



School of Journalism
and Mass Communication
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Vilas Insider

SPRING 2025

School of Journalism and Mass Communication



Bridging
Campus and
Community

New Courses Enhance
First-Year Student
Experiences

New Faculty and Staff
Members Join SJMC

Tom Mulhern's
Legacy Lives On

Letter from the Director

As I reflect on this past year, the word that comes to mind most is resilience. Higher education has faced no shortage of challenges in recent months. From budget uncertainties and shifting student expectations to a rapidly evolving media landscape, the pressure on institutions like ours has been unrelenting.

Despite this, I'm proud SJMC has not only endured, but continued to thrive. Our remarkable students, faculty and staff have proven to be adaptable, creative and committed to our shared mission: preparing the next generation of ethical, thoughtful and impactful communicators.

Our faculty have continued to innovate in the classroom and in their research, exploring urgent topics like political polarization, misinformation and health communication. Our students, too, have risen to the moment. Our undergraduates have applied their skills to address housing insecurity in Madison and pitched media campaigns to Bare Botanics, a wellness company founded by alum Jason Junod (BA'18). Our grad students are pushing their fields forward, producing award-winning content for the Capital Times and publishing research in major journals like Women's Studies in Communication and Journal of Health Communication. Behind the scenes, our staff continue to tirelessly support student experiences and keep the School running smoothly in uncertain times.



On, Wisconsin!

Kathleen Bartzen Culver
Director, School of Journalism and Mass Communication

This resilience isn't a fluke – it's an innate skill that SJMC has strived to instill in our students from day one. There's a reason that J202 students are only docked 10 points and don't receive an "F" when they make a fact error: we teach them how to move forward despite a mistake and improve for the next assignment. Our SJMC community knows how to rise above adversity and continue to create meaningful work.

We wouldn't have this resilience without you. Our alumni community has continued to show up in ways that matter deeply. Whether through guest speaking, mentoring, donating or simply reaching out, your support of our mission has helped us maintain the strong, collaborative spirit that defines the SJMC.

As we look to the future, I'm confident in our continued momentum. We are setting ambitious goals – advancing inclusive excellence, deepening community partnerships and public service, and strengthening the ways in which we connect with you, our alumni. Your involvement will continue to be a vital part of our success.

In challenging times, it becomes clear what truly matters. At the SJMC, it's our people who give this place its enduring strength. Thank you for being a part of our community.

Student News



Eric Agyekum



Wil Dubree



Jisoo Kim



Linqi Lu

Spotlight on Grad Student Award Winners

Graduate teaching assistants are a vital part of the SJMC academic experience. From leading discussion sections and presenting in lectures to behind-the-scenes work like grading assignments and helping develop course curriculum, TAs are crucial to maintaining our reputation for educational excellence. This year, four TAs were awarded campus-wide and college-level awards for their work both in and out of the classroom. They shared what these awards mean to them and what they find most rewarding about teaching.

Eric Agyekum (PhD'X) **UW-Madison Early Excellence in Teaching Award**

"The classroom, to me, feels like a small convivial community for creating connections and empowering students. This award is both rewarding and humbling. It is not just an acknowledgment of my teaching abilities; the award also imposes on me a greater duty to be exceptional and more responsible in discharging my duties as a teacher."

Wil Dubree (PhD'X) **L&S TA Teaching Mentor**

"Being selected as an L&S Teaching Mentor is both an honor and an exciting opportunity. It allows me to collaborate with dedicated instructors across campus, strengthen my own teaching practices, and contribute to a community committed to excellent, student-centered instruction. Personally, I feel that this award is both a recognition of my hard work over the past few years and a chance to take the next step in my career as a teacher."

Jisoo Kim (PhD'25) **UW-Madison Capstone Teaching Award**

"I deeply value seeing students discover their strengths over a semester and even years. I have met over 500 students while teaching seven distinct courses as a TA and one course as an instructor of record at UW-Madison. Receiving this award in my last semester is an acknowledgment of my pride and struggles. They will stay with me forever and guide my future career and approaches as a professor."

Linqi Lu (PhD'X) **L&S TA Teaching Mentor**

"This award affirms my efforts to design meaningful, student-centered experiences and create an inclusive classroom environment. It motivates me to continue growing as an educator and mentor. The most rewarding part of teaching is seeing students grow in confidence and curiosity. Watching students light up with new understanding, ask thoughtful questions, and support one another in the learning process brings me so much fulfillment."

Vilas Insider

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Cover: SJMC graduates sing "Varsity" at the 2025 SJMC Spring Graduation Celebration on May 9, 2025. (Photo by Melanie Jones/Melanie Renee Photography)



Students in professor Sue Robinson's J475: Practicing Communication for Social Change worked with four community partners to teach teens storytelling skills and work on strategic communication, fundraising, podcasting and other projects.

From Campus to Community: How Two SJMC Courses Made an Impact this Spring

By Elizabeth Shoop

In two courses this spring, Professor Sue Robinson brought the Wisconsin Idea to life, connecting students with the greater Madison community to apply their skills in storytelling, advocacy and strategic communication to pressing real-world issues.

For students in Robinson's courses, J475: Practicing Communication for Social Change and a Madison Commons directed study, this semester was a crash course in community engagement. They went beyond the classroom to develop fundraising strategies, train teens in storytelling and shine a light on Madison's housing challenges. Their work demonstrates the powerful impact that journalists and strategic communicators have when they play an active role in their communities to advance conversations and direct attention to major societal issues.

"The idea is that we embed ourselves in the infrastructure of some problem that needs solving and be solutions-focused, asking 'how can we move the needle?'" Robinson said. "Journalists are in a key position to be able to do that because we know what's happening in our community."

In her J475 course, Robinson connected students with four community partners: Root 2 Rise, GSAFE, Bayview Community Foundation and Black Girl Magic Educational Services Inc. The students visited their assigned community partner once a week to train teens in storytelling skills and work on strategic communication, fundraising, podcasting and other projects.

Senior Molly Zedeck spent the semester developing a digital yearbook for the Bayview Community Foundation. Her team wanted to showcase the programs and initiatives of the organization

through event photos so Bayview could look back at all of the work they had done.

"The opportunity to work with kids and give back to a community that's given me so much was something that was really intriguing to me," Zedeck said. "As much as I love Vilas, it was nice to explore a different side of Madison. I have always loved giving back to my community and volunteering, so the opportunity to do that for class and spend every Wednesday in a different community was really special."

In Robinson's directed study, her students tackled a different community challenge: housing insecurity. Robinson selected this issue after doing her own work with the UW Odyssey Project, a transitional program for non-traditional low-income students. For the next year, students will write for Madison Commons, UW-Madison's student-led Dane County news source, about housing insecurity and how it is impacting the community.

While Robinson's directed study students do not travel to a community location each week, they did have the unique

opportunity to travel to Kentucky to learn about a program called Family Scholar Housing. During their three-day stint, the two students who attended visited different housing programs that the UW Odyssey Program was hoping to bring to Madison.

After returning home, the students developed a documentary that premiered at an event the class organized called "Let's explore a family scholar house program for Madison." The powerful event included attendees sharing their own stories about housing insecurity while developers listened and discussed possible ideas and solutions.

Throughout the semester the students planned additional events centered around combining their own interests with their affordable housing initiatives. The students found their own guest speakers, developed a Q&A session, produced a series of vignettes and created a podcast to raise awareness of the experiences of unhoused people.

Through both courses, students are not only applying skills that they have learned at SJMC, they are learning lessons that cannot be taught in the classroom.

"[Students] learn



J475's community partners were invited to Vilas Hall for an end-of-semester celebration and tour of WSUM and PBS Wisconsin studios.

resourcefulness skills. They're responding to a number of different voices that want input, trying to figure out how to navigate those spaces, learning how to pivot and be flexible, and not to be afraid. That's one of the hardest things to learn in your skill set," Robinson said. "[These courses] give autonomy and a sense of ownership in a way that other classes that are not community-based don't. I have to tell them, 'I am not going to be there, you're going to be in charge, and if something goes wrong, you're going to have to figure that out.' That's a really invaluable skill set to learn."

For Zedeck, the skills she gained over the semester were rewarding and will benefit her far beyond her time at the SJMC.

"Learning to take initiative, be a more inclusive communicator, bring different identities and backgrounds into strategic communication and reporting are all skills I learned this semester," Zedeck said. "We learned a lot about working with kids, especially kids of different backgrounds than us, so I've definitely developed more patience. We learned how to meet kids where they were and really be a resource for them."

Robinson's courses are an opportunity for current students to connect with, learn from and inspire the next generation of communicators and community members. While this relationship was formed throughout the semester, it was capped off when the class welcomed the organizations to Vilas Hall for tours of WSUM and PBS Wisconsin as well as a celebratory pizza party.

"The work we're doing is showing these kids, 'hey, we're college students, you could be a college student, and UW is not a place that you have to avoid,'" Robinson said. ■



Students in professor Sue Robinson's directed study will spend the next year writing about housing insecurity.



Sharing Stories, Building Community: SJMC and Posse Partner to Empower Students Through Storytelling

By Kara Rheingans

This spring, with guidance from SJMC teaching faculty Adam Schrager, UW–Madison Posse scholars took part in a storytelling workshop designed to help them share their lived experiences with clarity and confidence. The event highlighted the SJMC’s growing investment in partnerships that center student voices and expand the reach of journalism education across campus.

Posse identifies high school students in various major U.S. cities with extraordinary academic and leadership potential. The program extends these students the opportunity to pursue personal and academic excellence by awarding them full-tuition leadership scholarships and placing them in supportive teams – “Posses” – of 10 students. Posse’s primary goal is to train diverse leaders of tomorrow who can serve as catalysts for change.

The one-hour conversational workshop served as an opportunity for Posse scholars to reflect on their journeys and gain tools to craft compelling narratives to tell

their Posse story confidently and intentionally while also providing students one-on-one time with a faculty member. Schrager broke down the basics of a good story and emphasized the importance of their personal stories and that the best person to tell their story was themselves.

“One of the things professor Schrager talked about was that everyone has an interesting story to tell, it’s just about finding the right way to tell it and to the

proper audience,” said Julien Payen, a sophomore Posse scholar and SJMC student. “The stories that he showed us during the presentation were captivating, and they helped me gain an appreciation for things that we might think are average or normal, but are incredibly interesting to a different audience.”

Former Posse academic advisor and current SJMC undergraduate academic advisor Lauren Anderson was thrilled to collaborate with the



Teaching faculty Adam Schrager led Posse scholars through a storytelling workshop designed to help them share their experiences with clarity and confidence.

SJMC and provide her students an opportunity to practice sharing their stories in a friendly, relaxed environment.

“I hope that the workshop encouraged pride in literally everything they’ve done at such a young age, especially if folks have experienced impostor syndrome in academic spaces, around Madison or in professional settings,” Anderson said. “All of them are making a really big mark on campus in their own ways and it’s important that they know that there are ways to communicate those things and what they stand for in a way that doesn’t feel like bragging.”

As an auxiliary program on campus, Posse depends on partnerships with other departments and organizations at UW to provide quality programming to its students and expose them to various areas of opportunity. SJMC has taken a proactive approach in partnering with a wide range of programs at

UW to increase awareness of the school and its degree paths and certificates.

“It was great to feel like someone’s coming to us. I think that really speaks to the school overall and its faculty and staff,” Anderson said. “I hope that this can continue in the future and hopefully each event will just

“Everybody needs stories. At its core, this is why the skills we teach in the department work in every building on this campus. Every single one of them needs storytellers.”

get better and better with each iteration.”

For Schrager, his goal for the workshop was simple: show students why story matters.

“Everybody needs stories. At its core, this is why the skills we teach in the department work in every building on this campus. Every single one of them needs storytellers,” Schrager said. “Hopefully, this workshop gave

them an opportunity to understand why story matters and how it can help them going forward.”

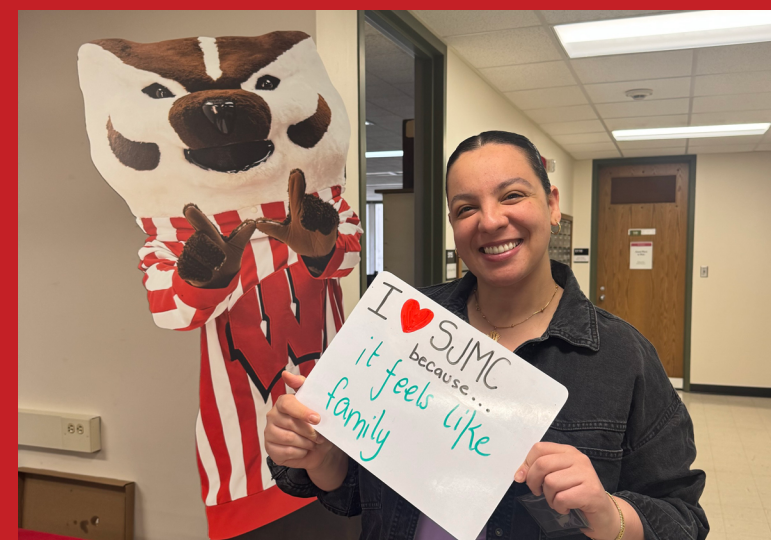
With so many options available to students at UW, it is more vital than ever that the SJMC actively work with campus partners to both raise awareness of the School and continue its mission of inclusive excellence. This workshop, the first

of its kind for the SJMC, is a launching pad for future events with Posse and other programs at UW.

“I’m a big believer in telling stories through the voices of people who oftentimes are not able to share their stories.

The Posse program is designed on this campus to ensure there is representation from certain groups that historically have not necessarily been seen in society and at this university,” Schrager said. “To the extent that we can see them and honor them and be empathetic and empower them, that’s a night worth spending. I hope to continue that with other organizations as well.”

Day of the Badger 2025: By the Numbers



Thanks to our generous donors, we had yet another record-breaking Day of the Badger fundraising sprint. Here’s a look at how we did:

\$35,605
raised in **1,848**
minutes

220
gifts given during
Day of the Badger

\$10,000

match from **7** generous current and former Board of Visitors members:

Gift leaders Ben Deutsch and Scott Farrell, Mary Conway, Shoshana Dichter, Phil Haslanger, Ginnie Roeglin and Dave Zweifel

Proceeds from Day of the Badger go to the Annual Fund, which provides discretionary funding for things like student scholarships, facilities upgrades and inclusion initiatives.

Tracing Paths of Migration

Recent SJMC grad and 2025 Wolff Fellowship recipient Cat Carroll, plans to spend the next year studying the migration phenomenon in seven different countries.

By Margaret Scheiner, College of Letters & Science



As her fellow graduating seniors prepared to close out their final semester at UW–Madison, Cat Carroll was laying out her itinerary to spend a year traveling to seven countries around the world to connect and tell the stories of communities directly affected by historic and contemporary migration patterns. Her work will also follow journalists, as they continue to document the cross-continental impacts of migration.

Carroll graduated this May with majors in journalism, international studies and German with certificates in public policy, European studies, Middle East studies and Arabic language and culture. She was recently named the 2025-2026 College of Letters & Science Wolff Fellow.

The Wolff Fellows program, established in 2020, awards a graduating senior a \$45,000 stipend to develop an itinerary for a year abroad.

"I was really drawn to apply to this fellowship because the way I saw it, there was no other opportunity available that could get me where I want to be at this

scale," Carroll said.

Carroll carefully crafted an itinerary based on places of historical and modern significance to global migration patterns.

"A commitment to studying global migration helped me develop my itinerary, which underscores everything, and then also how journalists are covering this issue," Carroll said. "Each place is somehow impacted by global migration movements, past or present, so that was what made me choose each place, and they all connect well together. That was something I kept in mind, to follow migratory paths that humans have taken to guide my own journey across these countries."

Carroll will travel to seven countries during her fellowship to examine migration patterns, understand how communities are affected by migration and document the stories of people at the center of it.

Carroll's journey will begin along the United States-Mexico border, where she'll shadow journalists who report on the border. She will also connect with communities that are

directly affected by the challenges at the border.

After leaving the border region, Carroll will go to San José, Costa Rica, where she plans to volunteer by teaching storytelling skills to students while engaging with local journalists living in exile.

Carroll will then head to Europe. Her first stop: Seville, Spain, where she will focus on immigration integration, studying both historic and contemporary integration practices.

From there, she will travel to Marrakech, Morocco, to work with youth and understand how they are affected by cultural changes.

Carroll will then visit Istanbul, Turkey, to learn from refugees and how they navigate through uncertainty.

In her second-to-last leg of the trip, Carroll plans to spend three months at a language institute in Amman, Jordan, to both advance her Arabic language skills and study different Arabic dialects. She will also investigate the impact these variations in dialects have on journalism and the coverage of different Arabic communities.

In her final three-month stretch of the fellowship, Carroll will travel to Berlin, Germany. Carroll plans to reconnect with refugees she met in Berlin during her study abroad in 2022 to understand the impact of historical forced migration on modern-day policy.

"I am really excited to challenge my assumptions and be on the ground in these places, engaging with people whose lived experiences differ from my own," Carroll says. "I think that's the greatest way to learn." ■

New Faculty Q&A with SJMC Alum and Assistant Professor Ross Dahlke



This January, Ross Dahlke (BA'18) returned to Vilas Hall and joined the SJMC as an assistant professor. Using software development, as well as social and data science, Dahlke's research dives into political information exposure and its effects on the open web and private communication channels.

What attracted you to UW–Madison and the SJMC?

UW–Madison has one of the strongest communities for doing research into communication and media anywhere in the world and across methodologies and topics. This scientific strength, combined with the close-knit community of the SJMC that goes all the way from undergraduates to graduate students and faculty, made the decision to return to UW an easy one.

How did you get into your field of research?

I got into my field of research through a combination of curiosity about the influence of media and a fascination with the power of data to answer complex questions. While working as a data scientist, I realized how new computational

methods were allowing us to ask and answer questions of human behavior that were previously difficult to get at. My transition into academia was driven by a desire to dig deeper – beyond immediate applications – and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how information systems affect society. My research allows me to combine my interest in human behavior with cutting-edge data science techniques in ways that I hope will advance both theory and practice.

How do you feel your work relates to the Wisconsin Idea?

My research focuses on understanding how media exposure, misinformation and AI-generated content shape beliefs and behaviors. These issues impact communities across Wisconsin and beyond, influencing everything from political engagement to trust in institutions. I also work to create open-source tools out of my research that people, including everyday citizens and journalists, can use to improve their lives and professions.

What's one thing you hope students who take a class with you will come away with?

I hope my students come away with a deeper appreciation and understanding of the topic matter. For example, in my data visualization course, I of course want my students to know how to create all the different types of graphs they may need. But I also want my students to understand why we visualize data and how we can use this understanding to communicate information and ultimately learn about the world so we can make better decisions. ■

2025 ALUMNI AWARDS

Distinguished Service Award

For professional contributions in journalism and mass communication.

- Conor Caloia (BA'04)
- Samuel Freedman (BA'77)
- Yoko McIvor Lieberman (BA'05)
- Renee Moe (BA'99)
- Jessie Stomski (BA'02)

Harold L. Nelson Award

For distinguished contribution to journalism and mass communication education.

- Gerald Baldasty (MA'74)
- Nojin Kwak (MA'93, PhD'01)

Ralph O. Nafziger Award

For distinguished achievement within 10 years of graduation.

- Steve Horn (BA'14)

Sharon Dunwoody Early Career Award

For distinguished achievement in teaching and research within 10 years of graduation from the PhD program.

- Bryan McLaughlin (PhD'14)
- JungHwan Yang (PhD'18)

Associate Professors Chris Cascio and Kathryn McGarr Receive Vilas Associates Awards

By Elizabeth Shoop



Associate Professor Chris Cascio

Associate Professors Chris Cascio and Kathryn McGarr received the 2025 Vilas Associates Award. The award, given by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research, supports recipients in advancing their research over the course of two years.

The award recognizes “new and ongoing research of the highest quality and significance” and is granted to researchers spanning a wide range of fields of study and expertise. Cascio combines social neuroscience and communication studies to examine how people process information. McGarr’s work explores and analyzes historical archives related to how social networks and political culture shape opinions about U.S. foreign policy.

While Cascio and McGarr are working to advance their own projects in very different areas, the Vilas Associates Award offers more than just financial support. It creates a sense of community that makes difficult research projects feel more supported.

“An award like this is really meaningful because it gives you a

cohort of people who are all sort of in the same phase of a project,” McGarr said. “It’s a new phase of work, and you’re getting support again.”

Unlike writing a dissertation, McGarr said working on a post-tenure project offers almost no support and can feel “solitary,” but this award is giving her the support and community needed to advance her research.

“It’s such a wonderful vote of confidence in work I have been doing the last couple of years on my own, and now get to start sharing with other people,” McGarr said. “Having a committee who looks at this work, decides they want to fund it for the next two years and is encouraging, feels really amazing.”

McGarr’s work focuses on transatlantic friendship networks, mostly British and American, and she analyzes conversations regarding U.S. foreign policy and policy in the Middle East. McGarr looks at works of mostly public intellectuals who write for a public audience, but are also in academia.

Cascio’s broader research is centered on how persuasion and social influence impact people’s behavior. Inspired by a conversation with his child’s pediatrician about the impacts of social media on children, Cascio focused his research on studying adolescent health and well-being in relation to social media use.

With this award, Cascio plans to extend his research beyond studying teens’ social media use, to analyze parents’ social media use as well.

“As a parent and as a researcher, [this study] answers really

interesting questions,” Cascio said. “Adolescent health is really important. It sets kids up for their future health, the habits they develop, and the things that they do. It’s going to dictate their future, and if I can be part of making that better for anybody, then that’s great.”

The years of research Cascio and McGarr pursue feel so impactful once they are able to share their findings in a clear, accessible way that benefits the broader community. The Vilas Associates Award allows both researchers to uphold the Wisconsin Idea by continuing to expand their research and eventually share their findings beyond the bounds of the university to create a positive influence in society.

“Part of the big impact is the Wisconsin Idea. It’s giving back to the community, giving back to the state in which we live and we conduct our research,” Cascio said. “It’s always nice to engage with the public on your research and show them the things we do on campus are meaningful and can translate to help or at least inform the public.” ■



Associate Professor Kathryn McGarr

Meet Our Three New Staff Members

This spring, we welcomed three new staff members to our team: Lauren “Lo” Anderson, Jamie Prey and Darby Winchel. All three have already started making their mark by strengthening relationships with our students, faculty and alumni communities.



Lo Anderson

Undergraduate Academic Advisor

“I’m most excited to begin learning all about SJMC’s extraordinary history, the endless number of pathways in reporting and strategic communication, and how the SJMC exemplifies the Wisconsin Idea, including the ways our community supports students in fostering their unique voice and embrace their creativity.”



Jamie Prey

Alumni Relations Officer

“I’m excited to give students a chance to learn about their future from our vast alumni pool, while offering our alumni an opportunity to reconnect with their ‘home’ school. I am also super excited to experience Homecoming in a whole new way, enjoying it with alumni and as an alum!”



Darby Winchel

Career and Internship Specialist

“Being an SJMC alum, I was so excited to get back to my roots and support a wonderful, innovative department. I mean it with my whole heart when I say our students are a joy to serve and so inspiring in what they are aiming to achieve – both during and after their college careers.”

2025 Terry Hynes Innovative Leadership Award Winners

The Terry Hynes Innovative Leadership Award honors leaders and mentors that strive to make the SJMC a place where students are excited to study communication and feel a sense of community. Awardees receive financial support for professional development opportunities to continue making a positive impact on School.



Rowan Calyx

Administrative Support



Stacy Forster

Distinguished Teaching Faculty



Debra Pierce

Distinguished Teaching Faculty

Q&A with Distinguished Teaching Faculty Stacy Forster



Stacy Forster recently earned Distinguished Status, the highest designation for teaching faculty. This status recognizes Forster's outstanding teaching contributions and dedication to her students.

What does this recognition mean to you?

My son is looking at his post-high school options, and we came across a video about what makes for a quality college experience. Some of the key factors were having a professor who made students excited about learning and who cared about them as a person. I've always worked to connect with students one-on-one, and I hope this recognition means I've been able to provide that kind of life-changing experience for the students I've worked with over my years in SJMC.

In your nearly 13 years of teaching at SJMC, what are you are most proud of?

It's lots of little things. Editing thousands of words when putting together an issue of Curb magazine. Connecting with each student in J202, either by reading everyone's Individual Story projects or doing more than 100 student hour visits in a semester. Hearing our pro-track students present their portfolios at the end

of their programs and marveling at all that they've done in such a short time. Just being a part of a student's UW-Madison education is important to me.

When it comes to teaching, what do you find most rewarding?

One of my favorite pieces of storytelling is the musical "Hamilton," and the line about what it means to leave a legacy often kicks around in my head: "It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see." I don't get to follow every student's path away from SJMC, but I enjoy knowing that I may have played a part in what they do with their lives and their careers. If you were my student, please let me know what you're doing! My day is always better when I hear from you.

What excites you most about the future of communication and the role SJMC students will play in shaping it?

When I joined SJMC 13 years ago, I latched on to the school's core principle that we're training students for jobs that don't exist yet. I love the idea that we are sending our students out to create the next generation of communication and storytelling – and that with their creativity and drive, they're ready to do it with the foundation we've given them. ■

CONGRATULATIONS



Professor Young Mie Kim
UW-Madison Phi Beta Kappa
2025 Excellence
in Teaching Award

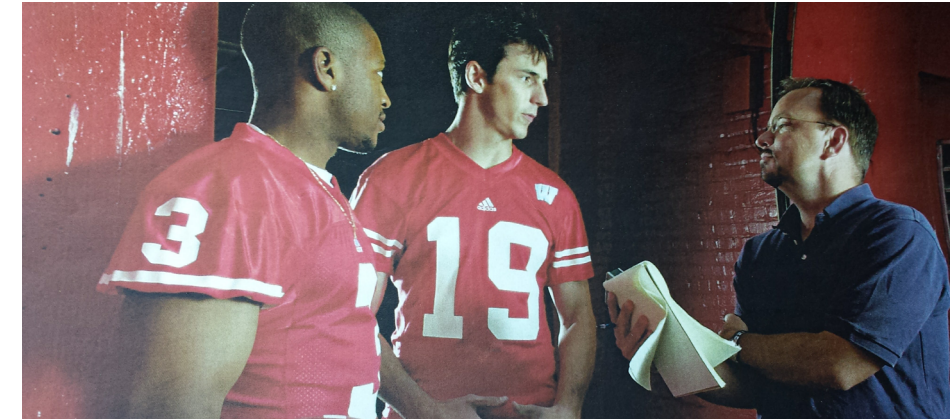
"This recognition strengthens my vision for journalism education as a crucial platform not only for understanding and analyzing societal issues but actively addressing them."

Moving forward, I envision journalism education continuing to foster critical thinkers and active civic participants, equipping students with the analytical rigor, ethical grounding and practical skills necessary to navigate – and positively shape – our complex media landscape and democratic society."

More Than Just a Cup of Coffee

10 years after his final byline, Tom Mulhern's story continues – through a scholarship, a family-led fundraiser and the next generation of sports journalists.

By Kara Rheingans



Tom Mulhern spent 15 years as the Wisconsin State Journal main beat reporter for the UW football team. Photo courtesy of Chris Mulhern.

Tom Mulhern's legacy is marked by honest sports writing. Thanks to a scholarship in his name and a family-led effort to fundraise in his honor, future journalists at the SJMC are learning to tell stories the way Mulhern did: with heart, integrity and a deep understanding of the game.

Established in 2014 after his passing from a rare neurological disorder, the Tom Mulhern Sports Journalism Scholarship supports students pursuing sports reporting. To commemorate the 10th anniversary, the Mulhern family has launched a special coffee roast to ensure the scholarship continues to inspire future sportswriters.

Mulhern (BA'80), began his career covering the Green Bay Packers from 1986 to 1998. However, a Badger sports fan at heart, Mulhern's real ambitions lay in Madison. He joined the Wisconsin State Journal staff in 1998 and became the main beat reporter for the UW football team in 1999.

"My dad did it the old-fashioned way, the right way, for his entire career," said Chris Mulhern, one of Mulhern's three sons. "He put in the legwork to get to the heart of a story."

Since 2014 the Mulhern family has

strived to keep his legacy alive and fundraise for the scholarship.

"One day I was driving somewhere and thinking of the scholarship and I thought 'Wouldn't it be cool to have a coffee in honor of Tom?'" said Bill Simon, Mulhern's brother-in-law.

After talking to his wife and Mulhern's sister, Kris, and Mulhern's three sons, Greg, Chris and Will, Simon worked with his son, Adam Simon, owner of Lenny's Lab Coffee Company in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin to develop "Mully's Roast," named for Mulhern's nickname. For every bag sold, Lenny's Lab will be donating 10% to the Mulhern Scholarship.

"If you've ever been impacted by journalism, not even just sports

journalism, you should be proud to give to this scholarship. That's what we're trying to do: promote and support great journalism," Mulhern said. "Not only do we want to promote my dad's name and his legacy, but we also appreciate the impact that he had on Madison and UW, whether people met him personally or just read his writing."

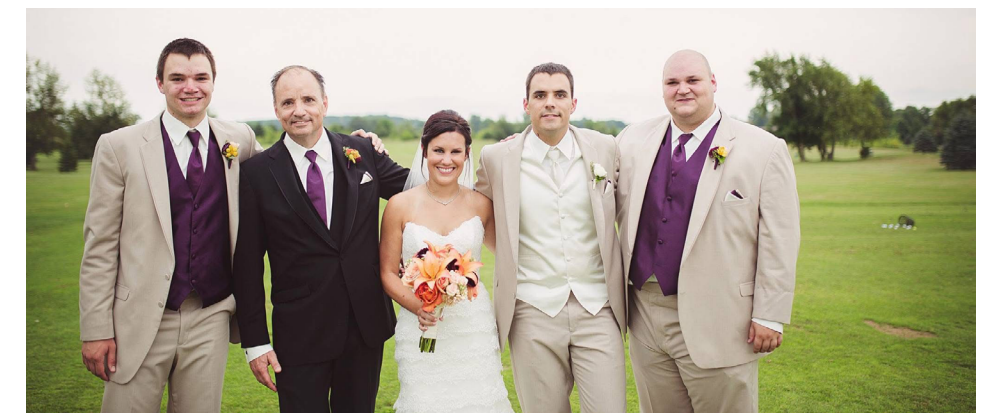
As the family looks to the future, they've reflected on who Mulhern was at his core: kind, honest and humble.

"He would be extremely humbled by the whole impact that the scholarship has had up to this point and inevitably going forward," Mulhern said.

Mulhern's impact on the Wisconsin sports community lives on through his family's efforts to keep his memory alive and the students who, supported by his scholarship, strive to do journalistic work the "right way" – the Tom Mulhern way. ■

Interested in supporting the Tom Mulhern Sports Journalism Scholarship?

Visit LennysLabCoffee.com to buy a bag of "Mully's Roast" or make a donation at supportuw.org/giveto/mully



(From left) Will Mulhern, Tom Mulhern, Erin Mulhern, Chris Mulhern and Greg Mulhern at Chris and Erin's wedding in July 2014. Photo courtesy of Chris Mulhern.

Small Classes, Big Connections: New SJMC Courses Expand First-Year Experience

By Elizabeth Shoop



Two new courses are introducing first-year students to one of the SJMC's main benefits: community. (Photo by Bryce Richter /UW-Madison)

Before mastering the art of crafting the perfect nut graf or developing an effective strategic media campaign, students often find something just as important: community. Professors Karyn Riddle and Kathryn McGarr ensured that first-year students experience that sense of connection through two new courses designed to make a sprawling campus feel a little smaller.

The new courses, "Children and Media" and "History of Women in U.S. Media," were developed to welcome first-year students into the SJMC community before they apply to the school or go on to other majors. Riddle and McGarr designed courses that would introduce core communication concepts as well as foster an inclusive, tight-knit classroom culture.

Over the past several years, the SJMC has offered a wide range of 100-level courses to introduce key concepts to first-year or undecided students and hopefully persuade them to apply to the School. However, these larger introductory courses were missing one of the school's main benefits – community. First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs)

and honors courses, like Riddle's and McGarr's, help to fill that gap and increase awareness of the school.

"Being in a FIG is a really great starting place as a freshman, especially for people who don't really know exactly what they want to do," said Gwen Cushman, a freshman in Riddle's Children and Media FIG. "It's a great way to explore topics and get three different perspectives on them."

FIGs offer students a unique experience that is not always available at a large university: small class sizes, extra attention from instructors and the holistic understanding of a topic through overlapping classes.

"It's about the nature of the students who are drawn to a FIG, but also the nature of the FIG," Riddle said. "They expect that this experience is going to be a social community. They went in there prepared to build that, not prepared to be in their own silo. It set off the tone for a really great semester, people that are engaged and want to talk and want to get to know one another."

Honors courses have similar

offerings to FIGs: small classes that lead to strong community, close relationships with professors and peers, and a deepened understanding of material.

The development of Riddle's and McGarr's courses has allowed for the community in the SJMC to reach students beyond the degree.

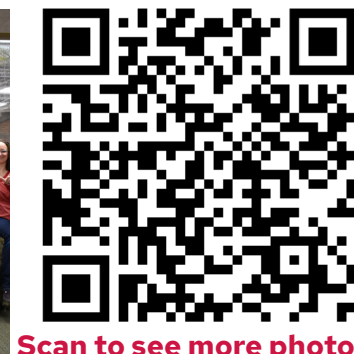
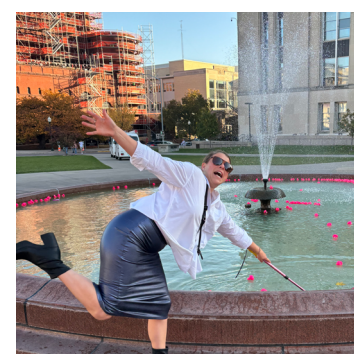
"A lot of my students have already decided on their major, but they may not have known that they would enjoy taking journalism classes," McGarr said. "I think only two of the 19 students are in the SJMC, so new course development is important for getting the word out to other parts of the university."

For many students, these courses are their first introduction to the SJMC. FIGs and honors courses attract high-level students who want to engage with their learning materials, classmates and instructors. Connecting with them has massive benefits for the School and the students themselves.

"Getting that small community with a high level of professor-student contact, high quality of feedback and attention from a professor contributes to the success of students as they progress through their college career," Riddle said. "If we do recruit those students into the SJMC, that's just great."

Building on the strong momentum from this year, Riddle and McGarr are already exploring new ways to deepen the impact of their teaching. With plans to continue offering and evolving these first-year experiences, the SJMC is embedding community into its very foundation, not just for admitted majors, but for every student interested in journalism and mass communication. ■

2024-25: Year in Photos



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Top row: (left) Ph.D. student Mian (Gloria) Wei presents at the Communications Crossroads Conference March 2025. (center) Amara Alexander (BA'25) meets an employer at the Communications Career Fair October 2024. (right) Students meet with BOV member Justin Dini (BA'95) at a BOV Roundtable November 2024. **Second row:** Professional MA graduates presented their final portfolios December 2024. **Third row:** (left) David Grossman (BA'87) delivers the keynote speech at the 2025 SJMC Graduation Celebration. (right) 2025 SJMC Alumni Award winners pose together at the ceremony April 2025 (from left, Yoko Mclvor Leiberman, Jessie Stomski, Renee Moe, Bryan McLaughlin, JungHwan Yang, Samuel Freedman, Steve Horn, Conon Caloia, Nojin Kwak). **Bottom row:** Director of Development Marit Barkve fishes for pink rubber ducks during Fill the Hill October 2024. (center) UW alum Manu Raju ('02) returned to campus September 2024 as a part of the Nafziger Lecture series. Manu spoke about his experiences as a political journalist in Washington. (right) SJMC faculty and staff post together to celebrate Day of the Badger April 2025.



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J202 Quiz

J202 is the first class students take after being admitted. It is impossible to forget the quizzes that started off each lecture on Monday morning to test students on AP style, grammar, course material and current events. If you were enrolled in J202 now, how well would you do?

1. Fix this: ATHENS, GEORGIA (AP) – The postal service's new delivery vehicles aren't going to win a beauty contest: they're tall and ungainly, the windshields are vast, and their hoods resemble a duck bill. (3 errors)
2. Name two of the four variant forms of metaphors (figures of speech).
3. The video streamer Max – formerly known as HBO Max, HBO Now and HBO Go – announced it will change its name to what?
4. Name two of the nine most common storytelling biases.
5. This Wall Street Journal columnist and Badger alum gave the UW-Madison commencement speech in early May.
6. Fix this sentence: At the sound of the 2nd whistle, the coach expected the players to run towards the opposite end of the field and do eleven jumping jacks (3 errors)

1. ATHENS, Ga. (AP) – The Postal Service's new delivery vehicles aren't going to win a beauty contest: they're tall and ungainly, the windshields are vast and their hoods resemble a duck bill.
2. Pure, Metaphor, Simile, Allusion, Personification
3. HBO Max
4. Personalization, Ideological, Compositional, Overestimation, Correlation v. Causation, Mind-reading, Faulty recollection, Context, False equivalence
5. Jason Gay
6. At the sound of the second whistle, the coach expected the players to run toward the opposite end of the field and do 11 jumping jacks.

Photo by Leone Venter on Unsplash

