

TBD: TO BE DISCOVERED

A Newsletter from the Department of Communication and Journalism

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Between The Lines

By Dr. David Eshelman, department head and professor of communication

It is my privilege to write a statement for this inaugural issue of the newsletter. First, I am grateful to Samantha Ballew and the students in the PRSSA for putting this document together. Second, allow me to introduce or reintroduce myself. I have been a professor at Arkansas Tech since 2006. For approximately a decade, I oversaw the Theatre Program. I am now department head. In this capacity, I invite each of you to get to know me and visit with me. My office is Energy 124. I am in the office more often than not, it seems.

It is my honor to take over the job that Prof. Anthony Caton did so well for such a long period of time. As you know, Prof. Caton passed away earlier this semester. I know that he meant a lot to his students. He meant a lot to me. I am glad that we can all work together to ensure the future success of this department that Prof. Caton loved so deeply.

Regarding the department, there are several changes on the horizon. First, with the university restructure, we are now called Communication and Media Studies. While we will still offer a solid education in journalistic excellence, the faculty felt that "Media Studies" better fit what our department was and will be in the future. We are also making several curricular changes, including proposing a B.A. in Social Media Influencing, which would be among the first such programs in the world. We feel that our department---with expertise in writing, video, public relations, social media, performance, and communication---is perfect for such a degree.

Looking back to 2020, we can say that we have been through a lot. I am grateful for the lessons that pandemic isolation taught me---for instance, that we can still find ways to stay connected and do our good work in spite of obstacles. But I will also say that I am glad to see so many student faces. You should be proud of yourselves for making it through this irregular time.

I am glad to be associated with Arkansas Tech and to work in this department that values innovation but also people. Thank you for letting me be a part of your academic journeys and your lives.

The Arka Tech Adapts to the Pandemic

By Braden Jones

Mr. Tommy Mumert, assistant professor of journalism, serves as the advisor for the ATU student newspaper, The Arka Tech. Mumert explained how proud he was of the students he oversaw during the early stages of the pandemic.

"I have been proud of how the editors and staff continued to produce a weekly, printed newspaper once we returned to campus in the fall of 2020," Mumert said.

The editors and staff pivoted to a virtual atmosphere which allowed them to publish content and edit releases safely.

During this time most student-led newspapers made the switch to an all-digital format. Mumert and his students believed a printed newspaper was still an important news outlet as well as a valuable learning laboratory for students and faculty. Members of The Arka Tech also dramatically increased the paper's digital presence with an online website.

The paper can be found at arkatechnews.com and features stories from the printed paper as well as exclusive online content. The pandemic brought several publishing centers to a halt, but the ATU student paper found a way to adapt and overcome the troubling times.

Arkansas Tech SPJ Gets Involved

By Sam Strasner

Arkansas Tech University's chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) invested a portion of its fall 2021 semester in teaching the importance of media literacy to students at Dardanelle High School (DHS). The project began in September when ATU students presented to Ashley Turney's digital marketing and analytics class at DHS. Topics covered included definitions of common terms related to media literacy and tips on how to be an effective consumer of news and social media content. With that foundation of knowledge established, the DHS students were invited to produce and submit a 90-second video, a 3-to-5 image photo story with captions or a two-page essay that answered the question, "What does media literacy mean to me?"



SPJ also hosted a Valentine's Day photo booth in February for students and faculty to take a photo with a loved one or Jerry the Bulldog.

Overcoming Obstacles

by Dr. Alexis Johnson, associate professor of communication

The semester at the start of the pandemic I was teaching one of my upper-division seminars, Health Communication. It is what I do for research and is easily my favorite class to teach despite the difficulty of the topic. I had many familiar faces including students I had seen around the department that were able to finally take a class of mine. I remember comparing COVID-19 to the flu at the start. As time progressed, and more became known about the virus, I retracted my statement. As a Health Communication scholar I realized I made a faulty comparison without yet knowing much. I let my students know that I was pregnant with my first child and because of all the unknowns of the virus, I wouldn't be meeting outside of class. This was a difficult decision because I am passionate about being there for my students. Then news spread about pivoting to virtual learning. I told my students not to panic and that I was going to make this transition as smooth as possible. I adapted my assignments quickly and made virtual lectures for all of my classes that didn't have them. Many of my seniors in my Health Communication class expressed how disappointed they were that this was the reality of their final semester at Tech. I felt devastated for them and to this day I wish I could have celebrated with so many of the students who had been in my classes for the last four years. I was proud of the resilience of my students then and their continued strength over the past two years. I was equally impressed with my ability to remain connected with them despite our distance learning. I sent out emails, met with them via WebEx, and connected with many of the graduating seniors on social media.

I had a parent of one of my graduating seniors reach out to me to thank me for the four years I educated her daughter. She informed me that her daughter was crying about having to go home and not being able to finish her semester the same way she cried when she was dropped off on her first day at Tech. She told me that she blossomed under my leadership and became a confident person. Her mom said, "my daughter will do great things and the seed you have planted is a big reason why." She expressed how she wished her daughter could have had closure and finished her semester to graduate. I ended up coming up with an idea to have all of the faculty in the department hold up a sign and make a collage to share that we missed them. I wanted our students to know that we still cared and were still thinking of them. This student not only persevered during the pandemic, as many of our students did, but taught me how important my role as a professor is. It is not only about teaching concepts in class or having students come out with strong communication skills, but also about making a positive lasting impact on their lives.

Through the pandemic, I was reminded of this and remained empathic to students' needs and their own struggles. I also was reminded of how greatly my students have positively changed my life. I hope that someday I will be able to celebrate with all of the students who were not able to. I hope they know how proud I am of them and most importantly I hope they know how these challenging times made them even more capable of making the world a better place.

The Arka Tech Wins Big

by Tommy Mumert, assistant professor of journalism

The Arka Tech won twenty-three awards, including nine first-place awards, in the 2022 Arkansas College Media Association press competition.

The awards were presented April 8 at the organization's spring conference on the Arkansas State University campus in Jonesboro.

Students winning awards, listed in alphabetical order, were: Tennyson Douglas, first place in online sports photos, second place in online feature photo, online sports photo and newspaper sports feature writing and honorable mention in newspaper sports photo.

Tara Espinoza, first place in online feature photo and online headlines (an award shared with Chris Morgan), second place in online sports writing and third place in online sports photo.

Tanner Gill, second place in online arts and entertainment writing.

Amanda Hampton, first place in newspaper personality profiles.

Kierra Hildreth, first place in feature page layout.

Trinity Lisk, first place in online editorials/commentary/blog, third place in newspaper general column.

Johnan Mitchell, first and second place in newspaper headlines.

Emily Ragsdale, third place in online sports writing.

Brady Williams, first place in in-depth reporting.

The Arka Tech's weekly radio broadcast, "Arka Tech Introspect," took first, second and honorable mention awards in the audio podcast category. "Arka Tech Introspect" made its debut in the fall 2021 semester and is hosted by A.J. Chauffe. Robert Williams served as co-host with Chauffe during the fall semester, with Mitchell serving as producer.

The Arka Tech's website, arkatechnews.com, won first runner-up honors in website general excellence. Avery Harrah is The Arka Tech's webmaster.

The Arka Tech co-editors, Espinoza and Mitchell, also received a third-place award in online editorials/commentary/blog.

From An Alum

"The pandemic taught me a lot about my work style and needs. Turns out, I love project-based assignments and strongly value organization. I also learned that company culture and interacting with people are also important to me, whether that be in-person or virtual spaces. On a personal note, the pandemic emphasized my need for work-life balance - I get out for more walks and started roller-skating."

Our alumna this issue is Lydia Lucien Grate. Grate graduated in 2011 with a BA in Broadcast Journalism, Public Relations, Speech Communication, and Minors in Business and History. After graduation, Grate served in the Peace Corps for two years stationed in Togo. In May 2022, Grate will graduate from the Clinton School of Public Service. She will begin a year-long fellowship in Madagascar in August 2022.

Student Feature

If you are interested in submitting a work to be featured in the next issue, please contact Dr. Hanna Norton at hnorton@atu.edu.

Thank You

We want to thank the students and staff who worked to put together this first edition of *TBD*.

Upcoming Events

SPJ (Society of Professional Journalists) is hosting a "Week of Journalism" April 18 through April 22. For more information, visit [atuspj](https://atuspj.org) on Instagram.

Arkansas Tech Theatre will be showcasing one-act plays directed by students on Friday, April 22 and Saturday, April 23 at 7:00 p.m. Tickets will be available at the box office.

Arkansas Tech Radio Theatre's production of "Unwanted Guests" will be performed on Saturday, April 23 at 7:00 p.m. on KXRJ, 91.9 FM.