CMS 120: Service Learning with a Purpose and Lesson

By Anna Hoffmann

CMS 120, or Media Writing, is a unique course in the Communication Studies curriculum. It is an intro-level course that teaches students the basics of writing for various media, but it is also the Communication Studies’ Learn and Serve course.

Students are required to complete 20 hours of community service during the course of the semester, and each student must arrange for a placement in a local agency that addresses and works to combat some sort of social injustice. Students receive placements that range from Head Start programs to the Domestic Violence Unit of the Niagara Falls Police and the refugee hostel Journey’s End. Then, while they do their service work, they build their journalistic experience by writing feature articles about their observations and experiences.

“I really like that we are required to do this. It’s a challenge where I’m learning a lot.”
~Sean Farber
Volunteering at the Boys & Girls Club of Niagara Falls

The service learning aspect serves another very important function as part of this Media Writing course: it challenges students to step out of their comfort zones and stay on their toes, both important skills in journalistic reporting. “The experience for them is so much more than just volunteering somewhere. They’re learning to cope with unexpected situations with people and environments they would never ever be in contact with otherwise,” Murphy argues. “And that’s going to prepare them to be... broadly, a better strategic thinker in any kind of job.”

Murphy’s students are already seeing the value of combining service work into Media Writing. “I really like that we are required to this. It is a challenge where I’m learning a lot,” says Sean Farber, who is completing

Dr. Brian Murphy, associate professor of Communication Studies, discusses the service learning component of his Media Writing course.

Photo by Anna Hoffmann
his 20 hours at the Boys and Girls Club in Niagara Falls. Emily Kaufman, who is also volunteering there, adds, “If I become a writer or professor, having the opportunity to work with various types of people with a background different than my own will give me a greater perspective on people and the lives they lead.”

Murphy has gotten a wide variety of feedback on the course over the years. He claims that a minority of students say the class is a complete waste of time, while another minority on the opposite end of the spectrum continues to volunteer at their placements even after the semester is over. Overall, Murphy believes the course successfully achieves its goals.

Murphy claims that the task of teaching CMS120 is not an easy one. He spends the first three to four weeks getting his students to un-learn the essay-writing techniques that were drilled into their heads year after year in high school, and then he must re-teach the students how to write information in short, concise and interesting ways for television, newspapers, magazines and other media.

Murphy says that teaching students how to write for media and immersing them in their community service is a rewarding experience, but it also becomes very taxing as the years go by.

Murphy will be relinquishing his role as professor of CMS120, and Dr. Kalen Churcher will teach it this spring. The course may undergo some changes, but Murphy maintains that the Communication Studies Department will always build service learning into one required course in the curriculum and use it to help students build skills for their future careers.

Dr. Churcher agrees.

“Service learning is incredibly important to the department and to our commitment to educating students on social justice issues. Plus, the students typically have a great time helping the community.”

Since this issue is the last newsletter of the semester, I would like to personally thank all of the past contributing writers for the CMS Review. Without you, this newsletter would be a series of random pictures and empty textboxes!

I also want to remind all CMS majors and minors that submissions for the newsletter are always welcome—just email Dr. Churcher at kchurcher@niagara.edu with a story idea or a desire to write something.

With that said, have a happy holiday break everyone! I’ll be spending my time hanging out with my rambunctious 17-month-old niece, or curled up with a good book and some hot coffee.

See you next semester!

- Emily Kaufman, ’13
Mark the date to submit your Public Service Announcement(s)!

Niagara University is holding its fifth annual Media Awareness Day in late March, sponsored by the Communication Studies Department and Lambda Pi Eta, the department’s national honor society. High school and college students (both from NU and other schools) are invited to submit entries to the 2011 Media Awareness Student Video PSA Competition. The goal of creating a PSA is to promote media literacy. Media literacy refers to conveying awareness of the mass media issues. Examples could include the stereotyping of women in music videos, media violence in video games and hypersexualization in advertisements.

Dr. Mark Barner, Chair of the Communication Studies Department stressed why media awareness is so important.

“Most people underestimate the power that the mass media have in their lives,” Barner said. He also explained the department is trying to expand Media Awareness Day to three days rather than just one, adding that it is “significant” and “very valuable” to gain an understanding of the impact the media has in our everyday lives.

The competition is divided into two categories: high school and college level. PSA’s must either be 30 or 60 seconds in length. First place for each category wins $100 and the title of “The Winner” and second prize earns an honorable mention and $50. Last year’s winners, Raymond Potter and Franklin Moore expressed their excitement for winning the competition and first prize.

Potter and Moore chose to address the stereotypes of interracial relationships in society.

“We thought it would be a good idea to promote it to the public and it was great we had friends willing to help our cause by acting in the video,” Potter said.

“Winning felt great,” Moore added. “It should all our hard work and editing paid off, literally!”

Entries for the competition must be postmarked by March 11, 2011. For more information including entry forms, regulations or general questions, visit www.niagara.edu/communication or email barner@niagara.edu.

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**Editor’s Gift to Stressed Students**

*Take a break from studying and color!*
A Taste of College for Sweet Home Students

By Stacey Czerwinski

It’s obvious that college preparation is a top priority for the juniors and seniors of Sweet Home High School. A high number of students participate in the Niagara University Senior Term Enrichment (NUSTEP) Program’s offered elective, Communicating for Social Justice (CMS 100).

As Associate Director of the Niagara University Office of Continuing Education, Christine Schwartz says that through the NUSTEP Program, Niagara University works with selected high schools from the area to enable students to take NU courses while still studying at their normal high school. Since 2002 Niagara University has been in collaboration with Sweet Home, offering courses as college-level French, Spanish and Math.

In the fall of 2009, Sweet Home began offering the CMS 100 elective to its students.

At Niagara University, CMS 100 is a first year seminar for Communication Studies majors and minors. The course’s focal point lies in the connection between mass media and our society. Implementing the course into a high school setting required a substantial amount of effort from the administration of Sweet Home in order to ensure that the same ideals of the course are instilled into the classroom.

According to Dr. Mark Barner, Chair of the Communication Studies Department at Niagara University, before the course could be offered to Sweet Home students, faculty and staff from Sweet Home had to discuss with himself and Christine Schwartz what would be offered in the course. At these meetings the faculty reviewed the CMS course content and worked to propose a syllabus to ensure that there was, according to Sweet Home teacher and instructor of CMS 100 Lisa LaBrake, “an alignment” to what is found on campus.

As a result, Sweet Home’s CMS 100 is structured similarly to Niagara’s CMS 100 class. The course begins with a study of the foundations of communication and its vitality in our society today. Through the duration of the course, students attempt to analyze and understand the concepts of media in democracy, ethics, entertainment, journalism and advertising.

“For all students, it’s vital to know how the media influences them, especially those who are interested in media as a career,” Barner said.

Niagara also opens its campus to the students of this course in order to provide them with first hand newsroom experience. Barner works closely with the Sweet Home administration to show students how to create their own news shows and radio sweepers. For recent Sweet Home graduate Kari Moley, this interaction in the newsroom helped her better understand the effects media has on how society receives messages.

“It definitely made me aware of how the media can exploit things and controversial topics,” Moley said.

Students are also encouraged to sit in on and participate in one college level Communications class throughout the semester. This semester many of the 28 students active in CMS 100 visited Dr. Kalen Churcher’s CMS 363 course, Stereotyping in the Media, which further enhanced their experience.

After being educated in the variety of avenues that compose mass communications, many of the students who enroll in this program go on to become Communications, Marketing, or English Majors. This fact alone displays the positive affects it has on the students.
The benefits of taking a NUSTEP class are important to students looking to further their education after high school. NUSTEP allows high school students to receive college credit for their course while in the final years of secondary education. Many high school students who participate in the program go on to college as freshman with advanced standing. The program also generates a stronger understanding of what a college work load is like and also aids in the preparation of the students for the great demands of upper level coursework.

For Moley, now an Education Major at Niagara University, CMS 100 helped her to better develop a college work ethic that has proved to be handy in her first semester of college.

WISHING YOU A SAFE AND RESTFUL VACATION!

Have a great holiday break and a happy New Year!

- Communication Studies Department

For more information about NU’s Communication Studies Department, visit our Facebook group [Niagara University Department of Communication Studies] for event announcements and updates on our active students!
Whether black and white or in color, student photography work catches the attention of all who view it.
It all began with a discussion over a Craigslist scandal.

Two months later, that discussion evolved and transformed into a two-day event designed to educate Niagara University students on the issue of human trafficking and modern day slavery.

As part of Dr. Kalen Churcher’s Politics & Media course, students were required to design – and launch – a socio-political campaign on campus. The goal was to combine elements of public relations and campaigning with politics and media.

“This was the first time I taught the politics course at NU in this fashion,” said Churcher, an assistant professor of Communication Studies. “My hope was to give students some ‘hands on’ experience as to what it’s like to conduct a political campaign.

“The students chose more of a social-political event, which was fine. They really seemed to get into the project. They handled everything from organizing the food to contacting potential panelists.”

Earlier this year, the media reported on people misusing the Craigslist website for sexual exploitation purposes. A week later a student from the class heard a local radio station, WKBW, talking about the issue of Human Trafficking and its relevance to the Niagara Falls Area. After much debate, the students decided to tackle the issue of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is the third largest criminal activity in the whole world bringing in millions of profit and revenue each year. Western New York is a prime location for human trafficking because of its numerous border crossings, urban centers, and transient populations. Patricia Calleri, a special agent with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, refers to Niagara Falls as a “hotspot”. Calleri was one of three panelists to speak with students. Additional panelists included Elizabeth McIntyre from the International Institute of Buffalo and Dr. Chris Lee, an assistant professor in Niagara University’s Political Science Department.

Calleri focused her speaking on the Department of Homeland Security’s role in combating human trafficking; McIntyre spoke on IIB’s role in helping local trafficking victims; and Lee discussed international human rights issues.

Approximately 50 students attended the panel discussion. On an earlier night, more than 70 students attended a viewing of the movie Taken, a fictitious, Hollywood dramatization of human trafficking. Both McIntyre and Calleri were quick to point out that trafficking is nothing like what is depicted in the movie. However, the movie did bring attention to a serious issue.

“I think a lot of people were surprised about what they learned from attending the event, said Chris Dugan, a junior history major. “I have been hearing a number of people talk about it since then.”

Students agreed that marketing the two-day event was crucial.

“One of the key aspects of our event was our advertising and promotions feature,” said Rachel Osinski, one of the students who helped plan the event. “This event wouldn’t have worked if we had poor promotions and relations with the student body, as a number of our friends came out. It is difficult to take an issue like human trafficking and get the student body involved.”
interested in attending when they have so much going on in their lives as it is, but the issue itself definitely gained general interest and attracted students to come.”

Though it was a challenge, the students used all avenues, from social networking sites, to advertisements, word of mouth, and even personally gave out ads and treats to promote the event.

The project taught the class a multitude of things relatable to the realities of how things run in political campaigns and the media world.

“In order for an event of this nature to work you truly have to create a packaged deal that attracts your target audience,” said Chelsey Zimmerman who designed the event advertising.

Left: Members of the Politics & Media class are: (first row), Raymond Potter, Alicia Wainwright, Julie Fonzi, Kristina Hurtgam, Rachel Osinski, Neiko Crown, Rianne Farrugia, and Franklin Moore. (second row), Brian Basta, Ian O’Rourke, Teresa Watson, Chelsey Zimmerman, Matt Riley, Tyler Russell, and Sean Dajka. Not shown: Hannah Hedrick, Emily Brillanti and Katie Hoffman.

Photo by Anna Hoffmann

Above: Raymond Potter and Franklin Moore led the panel discussion and Q&A session. Potter is a Communication Studies Major; Moore is a Philosophy major.

Photo by Emily Brillanti

Left: Elizabeth McIntyre of the International Institute of Buffalo discusses some of the services offered by her organization. IIB helps victims with everything from educational classes to housing.

Photo by Emily Brillanti
The Skinny on Grad School:
What to Look for and What You’re Really Getting Yourself Into

By Jessica Garfinkel

Grad school is a huge decision which can be really intimidating; I get it. One year ago I was a horrified senior nervous about making the right choice regarding my next step: grad school. But after months of researching, visiting, and applying, I’m proud to report that I’ve successfully landed in the program of my dreams, doing things that I love every day while intensely preparing for the professional world. I’m guessing you’ll want to say the same thing a year from now, so here are a few things to keep in mind while you’re hunting for the perfect school. It may be difficult for you to imagine right now, but time flies and you’re going to get there much sooner than you think.

1.) **Take a close look at the program:** some schools offer traditional “academic” programs focused on theory, research, rhetoric, etc., while others provide “professional” courses dealing with the technical aspects such as equipment training, field work, and industry skills. When deciding which is right for you, think about what you really want to do for a living and choose the program that will teach you the skills you need for that job. Do not waste your time in a program that results in a great degree, yet can’t help you be better at what you want to spend your life doing.

2.) **Think about the time you want/can afford to spend:** depending on the school and major you choose, the curriculum can be spread over one year, two years, or sometimes more. It’s important to look at what each individual program requires you to complete within that time frame. Consider the amount of work you can handle all at once, and how quickly you want to finish versus how long you’re willing to spend in the program. Do you want to get into the work force quickly or focus on just a few classes at a time?

3.) **Location, location, location:** where is the school located? Most schools don’t have on campus housing for grads, so chances are you will have to find your own place to live. Take note of the surrounding neighborhoods, traffic, crime, public transportation, and on-campus parking rates. This will help you decide how close to, or far away from, campus you want to live.

4.) **Visit the school:** this is pretty much a given, but worth stressing. You’re planning to spend at least a year studying there, so it’s definitely worth checking out the facilities, and people, in person. This is the only way to tell if you are comfortable in the environment,

Jessica Garfinkel (right) and Savannah Hauck (2010 NU graduates) take some time to relax during an undergraduate research conference at RIT.
Once you begin your program, the real fun begins. Here’s some useful advice based on my experiences so far...

1.) **Handling the work load:** time management is key. The cruel reality of grad school is that you will have very little free time. Get into the habit of squeezing every productive minute out of your day that you can. No matter what you did (or didn’t do) in undergrad, you WILL have to study and do the reading assignments in order to do well at the graduate level; professors hold you to a higher expectation.

2.) **Campus activities:** being a grad student does not mean you can’t get involved on campus. Take the time (when you have it) to join an organization that will help you get a job. Choose your activities wisely; you will make the time to participate in what is beneficial to you in the long run, even if you think you don’t have it.

3.) **Try to get close to at least one professor:** you don’t have as much time to build relationships as you did in undergrad, so start right away. Getting to know you allows them to give you the best advice about what directions to take in your coursework and in life. Keep them posted on your job/internship hunt as they might have a lead for you, and will likely make a strong reference.

4.) **HAVE A SOCIAL LIFE:** make friends and do something with them, even if it’s watching a TV together once a week. Grad students have intense passion, so feed off of your friends as you do your professors. Be prepared for greater diversity in the ages of your classmates. Friends will keep you sane when you feel like you live in a cave.

Prepare yourself for late nights at the library, early morning study sessions, eighteen hour days, and lots and lots of coffee (power to you if you can go without it). When you get stressed, just breathe. Remember, grad school is meant to prepare you for the career you want. It will probably be the most intense year(s) of your life so far, but you’re going to love every second of it!

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**Nationally-Recognized Program Launches PSA Contest**

Screening for Mental Health, Inc. (SMH) is looking for talented college students ready to take their media skills to the next level.

The SMH team is calling for students to produce an original **30 second public service announcement** (PSA) video exposing the dangers of eating disorders to their fellow students and promoting free online screenings at www.CollegeResponse.org.

Winning entries will be shown to students across the country as part of this year’s National Eating Disorders Screening Program® campaign

The winner can receive a **$500 prize**!
Spotlight on Brian Rock

By Elizabeth Caspari

Brian Rock, has always had a passion for visual entertainment and is now using his passion to teach students at Niagara University.

Rock started off his college life at the Corning Community College majoring in pre-med. During his second semester he took a photo shop class which was the turning point of his young college years. This class helped him to decide that pre-med wasn’t what he enjoyed most.

Rock then finished his education at SUNY Fredonia where he could experience many different versions of graphic designing.

“I took media arts, which was like communications but with an art approach,” Rock said, adding that this led him to receiving his first job at Bridges Television in Orchard Park.

After three years at Orchard Park, Brian made his way to Niagara University where he has been providing the university with his best talents for the past two years. Here at Niagara, he is the manager of the television studio and also helps out in Information Technology.

“I was always a visual person; I loved drawing, games, and visual entertainment basis,” Rock said.

Rock was always interested in entertainment and this spring is hoping to work with a potential NU broadcasting club. The club will give students some experience of how it will be in the real world.

“The goal is to have one show,” Rock said.

The broadcasting club isn’t Rock’s only extra effort to make NU students more equipped for the real world. He also offers very valuable internships. Every semester one student works with Rock one-on-one. Students have the opportunity to do everything from editing to shooting footage.

“It is so important to have an internship, I learned more at my first job in the first three months compared to my whole college career,” Rock said.

Dr. Kalen Churcher, assistant professor of Communication Studies, agrees with Rock as to the importance of internships. She also encourages students to apply for Rock’s internship, or any other internship for that matter.

Students who have worked with Brian Rock have gained invaluable experience,” Churcher said. “They leave that internship having professional material to show potential employers. That certainly gives them an upper hand.”

“Students who have worked with Brian Rock have gained invaluable experience.”

- Dr. Kalen Churcher, Assistant Professor of Communication Studies

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