humor, Barner makes the list without a question. “I think they are all great professors,” said Lauren Merrick, editor of The Index. “It was one of the main reasons I choose communications as my major, because I thought that I could really learn from them.”
Hoping for the last laugh: Senior takes comedy to a new (learning) level

By Robert Crates

One could say that Alex DiVirgilio, a senior communication studies major, has multiple personalities.

In addition to being a university honors student, DiVirgilio is involved with improv comedy, and is a part of the Buffalo ComedySportz squad.

Every time he hits the stage to perform a show for a new crowd, he must come up with new characters right on the spot and create dialogue with action like it was written for him. Yet, this does not pose a challenge.

“With improv, it’s always new, it’s always different,” DiVirgilio said. “It’s very fresh and in the moment. It keeps me on top of things.”

That very statement influences his classwork and his very essence of being a communication studies major.

“I need to stay on top of trends; I need to know the big thing of the week, or what’s going on in the media. I have to know mostly everything that an audience can throw at me,” he explained.

This is where his communication studies education comes into play, as he is exposed to media – all types – every day.

DiVirgilio has event taken his improv experience to another level with his education. For his senior thesis, he is focusing on the improv community.

“Improv is a (medium) often over looked. It (improv) basically births the comedy we consume today.”

For DiVirgilio, it all started when he took a class trip in the 11th grade to Chicago. While there, he saw the Chicago ComedySportz troop and he was instantly hooked. He waited until the end of his senior year of high school until he auditioned, but right away he made the Buffalo ComedySportz troop.

This is not some fleeting activity for DiVirgilio, though. Instead, he has made it an important part of his life.

Recently, he has started assistant teaching improv classes in Buffalo. However, he wants to take it a step further and create a high school improv league.

“I believe by creating a high school improv league it will help boost the student’s confidence and any fear they have towards public speaking,” DiVirgilio said.

In fact, just that has happened for Divirgilio and more, just because of his experiences with improv.

For DiVirgilio, improv has given him a leg up on the competition within the communication studies field, he believes, because his “person skills and patience,” have been boosted by the constant interaction with others due to improv.

“It has caused me to be flexible, with any situation; I’m rarely caught off guard now. Without a doubt, that’s an added plus in the ‘real world,’” he said.

On the other side, though, the ComedySportz troop has taken advantage of his communication studies background and put it to good use.

For his troop, DiVirgilio basically handles all the social media aspects, whether it’s a Facebook posting or a Twitter posting.

So, his education has aided his troop and with they are trying to accomplish.

The main aspect that has fueled his education and experience in the communications field is a heightened sense of people and that type of interaction with others that people rarely get to experience.

“I’ve picked up on a lot of non-verbal communication now. I can read body language really well.

“Not only is that important in improv, but when it comes to an interview for a job or for an assignment, I can read what a person is hesitant on saying or thinking.”

Don’t miss Alex DiVirgilio and his comedic ways.

Check out http://buffalocsz.com/ to find out the next time Alex, or the whole ComedySportz troop, will take the stage.

“(Improv) has caused me to be flexible, with any situation; I’m rarely caught off guard now. Without a doubt, that’s an added plus in the ‘real world.”

~Alex DiVirgilio

Submitted Photo

Alex DiVirgilio, second from left (in blue), poses with Buffalo ComedySports.
CMS Students Travel the World...and Study, Too

By Lauren Palmieri

If you had the opportunity to study in a foreign county of your choice would you take it? Hundreds of students each year study abroad and find themselves away home, and far from the familiar. They may know a country’s history or language, but until they are submerged in its culture they don’t know what it is like to live there.

Communication studies students study abroad on a regular basis, spending time in countries from Spain to England.

Lauren Merrick, Shawna Cordon and Luke Lorenzetti, all seniors, are just a few of the students who crossed the pond for the chance to continue their education while taking in the sites of some of the most breath-taking and beautiful places most people only dream of seeing.

“Why not study in your version of paradise for a semester?” said Merrick when asked why she decided to make the trip overseas. “I have always loved Europe, I had already been all over Italy and France and I couldn’t wait to go back.”

Merrick selected “Discover the World: Europe,” which according to NU’s Study Abroad Coordinator, Bernadette Brennen, is one of the university’s most popular study abroad options.

The program offers students the opportunity to study in Rome and Paris with a choice of a third city in either, Dublin, Ireland or Salamanca, Spain.

Merrick chose to fulfill her general education requirements while abroad, with her favorite course being Art History of Rome. After researching a historical Roman artifact, Merrick and her classmates were asked to become tour guides to the site.

What better way to learn about something than seeing it up close?

Cordon spent the spring semester of her junior year in Sevilla, Spain. She was able to work on her Spanish and take courses related to the culture, including a dance course based on the quintessential Spanish dance, Flamenco.

Cordon immersed herself in the culture immediately, stating that, “It is such a huge culture shock at first, but once you begin to interact with the culture and people, you don’t want to leave.”

Lorenzetti took a different approach to the study abroad experience interning in the summer for an independent movie production house called Film and Music Entertainment in London, England.

During his internship, Lorenzetti learned firsthand how independent films are made, while lending his hand at various parts of the process including budgeting for films, helping with casting interviews, reading scripts, and other various intern duties.

“It’s an exhilarating feeling when you realize you’re out on your own in one the biggest cities in the world, working in a field you love, on your own, and in the prime of your life,” Lorenzetti said of the experience.

All three students revealed how valuable studying abroad can be. As if they were mimicking each other, Merrick, Cordon and Lorenzetti each could not stress enough how life changing their time abroad had been.

“It was too short and I didn’t want to come home,” Merrick said.

“It was a life-changing, one-time opportunity everyone should take part in,” Cordon continued.

“I would demand it,” Lorenzetti said.

One student who could not wait to join the study abroad club is sophomore, Nick Solly,* who, at the time this interview was conducted, was planning to travel across the Pacific to reach his ideal destination of Gold Coast, Australia.

Solly plans to take four courses, three in film and television and one in philosophy at Bond University. Hoping to further his knowledge of film and the film industry, Solly said he also wants to expand his horizons.

“In addition to studying I also am extremely excited to explore another part of the world and experience what it has to offer, it is an opportunity of a life time and it has been my dream for awhile,” Solly said.

Brennen is no stranger to travel either, and hopes to share the same excitement and passion for international expeditions with many students to come.

“Students will come back and say ‘it was the best time of my life,” she said.

The benefits of studying abroad are endless, Brennen continued. She also emphasized how much of an investment it can be in your career.

“There are times when students need to reach a level of maturity,” Brennen said. “When they return they say, ‘I can do things I never thought before’.”

Merrick, Cordon and Lorenzetti would likely agree.

*Solly is currently studying in Australia.

For more information on studying abroad contact Bernadette Brennen or visit the webpage at www.niagara.edu/sap.
Shawna Cordon (right) flamenco dancing.

Studying Abroad

Lauren Merrick presenting a project in Rome about the Four Rivers Fountain in Piazza.


Shawna Cordon (right) flamenco dancing.
Niagara University
Undergraduate
Research Conference

Senior Anna Hoffmann presents her honors thesis: a video on the past, present, and future of Niagara Falls.

(Above): Communication Studies students research everything from masculinity, to media consumption to social media in the broadcast industry. (Top): Senior Hannah Hedrick discusses her senior seminar project on March Madness and sideline reporters.

(Above): Lauren Merrick, right, explains her research poster to a conference attendee. Merrick’s poster was part of her honors thesis examining the social construction of gender on BusinessWeek magazine covers.

(Above): Communication Studies students research everything from masculinity, to media consumption to social media in the broadcast industry. (Top): Senior Hannah Hedrick discusses her senior seminar project on March Madness and sideline reporters.
(Above): Brett Baldeck researched social media and their effect on broadcast media as his senior seminar project.

(Left): Casey Byam answers questions on her poster Gender Construction in Top Disney and Drama-Based Films.

(Right): Tyler Russell reads through a classmate’s poster at Niagara University’s Undergraduate Research Conference. Russell’s project critiqued and theorized masculinity in the film Fight Club.

(Left): Lauren Palmieri, left, and Kaitlyn Bayne, take a break from the conference for a brief chat. Palmieri studied the international media coverage of the Amanda Knox trial, and Bayne conducted a cross-cultural comparison of audience enjoyment of film adaptations of literary works.

(Above): Brett Baldeck researched social media and their effect on broadcast media as his senior seminar project.

(Left): Casey Byam answers questions on her poster Gender Construction in Top Disney and Drama-Based Films.
Students and faculty of Niagara University were able to rock and raise money for the African state of Somalia during a student-initiated, on-campus concert, “Sing for Somalia.”

With a $5 cover at the door, great music, raffle tickets and a variety of food being served, the student-run concert was the perfect project to get the members of the Niagara community out to enjoy live music while donating to a good cause.

“I like it,” said Nicholas Angelicola. “I think it’s a great atmosphere. People need to give it a chance. I think if they came they’d enjoy it.”

The event, organized by Niagara University junior, Jeannine Alsous, had a solid 150-200 people at any given time.

Alsous hopes to eventually work in public relations for a non-profit agency. Until then, she keeps busy through her involvement in a number of on-campus organizations, including student government.

With so many worthy organizations and causes, why the emphasis on Somalia?

Last year, Abdiweli Ali, a Niagara University professor in the College of Business, accepted the position of Prime Minister of Somalia. Since then, Niagara University has supported “Mission Somalia,” with funds going to Oxfam.

Oxfam America, according to its website, is a “relief and development organization that creates lasting solutions to poverty, hunger, and injustice.”

Alsous thought the concert would be a perfect way to raise money and awareness.

Acts ranged from NU students to more well-known performers like Turquoise Jeep. The large number of acts allowed there to be something for everyone.

“It’s a really fun event and for a great cause,” said Billy McKnight, one of the student performers. “Even though I’m a senior this year, if I could, I would definitely come back next year.”

Kenny Cooper, another concert enthusiast, named McKnight as his favorite act. McKnight covered three songs (including fan-favorite “Wonderwall”) and one of his own songs.

“Billy performed extremely well; he was so confident while on stage,” Cooper said. “It’s a great event and it’s always good to come and support a friend.

“Plus the atmosphere is just awesome.”

The exact amount of money raised was unavailable at the time this story was written, although Alsous anticipates donating several thousand dollars to Oxfam.

To make a donation for “Mission: Somalia,” go to www.oxfamamerica.org/SomaliaRelief.

Outstanding students recognized in honor society induction

Eleven students were inducted into the Communication Studies Honor Society, Lambda Pi Eta, on April 28. To be eligible for induction, students must have a major- and overall - grade point average of at least a 3.5, and have earned at least 60 credits at Niagara University, with 12 of those credits being in communication studies. From left, are Jeannine Alsous, Vince Schiano, Kaitlyn Bayne, Molliann Zahm, Julie Hunt, Alicia Wainwright and Alex DiVirgilio. Absent from photo, are Kerisa Bonville, Stacey Czerwinski, Sean Farber and Amanda Galster.

Photo by Anna Hoffmann
Economy remains rough, but post-grad job outlook cautiously optimistic

By Robert Crates

Each year, a survey is completed by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, highlighting the job market and post-college life for graduates in these fields. The most recent survey was completed and sent out in late-2011.

The report review showed that graduates from the class of 2010 were more likely to have at least one job offer post-graduation than the class of 2009. In addition, the graduates were more likely, when compared to 2009 graduates, to have a job within their communication field.

The median salary for the graduates stayed the same over the past two years, at approximately $30,000.

“I never really thought about what the salary would be when I would graduate. I’m glad I know now, yet it wouldn’t change my mind on becoming a communication studies student; I’ve wanted to do this since high school,” sophomore Taylor LoGalbo said.

“Students need to take advantage of any learning opportunity that they can. That means working hard in classes and applying for internships...maybe even two.”

~Dr. Kalen Churcher

The aforementioned information applies only to graduates with bachelor degrees, though. Those with masters degrees have a bit higher probability of full-time employment status, yet that also has slowly decreased.

With competition for jobs so great, what can a student do to have “an edge” over someone else?

“Students need to take advantage of any learning opportunity that they can,” Churcher explained. “That means working hard in classes and applying for internships...maybe even two.

“Dr. (Brian) Murphy always says that ‘no internship means no job,’ and he’s right. Internships provide the opportunity to put into action everything that students have learned in the classroom.

Employment improvement has occurred in various telecommunications areas; public relations and advertising also have held their own.

“No matter what the job market is/was like, or the salary, I still want to work in public relations or advertising.” Logalbo continued. “It’s been the plan since high school, and nothing will change that.”

Also included in the report was how graduates network for jobs. Eight out of 10 grads use the web when job hunting and more than half use social networking sites to search for employment.

Seniors in Churcher’s and Doug Tewksbury’s senior seminar course were introduced to some of these sites at the beginning of the year. Seniors created Linked In profiles and electronic portfolios either on that site or some other, like Vimeo.

Electronic portfolios are helpful to prospective employers who might want to view samples of potential employees’ work.

Ultimately, the job market in 2010 was better than in 2009. Information on the 2011 market will be available later this year. However, the job economy is tough for all majors – not just for communication studies graduates.

“What excites me is that our graduates have been getting, and continue to get, jobs,” Churcher said. “I can think of at least three students graduating in May (2012) who have already secured excellent full-time jobs for after graduation. That’s fantastic.”

Current Niagara University students realize the job market likely will still be in rough shape when they graduate, but they are confident that their communication studies degree will work for them.

“Whatever happens, I’m still optimistic about the future and finding a job,” said sophomore Amanda Hurst. “Everyone will have trouble...getting out of school to find a job.”

Students are encouraged to visit the Niagara’s office of Career Services with all questions related to the job hunting (or the internship) process. Career services offers a variety of workshops throughout the year, including networking, etiquette and interviewing. Check them out at http://www.niagara.edu/career/.

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Interested in writing for the CMS Review?

We are currently looking for students interested in writing for Fall 2012 for our monthly newsletter. Students from all years (including freshmen) may apply. Candidates should have some writing experience or the willingness to learn.

Please contact Dr. Kalen Churcher at kchurcher@niagara.edu if you are interested.

We are also looking for student photographers to contribute to the newsletter. Email Dr. Churcher if you are interested.
It’s crunch time for the seniors of Niagara University’s Communication Studies department. With graduation right around the corner for many, senior seminar is the last obstacle in the quest for a college degree. The course is designed to test the student’s knowledge and skill of media and communications, combining all parts of the major into one project.

“It’s not an easy project – research never is,” said Doug Tewksbury, assistant professor of communication studies and one of the two instructors for the course. “But it’s incredibly rewarding to see the way in which students grow from not knowing what a research method is to developing, conducting, and writing an original project on their own.”

Senior Seminar projects, for most students, begin in the fall with Research Methods, a course made to teach the basics of designing and conducting research. However, once spring rolls around, it is time to get down to business. Seniors Derek Zeller, Alyssa Erikson and Amy Young have each constructed widely different projects tailored to their interests and skills.

The advantage of being a CMS major is the ability of many students to get creative with their studies, which is evident in both the topics themselves and their presentation.

As Erikson explains her reasons for choosing this topic, she demonstrates the benefits of this type of research project. Students can create awareness with their projects, by adding to previous studies or creating original research.

“When I chose to do this topic after realizing the scrutiny the media puts transgendered people through,” Erikson said. “I feel as if there were more credible articles as opposed to (biased) print media, people at least have the option to find proper information.”

As Erikson explains her reasons for choosing this topic, she demonstrates the benefits of this type of research project. Students can create awareness with their projects, by adding to previous studies or creating original research.

Once the topic is decided, it is up to the student’s discretion on how to present their findings. Several Senior Seminar students chose to create films that combine their knowledge of media theory and research with the technical aspects of the major.

Zeller, who considers himself a movie buff, is using his love of film to his advantage by creating one of his own.

“When I love coming up with different ideas to include in the film,” Zeller said. “In the end I will be more than pleased with the outcome of my film.”

When it comes time to present, students have a number of options to share their findings. One option is to present at an undergraduate research conference held at The Rochester Institute of Technology (see story on Page 1).

Young chose to present her project at the RIT conference as she believes it will be a great platform to show off her hard work.

“I’ve put a lot of time and effort into this project and wanted to show it off in some way. The RIT undergraduate research conference is a great way for upperclassman to display their hard work,” she said. “It will not only give me a sense of satisfaction, but also will be a great closure to my education at Niagara.”

In addition to RIT, students have the option to present at the Niagara University undergraduate research conference, in which they can present their study to their campus community while also adding that extra element to their resume.

Some students may groan about the work involved with Senior Seminar, but Tewksbury believes most are satisfied with what they accomplished at the course’s completion.

“The thing that I love most about teaching Senior Seminar is getting to experience the pride that students take in tackling a quite difficult project that is their own,” Tewksbury said.

“Students develop their project, themselves – the topic, the method, the approach, the texts or people they want to research.”

Amy Young fields questions at the RIT Undergraduate Communications Research Conference.

Congratulations
Class of 2012!
Have a fantastic summer.
~Mark Barner, Kalen Churcher, Brian Murphy and Doug Tewksbury~
Students excel at Niagara University and RIT undergraduate research conferences

(Right): From left, Lauren Palmieri, Amy Young and Tiffany Hyman take a break from the RIT Conference to enjoy a few senior-year photos.

(Left): Lauren Palmieri poses with her research poster at Niagara University’s Undergraduate Research Conference.

(Right): Matt Riley and Lauren Merrick discuss Riley’s honor’s thesis research poster that illustrates how marijuana challenges heteronormative powers in film.
A Tampa Bay Buccaneers fan, a Star Wars lover, and an avid tennis player all make up the SPK 201: Oral Interpretation’s professor, Brother Martin F. Schneider.

What is Oral Interpretation, one might ask? It is a class under the Communication Studies Department that teaches students to feel more comfortable and more aware when giving a presentation, interview, or just talking to someone. “I call it a very unique class,” Schneider said. “It’s different than normal other classes because it is kind of like a bonding experience amongst the students.”

Schneider relates a story a former student told him; she was walking around campus and came upon one of her former classmates from SPK 201 and they didn’t just walk past each other but actually stopped and caught up on each other’s lives.

Schneider also prides himself on the fact that this class does not require a textbook; instead, different media outlets (magazines, newspapers, etc.) are the textbook. There are five or six presentations throughout the semester including a descriptive, narrative, dramatic, personal, and a ‘pick what every you want’ presentation.

“I call it a very unique class,” Schneider said. “It’s different than normal other classes because it is kind of a like a bonding experience amongst the students.”

-Schneider said. “The student speaks and interprets the piece in whatever way they think it should be interpreted.”

Now, there is no reason to be afraid of this class. First, Schneider would like the students to know that you do not have to take SPK 101: Public Speaking to take SPK 201. In addition, freshman can take 201 as well. It is a class for all levels and majors.

“Once you get out of Niagara, you have to be able to talk to people,” Schneider said.

Schneider was ‘missioned’ to NU in 1972 by the Vincentian Order. He studied at NU and finished his master’s degree at the University of London in England in the early ‘80s.

When asked if he likes NU, Schneider answer was not terribly shocking. “Of course, but I don’t like the weather. We lived in Florida,” he said. “I like the heat.”

Schneider said he grew up in New York, but his family moved to Florida and is still there.

Throughout his NU career, Schneider has worked in several different positions. He worked in Student Activities for five years, taught freshman English for 15 years, but has always worked in the Theater department. He also is a coordinator for the undergraduate commencement at NU and a coordinator for the Canadian Educational commencement.

One of Schneider’s favorite things to do is play tennis. Up until about five to six years ago, Schneider would be on the tennis courts everyday. The tennis coach would even have to kick him off for the tennis team practices.

“What I should have said was ‘Put me on the team!’”

Though he is not on the tennis team, Brother Martin is one of the playmakers for NU’s teaching team.