

COM/365

DEAN'S REPORT 2025

NEXT
GEN

A new wave
of COM leaders
shares hopes for
their industries

THE FUTURE OF A.I.

ALUM AND COMMUNICATION
EXEC KELLY SULLIVAN
HELPS CLIENTS PUSH THE
BOUNDARIES OF GENERATIVE
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

COM by the NUMBERS

DONORS



1,142

Total Donors



\$2,147,913

Total Donations



19

Endowed Graduate Scholarships



25

Endowed Undergraduate Scholarships



7

Endowed Professorships

FACULTY & STAFF



244

Total Faculty



101

Full-Time Faculty



143

Part-Time Faculty



62

Total Staff

STUDENTS

2,026



Total Undergraduate Students

486



Total Graduate Students

Advertising: **79**

Emerging Media Studies:

56 MA, 15 PhD

Film and Television Studies: **17**

Journalism: **56**

Media Science: **67**

Media Science: Marketing

Communication Research: **58**

Media Ventures: **15**

Public Relations: **61**

Screenwriting: **22**

Television: **40**



5 YEARS OF INNOVATION AT COM

With apologies for twisting a cliché, what a difference five years makes! Since I arrived at COM in fall 2019, the team and I have been on a wonderful journey of innovation and growth together, making terrific progress on our strategic plan. Let me share a few highlights:

- We've brought in new talent and diverse perspectives, adding 20 faculty and 20 staff positions. By fall 2025, we aim to add an additional 20 faculty and three staff.
- We've also added four new department and division leaders in the past year and a half (page 12).
- To support our growing team, we've improved our recruiting practices, added onboarding programs, established equity in compensation, appointed an associate dean for faculty development, developed new community gatherings and expanded funds for travel to career-enhancing conferences.
- To clarify governance, we've redone COM's faculty bylaws, faculty expectations, annual merit reviews and a host of other policies.
- We've completed a \$500,000 revamping of our TV studios.
- In a \$3.5 million project, we are creating new learning spaces for film and TV students in production, cinematography and directing at 808 Commonwealth Ave. (page 7).
- We have dedicated \$500,000 to update the interior of 640 Commonwealth Ave. in time for fall 2025.
- We have upped funding support for student films to more than \$100,000 per year.
- We have increased the frequency of student equipment replacement—including cameras, mics, lights and more—and added to our IT budget.
- We are launching a newsroom initiative to support local journalism in New England (page 8).
- To enhance COM's research and discovery engine, we've

created new supports for tenure and promotion, launched a faculty-led survey with Ipsos (page 6) and launched internal seed grants funded in part by COM Dean's Advisory Board member and BU Trustee Hugo Shong ('87).

- We've created virtual and in-person panel discussions with experts, student gatherings of affinity groups and college-wide celebrations and retreats.
- We are connecting with—and inviting in—our COM alumni, through advisory committees, a 1:1 mentoring program and on-campus and virtual events. (Want to help? Please write to Lu He, COM's alumni engagement director, at helu@bu.edu.)
- We are wrapping our heads and our arms around BU's recommendation to "critically embrace" generative AI technologies so we can prepare students to adapt and thrive in the world beyond the completion of their degrees (page 4).

In this issue, we also celebrate and recognize the latest achievements by the COM community. For instance, in "Reel Diversity," starting on page 18, you will meet Lynn Asare-Bediako and Lydia Evans, creators of the student Black film society BlackBox. Now in its second year, their festival showcased a rich array of films from students as far away as Florida. It was such a treat for the audience and me to enjoy their work. Peppered throughout the issue, too, are notes about the award-winning work of other students, faculty and alumni.

Last and not least, I hope you will enjoy the scholarly explorations of digital dating by Kathryn Coduto in "Why We Swipe," starting on page 26. Clearly, there's a lot to love these days at COM.

Best,



MARIETTE DICHIRSTINA ('86)
Dean

Dean

Mariette DiChristina ('86)

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with professors and classmates.

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Four department heads discuss their most ambitious goals and deepest fears for their fields of emerging media studies; film and television; journalism; and mass communication, advertising and public relations.

REEL DIVERSITY

The student-led BlackBox film society is creating opportunities for Black filmmakers and improving the diversity in student films at BU and beyond.



ON THE COVER: Kelly Sullivan ('94,'96) leads an AI-focused team at Weber Shandwick

THE NEW THOUGHT LEADER

Alum and communication exec Kelly Sullivan is an AI evangelist—and she’s shaping how organizations use it.



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WHY WE SWIPE

From social media to sexting, Kathryn Coduto studies why people use new technology compulsively.

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SHOOTING FOR THE STARS

Jeff Lipsky is one of the most trusted photographers in Hollywood, where he’s worked with everyone from Brad Pitt to Taylor Swift.



30

Courtesy of Jeff Lipsky (right)

A CRITICAL EMBRACE OF AI

How faculty across COM are addressing artificial intelligence in the classroom

By MARA SASSOON

In November 2022, Anne Danehy attended a faculty meeting where a colleague introduced generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) platforms like ChatGPT. The technology shocked her. “This was the first that many of us were hearing about it,” says Danehy, COM’s senior associate dean for academic affairs.

Almost immediately, COM began working on AI policies—a challenge because, Danehy says, some faculty don’t see AI having a place in their courses while others embrace it. She joined the University-wide AI Task Force, which helped her to inform COM’s approach.

“What came out of the AI Task Force was this idea of ‘critical embrace,’” Danehy says. “We want faculty to be aware of it and to have conversations with students around the ethics involved.” That means dis-

cussing proper uses, handling of personal information and having clear classroom policies for when and how students are allowed to use it.

Dana Janbek, a master lecturer in mass communication, advertising and public relations, oversees and coteaches COM 101, in which students aren’t allowed to use GenAI for any coursework. “This is a foundational course, and our job is to introduce students to and expose them to these foundational communication principles,” she says. “In upper-level courses, there may be space to use AI in their assignments and projects, but in 101, we believe that they need to come to class and apply what they’re learning, using their own original thoughts.”

On the other hand, Margaret Wallace (’89), an associate professor of the practice in

media innovation in the film and television department, has been integrating GenAI into her courses since 2022. She received an Accelerating Classroom Transformation grant from BU’s Digital Learning & Innovation office, which she used to fund a team ChatGPT subscription for her Fundamentals of Interactive Media class.

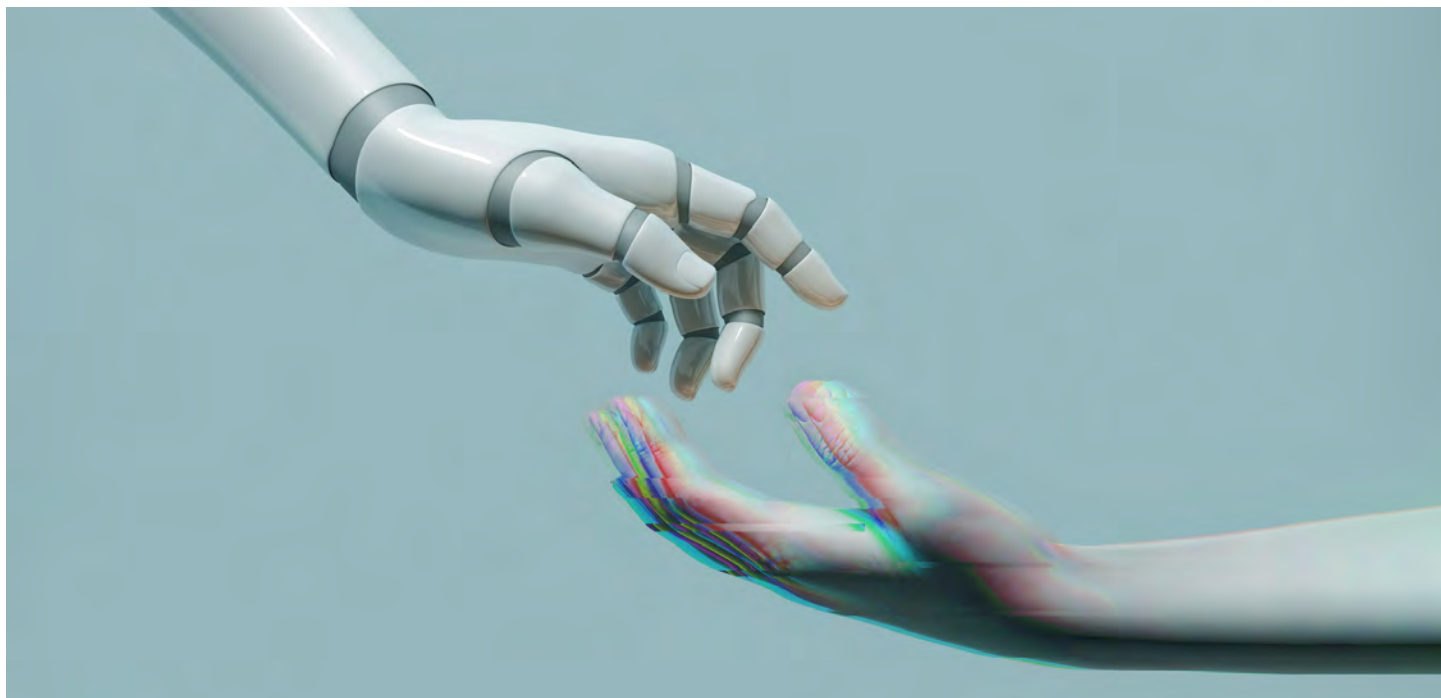
She hopes her assignments help students think critically about where GenAI can be helpful, how they use it, as well as how the technology works—including the potential for implicit bias in the data the AI is referencing.

“I think it’s really important to separate the hype from what I call the real deal,” she says. “The machine is not the expert. You’re the expert.”

In August 2023, at COM’s annual faculty retreat, alumni spoke to each department about AI in their respective indus-

tries. Wallace moderated the film and television panel. “The potential impact of these GenAI tools can be experienced very differently based on where you’re coming from, whether you’re a creator, filmmaker, journalist or advertising executive,” she says. Wallace, COM’s AI faculty ambassador and a member of its new AI Oversight Committee, thinks the college is ready for the challenge.

“There are a lot of different opinions about the usefulness of generative AI tools and a lot of righteous concerns about using these tools in the classroom,” she says. “I think that COM is in a good position to address some of the critical issues that are coming our way, including things like deepfake videos. Media literacy is more important than ever—and COM will continue to play a strong role in that.” /



Marcos Osorio/Stocksy

SAFE AND ETHICAL CRISIS REPORTING

Pulitzer-winning photographer Greg Marinovich teaches battlefield readiness

By JOEL BROWN



BU student journalists look at images while covering a student protest at Italy's University of Padua.

Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Greg Marinovich ('20) has covered violence and tragedy. He has lost friends and survived life-threatening situations. Now a master lecturer in journalism, he wants his students to know the things he learned the hard way covering stories in South African townships and on Bosnian battlefields.

In summer 2024, Marinovich launched a new course—JO 551 Conflict & Crisis Reporting: Covering Hostile Environments Smartly, Safely & Ethically—at BU's Padua Academic Center in Italy. "I wanted it to be a hothouse thing, like you do when you're on assignment and you're stuck with fellow journalists 24 hours a day," he says. "I wanted them in a place where they didn't know the lay of the land, they probably didn't know the language or only very poorly, and the culture was different."

The course covers hostile environment awareness, battlefield first aid, ethics and codes of conduct. It also explores the urgent stay-or-go decisions journalists must make in places like Gaza and Ukraine, and the moral dilemmas that arise when the imperative to tell a story endangers the lives of sources.

Marinovich began to think about creating the class around the start of the Ukraine war. In the Mideast and elsewhere, jour-

nalists were being targeted with violence more often. Major media outlets, including photo agencies, had become more risk-averse. Marinovich says he wants to teach students the things there may be no one around to teach them anymore.

"He talks about the mistakes that he's made and how to know when to leave, when to back up, when a photo's worth it because of the danger factor," says Madi Koesler ('24). They're lessons she put to immediate use.

Koesler and two classmates were walking past the University of Padua one day when they heard a protest over the university's investments in the weapons industry. Koesler suddenly found herself on the front lines, photographing a clash between students and university police or guards. "They were pushing against each other, shoving more than fighting," she says. "I got my camera hit twice, once with a baton and once with the police officer's hand."

"A couple of the students struggled with the edginess and with some of the intimacy they had to deal with in the storytelling," Marinovich says. "But I think when it's a group like this, and they're all living together in the same dormitories, and they have class every day, they push each other." /

QUOTABLE MOMENT



"Storytelling is everything. For as long as there's been recorded history, the way ideas have been effectively conveyed to humans has been through storytelling. The Bible, Tarantino, whatever. Storytelling."

DAVID LUBARS
(CGS'78, COM'80),
2024 Undergraduate
Convocation speaker

THE SURVEY SAYS...

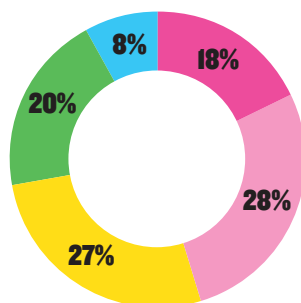
COM's Communication Research Center is taking America's temperature on important issues, from disinformation to artificial intelligence

For three years COM faculty and the Communication Research Center have been gauging Americans' opinions on issues such as trust in the media and the effectiveness of dating apps with a regular **Media & Technology Survey**. The surveys are conducted by Ipsos, a market and public opinion research firm, and the results are published at bu.edu/com/tag/com-survey. Here is a sampling of the researchers' findings, some of which were picked up by media outlets such as NPR and the *Boston Globe*.

DISINFORMATION & SOCIAL MEDIA

Survey designed by Chris Chao Su, assistant professor of emerging media studies

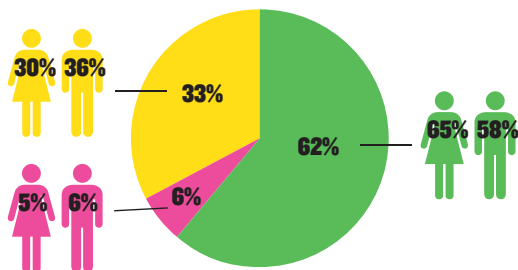
"If social media posts spread unverified information about a political candidate or election process, I think it is acceptable for social media platforms to remove content."



● Strongly Disagree
 ● Disagree
 ● Neither Agree or Disagree
 ● Agree
 ● Strongly Agree

DATING APPS

Survey designed by Kathryn Coduto, assistant professor of media science (see page 26)



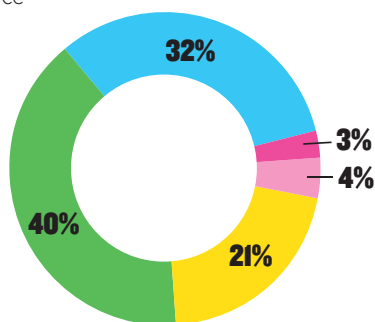
"Most people lie on dating apps."

● Agree or Strongly Agree
 ● Disagree or Strongly Disagree
 ● Neither Agree or Disagree

PUBLIC HEALTH

Survey designed by Traci Hong, professor of media science

"Social media platforms should be required to have warning labels on posts that promote synthetic nicotine (such as the nicotine used in vaping products)."



● Strongly Disagree
 ● Disagree
 ● Neither Agree or Disagree
 ● Agree
 ● Strongly Agree

QUOTABLE MOMENT



"I wish we could learn from history and improve on what we've done in the past, instead of constantly remaking... We just need to listen to and read about the folks who lived it—and then use your brains to make sure that you further it and don't go back and try to reinvent it."

ALLISON DAVIS (CGS'73, COM'75), television executive and founding member of the National Association of Black Journalists, during COM's 2024 Black Media Symposium

COM's new cinematography and directing studios will occupy the fifth floor of 808 Commonwealth Ave.



FILM AND TELEVISION GETS A NEW STUDIO

Department chair calls the move “a complete game-changer”

By STEVE HOLT

Since 2015, COM’s film and television production courses have taken place at its 2,900-square-foot studio at 300 Babcock St. In a relocation that department chair Craig H. Shepherd compares to moving from an elementary school football field to an NFL stadium, that studio will soon have a new home at 808 Commonwealth Ave., upstairs from the Howard Thurman Center for Common Ground. Shepherd says the new facility, which will be on the building’s fifth floor, will house studios for cinematography and directing. The move and renovation will cost roughly \$3.5 million and serve a growing film and television program. They follow a \$500,000 investment in equipment and renovations at Studio West, which primarily serves BUTV.

Shepherd inspected the Comm Ave space in summer 2024, when it was still filled with debris, including a Model T

car—perhaps a remnant of the building’s history as a car dealership. “But I saw a barren, open space that would be gutted and bespoke for the film and television department,” he says. “I also saw the ability, because the space is so large, to prep it for future technologies we don’t even know about.”

Construction is underway with the goal of having the space ready for the fall 2025 semester. Shepherd says the new studio, which he calls “a complete game-changer,” will be the hub of COM’s film and television production activity.

“I see it as the home for the students to not only have the appropriate studio space and technical equipment to create, but also a collaboration hub,” Shepherd says. “Because this art form is completely a collaborative art form—where there’s common spaces, where cinematographers can talk to directors,

can talk to producers, can talk to actors. That’s where the best ideas are generated from.”

Shepherd was tapped to take over the film and television department in September 2024. He’s said he aims to make an already good program even better. In the *Hollywood Reporter’s* 2024 rankings of America’s top film schools, BU came in at No. 18. A larger, state-of-the-art studio space—which will be closer to what graduates encounter when they enter the industry—will serve as its own recruiting tool for talented new students, he says.

“It’s like being in [Willy Wonka’s] chocolate factory, like walking into a fantasy land,” he says. “You just say, this could be all at your disposal, and you have the ability to use this space as you grow your career as a television, film and content maker. It’s inspiration, right off the bat.”

QUOTABLE MOMENT



“At the highest levels, [AI] has really democratized the creative development process.”

CHRIS LEE,
senior lecturer, advertising, during
COM's online panel “How AI Is
Changing the Media Industry”

NEW HIRES

FILM & TELEVISION

Craig Shepherd, chair and professor of the practice
Deepak Rauniyar, associate professor of the practice
Alan Wu, assistant professor
Aaron Walker, master lecturer

JOURNALISM

Steve Greenlee, professor of the practice

MASS COMMUNICATION, ADVERTISING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Sung-Un Yang, chair and professor
Mike Davis, associate professor
Juwon Hwang, assistant professor
Ayşe Lokmanoglu, assistant professor
Ejae Lee, assistant professor
Cen Yue, assistant professor



An ambitious initiative from the journalism department will bolster community news outlets across New England while giving students real-world reporting experience.

“There are really three goals for this program. One is to provide journalism to these outlets that desperately need it,” says Steve Greenlee, a professor of the practice of journalism. “Two is to get clips for students who need them in order to get jobs and internships. Three is to sharpen their skills even more.”

Greenlee, formerly executive editor of the *Portland Press Herald* and before that an editor at the *Boston Globe*, was hired to run the application-only class. Students in JO 400, called The Newsroom, will be paired with primarily nonprofit news outlets and will report and write stories that will be edited by Greenlee before being sent to the partner outlets for publication online or in print.

Amid the massive upheaval in the news industry—“the corporate-owned chains of the world have hollowed out journalism in so many places,” Greenlee says—one bright spot has been the emergence of grassroots efforts to provide citizens with reliable sources of news and information.

“Almost every community has one now or is trying to put one together, and they’re desperate for quality journalism,” says Brian McGrory, journalism department chair and a professor of the practice, who conceived the program.

“We hope to get some great energy and great stories,” says Ellen Clegg, cofounder, steering committee member and editorial advisor for the nonprofit *Brookline.News*. That site was founded by a group of residents in 2022 after the Gannett chain shut down the weekly *Brookline Tab*. It has two full-time employees and a part-timer who produce a website and a weekly newsletter, aided by freelance writers and photographers. They’re funded by grants and local donations.

“Classroom efforts and news labs like this are a critical part of filling in the gaps in the news landscape left by digital disruption and corporate chain consolidation,” says Clegg.

McGrory and Greenlee plan to expand the BU program to several classes next fall, and an additional lecturer-level faculty member will be hired to help Greenlee run it. “Ultimately we hope to build the graduate program around the newsroom and possibly even launch a news site in an underserved Boston neighborhood or community,” Greenlee wrote in a vision statement for the project. /

COM/MENDATIONS

Blue Chip grads, award-winning ads, DEI leaders and a film named *Bob* were 2023–24 highlights

ADVERTISING

A campaign created by COM students for Fanta won three prizes at the Young Ones advertising awards in New York City. The campaign, “Fanta Slurp Juice,” by advertising graduate students **Kairen Shi ('24)** and **Iraj Chaudhry ('24)**, earned the coveted top Gold Pencil award in the gaming category, silver in the experiential and immersive category, and bronze for integrated campaigns. “I Wanna,” another project for Fanta, by **Ethan Chandler ('25)**, **Polina Silkina ('25, CAS'25)** and **Drew Demeterio (CFA'24)**, received a merit award in the integrated campaign category. “Make it Peanut Better” for Teddie Peanut Butter, a design project by **Maria Paula Arizabaleta ('24)**, received a merit award in the brand/communication design: rebranding category. The honors propelled BU to number 12 in the Global Creative College Rankings, as tallied by The One Club for Creativity.

FILM & TELEVISION

Bob, an understated film about a young Chinese immigrant boy who feels abandoned when his mother wants to enroll him in boarding school, practically swept the 44th annual Redstone Film Festival, held in April 2024. Written and directed by MFA screenwriting graduate student **Tian Yu Du ('24)**, the short film took home best film and most of the technical awards. Here are the festival's winners: best picture: *Bob*, written and directed by Yu Du and produced by **Jessica Yijie Chen ('23)**; best screenplay: *Bob*, written by Yu Du; best cinematography: *Bob*, cinematography by **Raphael Edwards ('23, CAS'23, Sargent'23)**; best editing: *Bob*, edited by Edwards and Yu Du; best production design: *Bob*, production designer **Emily Ma ('23, CAS'23)**; best actor: **May Hong**, for *Bob*; best sound design: *Lock Jaw*, sound designer **Max Tanzer ('23)**; audience award: *Bob*; alumni short film: *Chameleon Corridors*, produced by **David Grober ('73)**, written by **Jigar Ganatra**; Film and Television Studies Award for Innovative Scholarship: **Lindsay Gould ('24)**, *Disney from Home: The Consumerist Spectacle of the Disney Episode*, and **Xinkai Sun ('24)**, *Madame Satō: Queer Disidentification and Performance*; Fleder-Rosenberg Screenplay Contest (short film): **Sifr Dimachkie ('24)**, *Khosgelam*; Fleder-Rosenberg Screenplay Contest (feature film): Dimachkie, *Leather Beat*; Sumner Redstone Television Pilot Contest (Half Hour): **Nell Ovitt ('23)**, *Strange Women*; Sumner Redstone Television Pilot Contest (One Hour): **Robert Felton ('23)**, *The Price of Angel Wings*; Adrienne Shelly Foundation Script-to-Film Award: **Daniela Arguedas ('25)**, *Blueberries*.



Kairen Shi and Iraj Chaudhry celebrate their win at the Young Ones ceremony in New York City.



Emily Ma (left) and Jessica Yijie Chen show off *Bob*'s Redstone awards.

COM/MENDATIONS

COM student work earned top honors in four categories at the annual Student Production Awards, sponsored by the Boston/New England chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. *In Omnia Paratus*, produced by COM's Real World Productions, was named the best college/university short-form fiction film: **Rayhan Bhamani (CGS'22, COM'24)**, producer; **Zayan Farhat ('24)**, writer and associate producer; **Anxin Chen (CGS'22, COM'24, CAS'24)**, director; **Rich Gbessi ('24)**, director of photography; **Michelle Lee ('24)**, editors and assistant directors of photography; **Sheila Sitomer**, faculty advisor. *Urbanity Dance* by Real World Productions was named the best college/university commercial: **Sophia Daniluk ('23)**, producer; **Yixi Zhou ('24)**, writer and associate producer; **Suha Chung ('23)**, director; **Bryan Yeh ('23)**, cinematographer; **Lining Bao ('23, CAS'23)**, editor and assistant camera; Sitomer, faculty advisor. *Our Times: Special Episode: The Arts* won for best college/university magazine program: **Zoe Zekos (CGS'21, COM'23)**, producer, director, videographer and editor. *Terrier Nation Spring Sports Update*, produced by BUTV, won best college/university sports program: **Hui-En Lin ('24)** and **Jo-Wei Lin ('25)**, producers; **Lex Garguilo ('24)**, director; **Allison Dewitt ('24)**, **Monet Ota ('25)**, **Belle Fraser ('24)**, **James Ninneman ('26)**, **Mason Jablonsky ('26)**, **Jessica Lam (CGS'22, COM'24)**, **Kyle Finn ('24)**, **Bobby Serafin ('25)** and **Tyler Davis ('26)**, analysts; **Adam Boyajy ('04)**, station manager and faculty advisor; **Tina McDuffie**, faculty advisor. BU students also received five honorable mentions, in the college/university live broadcast, newscast, video essay and arts/entertaining/cultural affairs categories.

JOURNALISM

Matthew Eadie (CGS'23, COM'24) and **Jesús Marrero Suárez ('24)** were recognized with the Jerome A. Nachman Writing Award, presented for the quality of their writing as journalism students. Each award comes with a \$5,000 prize to help recipients pursue their writing careers.

Taylor Coester ('24) won Best in Show and the top prizes in the news and story categories at the annual Boston Press Photographers Association's contest for college photographers. **Eadie** took home first place in the portrait category, and **Emma Hagert ('24)** won first place in the video category. BU student photographers won 18 out of 26 awards. Coester also received an honorable mention in news, third place and honorable mention in the portrait category, second and third place in story. **Andrew Burke-Stevenson ('26)** received second place in news and first, second and third place in the feature category. **Madi Koesler ('24)** received third place in news. **Clare Ong ('25)** received two honorable mentions in feature, and **Mingkun Gao ('25)** received second place in video.



Clockwise from top right: Dean Baquet and Brian McGrory; Brooke Williams and Jesús Marrero Suárez; COM's 2024 Blue Chip honorees.

Dean Baquet and **Emily Feng** received the 2024 Hugo Shong Awards, presented by the Department of Journalism and named after award-winning journalist and BU trustee Hugo Shong ('87). Baquet, who was the executive editor of the *New York Times* from 2014 to 2022, received the Hugo Shong Lifetime Journalism Achievement Award. Feng received the Hugo Shong Reporting on Asia Award.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

COM was honored as one of the 20 best schools for public relations—and the only one in New England—on *PRNEWS'* 2024 Education A-List.

COM-WIDE

Seventeen seniors were presented with a 2024 Blue Chip Award, the most prestigious honor for undergraduate students at COM: **Taylor Brokesh ('24)**, **Alanis Broussard ('24)**, **Amanda Brown (CGS'22, COM'24)**, **Yadira Cabrera ('24)**, **Mary Corbin ('24, CFA'24)**, **Christine Jiaqi An (CGS'22, COM'24, Pardee'24)**, **Sarah Klein ('24)**, **Victoria Lee (COM'24, CAS'24)**,



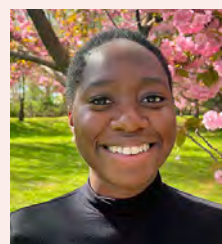
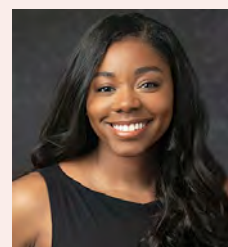
Taylor Coester's photograph of a pro-Palestinian march won Best in Show from the Boston Press Photographers Association.

Emma Longo ('24), James McSweeney ('24), Charles Moore ('24), Katarina Quach ('24), Mia Parker ('24), Chloe Patel ('24), Alex Shores ('24, Sargent'24), Sara Weinberg ('24) and Amanda Wu (CGS'22, COM'24, Pardee'24).

Rafeeat Bishi ('24), Alanis Broussard ('24), Quach and Eliza Yang ('24) received the 2024 Erin Victoria Edwards Award for Leadership Excellence in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, presented by COM's DEI Committee to COM seniors and graduate students for demonstrating strong leadership in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion.

Adam Lapidus and A. Sherrod Blakely received this year's top faculty awards from COM. Lapidus, an assistant professor of film and television, is the recipient of this year's Becker Family Teacher-of-the-Year Award, considered the highest honor presented by COM to its professors. The award was established in memory of the late David Brudnoy, a legend in Boston broadcasting and a professor at COM. Blakely, an associate professor of the practice of journalism, is the recipient of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Student Advising Award, nominated by COM students for excellence in student advising. //

The 2024 recipients of the Erin Victoria Edwards Award for Leadership Excellence in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion were (clockwise from top left) Kat Quach, Alanis Broussard, Eliza Yang and Rafeeat Bishi.





GOOM'S NEW WAVE

**CONVERSATIONS WITH FOUR DEPARTMENT HEADS ABOUT THEIR
BIGGEST GOALS AND GREATEST FEARS FOR THEIR INDUSTRIES**

By MARA SASSOON
Illustrations by PADDY MILLS

It's a transformative time at 640 Commonwealth Ave.

Since spring 2023, COM has welcomed a new wave of leaders, bringing with them a wealth of industry and academic experience: Brian McGrory, chair of journalism; Sung-Un Yang, chair of mass communication, advertising and public relations; Craig H. Shepherd, chair of film and television; and Betsi Grabe, director of the emerging media studies division.

McGrory brings his expertise from 34 years at the *Boston Globe*, the last 10 as the paper's editor. Yang, who comes from the Indiana University Media School, is an expert in public perceptions of corporations. Shepherd is a veteran of the film and television industries, having spent more than two decades as a producer. Grabe, who also comes from Indiana University, worked for South Africa's state-controlled TV under apartheid, an experience that inspired her research in media, technology and disinformation.

COM/365 spoke with each about their goals, fears and visions for their fields. »



BRIAN MCGRORY **Chair, Journalism**

What are some of your top goals as journalism chair?

The industry is changing incredibly fast and getting more challenging by the day. I want to make sure that we are as updated as possible, giving our students the right tools and the right education to step into the industry and really thrive. A big part of that is building a newsroom here at BU that will give our journalists on-the-ground training. We are also aiming to send our journalism to this huge rising class of nonprofit news organizations. There are these small, nonprofit digital native news sites that are popping up all over New England and all over the country. We've hired a founding editor for the newsroom, Steve Greenlee [professor of the practice of journalism], the former editor of the *Portland Press Herald* (see page 8).

What are the greatest challenges facing journalism?

One of the most important issues that we face is the future of democracy, but in journalism, we're also facing a crisis of sustainability. The business models that supported us for the better part of forever are now profoundly broken, and I would like COM to be at the very core of figuring out what kind of business models might work and how we make them work.

How do you see journalism as an academic field evolving?

I wrestle with this all the time because it is such a challenging industry. I'm not going to sit here and tell you it's all balloons and bunnies. It's not. But the need is there. People need high-quality information more than they've ever needed it. If we don't have high-quality journalists coming out of journalism schools, it's going to be profoundly damaging to the future of our democracy. It's part of the job of a great university, like BU, to try to help the industry figure out what works and what doesn't.

SUNG-UN YANG

Chair, Mass Communication, Advertising & Public Relations

What is your vision for the future of your department?

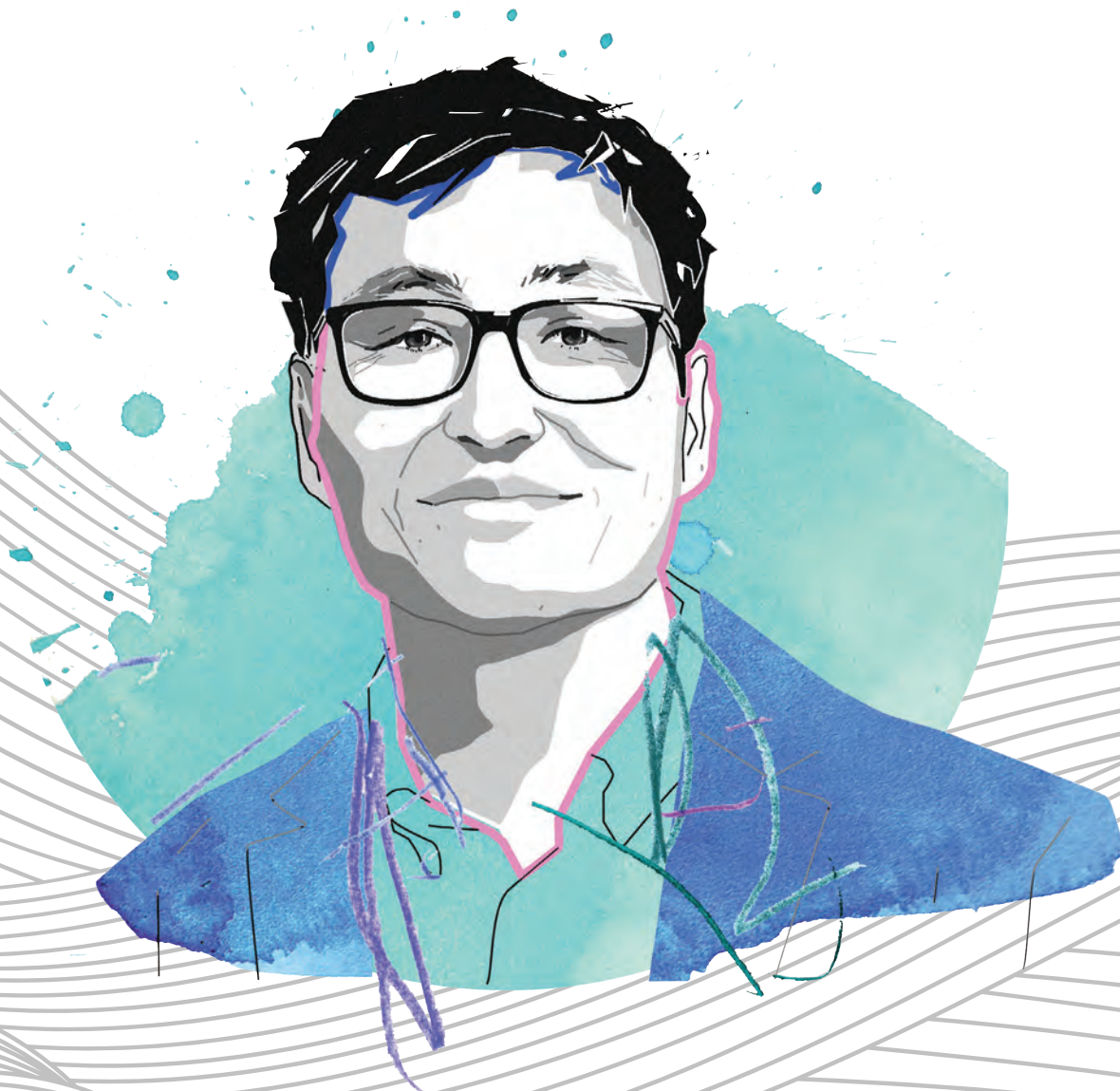
I want to bring advertising, media science and PR together. So advertising meets public relations, and then advertising and public relations meet media science in terms of analytics and audience analysis. It's getting harder and harder to find audiences, and even if we find audiences, it's a question of how to make them engaged with the content. I see combining the mass communication and media science skill sets on analytics or data-driven approaches, and the film and television or journalism department's input on storytelling—multi-media storytelling meets strategic thinking from advertising and public relations.

What keeps you up at night?

Generative AI. The greatest challenge is how this ever-evolving communication technology will help us or interfere with our work. I was recently speaking with someone who told me that, historically, it took a team of three or four people a week or more to create a really great website. With AI, a single person can create one in a single day. For many communication agencies, which are the outlets for our students after graduation, the billables will be reduced as AI and other technology will streamline processes. That means a lot less need for entry-level work.

On the other hand, what is one of the biggest opportunities in the field?

Everything has two sides, right? In addition to AI, another challenge is audience engagement—but there is also opportunity with that. Audiences are getting more fragmented with different kinds of personal and social media. I think we have passed the era of mass communication—we are living in the time of personal social communication. That being said, it's getting harder to find audiences and engage them, as they are inundated with content. I think those who are able to find a way to do so will be distinguished.



CRAIG H. SHEPHERD

Chair, Film & Television

What inspired you to join COM?

I've been a producer for 25-plus years, and I found I enjoyed talking about the business, from specifics about negotiating network deals and contracts to inventive distribution scenarios to the nuances of implementing creative vision. It is important to me to impart this knowledge on younger people so that they can be much more advanced by the time they enter the workforce.

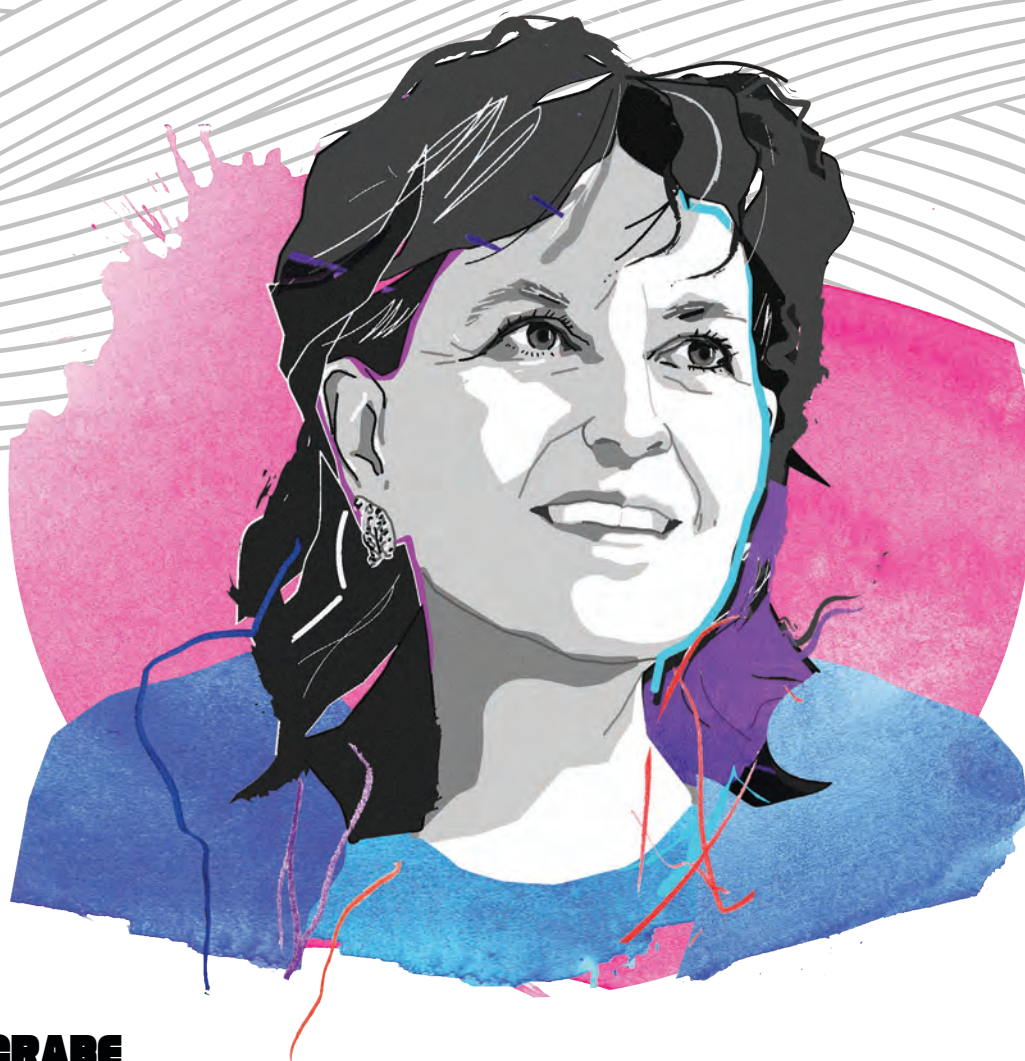
What are some of your top goals as chair?

One is exposing students to what the content landscape looks like, because it's changing quickly. Additionally, I want to ensure that students acquire a comprehensive skill set, encompassing directing, shooting, editing and writing. While the methods of distributing stories are undergoing significant transformations, the fundamental ability to craft compelling narratives remains paramount. Finally, I want to instruct students on how to navigate professional environments effectively. The pandemic impacted interpersonal skills, and I believe it's vital to equip students with the tools to interact confidently and successfully in office settings and on production sets.

What are some of the challenges that film and television face, both in general and as a field of academic study?

Things are moving at light speed. There are consolidations of big streaming services, there are massive layoffs, there is just so much content out there. Usually things are cyclical, but now I think people are questioning what the endgame is. There's always going to be the need for content and good storytelling, that's for sure, but people's viewing habits between streaming and basic cable are erratic, and their attention spans are very short. Also, AI is here. I think it's going to disrupt some potential jobs. There won't be the need to have 50 or 60 people doing this one task. But it's imperative that human creativity remains at the core of the industry. There is a shift occurring and we need to make sure that students understand and handle AI responsibly.





BETSI GRADE **Director, Emerging Media Studies**

What inspired you to join COM?

Emerging Media Studies is unique in that it focuses on the ever-changing dynamics of the information ecosystem. There are few graduate programs in the communication discipline with such a narrow and forward-looking focus that's at the same time committed to interdisciplinary work. It is truly inspiring to be part of such an agile program that trains future media scholars and practitioners.

What is the biggest challenge in your field right now?

AI—for sure. On a pedagogical level, faculty are confronted with the transition into teaching students to use AI to write and conduct research. According to industry sources, there is high demand for people who are trained to use AI responsibly and ethically. My sense is that AI will soon be a widely used tool, very much like we adopted other new and sometimes controversial tools, like Photoshop. On the research level, AI demands inquiry, which we are tackling from multiple perspectives and with an assortment of methodologies. There is pressing need for reliable answers to things like how AI affects information integrity, if it should be regulated, and to what extent and to what end humans can benefit from AI. It holds substantial promise if we figure out how to use it responsibly.

What are the greatest opportunities in Emerging Media Studies?

Faculty and graduate students are collaborating to understand the psychological and sociological effects of AI for individuals and society. Here is a good example: James Katz, the Feld Professor of Emerging Media Studies, is organizing an international conference with BU's Center for the Humanities for spring 2025. This two-day conference will bring together computer scientists, media theorists, philosophers and historians from around the world to grapple with complex questions related to AI. The goal is to come up with actionable recommendations for a more ethical and equitable future. /

REEL DIV

**BLACKBOX, A
STUDENT-RUN
FILM SOCIETY
AND FESTIVAL,
CREATES
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR BLACK
FILMMAKERS
AT BU AND
BEYOND**

By MARC CHALUFOUR
Photo By JANICE CHECCHIO

*Lynn Asare-Bediako (left) and Lydia Evans founded
BlackBox in 2023.*

IVERSITY



LYNN ASARE-BEDIAKO STOOD BEFORE AN AUDIENCE OF ABOUT 100 AT BROOKLINE'S COOLIDGE CORNER THEATRE IN SEPTEMBER 2024 AND PROUDLY WELCOMED THEM TO THE SECOND ANNUAL BLACKBOX FILM FESTIVAL.

The event featured work by Black student filmmakers from up and down the East Coast, from BU to the University of Florida, and Asare-Bediako, cofounder of the festival, offered a powerful introduction to their films. "Black voices are formidable, they're vital, they're beautiful, and, most of all, they're undeniable," she said. Referencing the many roadblocks that aspiring Black filmmakers face, she then paraphrased the rapper Kendrick Lamar: "Life will put many red lights in front of you, but sometimes you must push on the gas and trust God—and tonight, we're pushing on the gas."

The festival's 10 short films were funny, sad, touching and shocking. A claymation short ended with a surprising joke. A tense black-and-white drama presented a dark take on artificial intelligence. And the final film, about an uncomfortable parent-teacher meeting, ended with a plot twist that left audience members gasping and cheering.

BlackBox is a Black film society, established in 2023 by Asare-Bediako ('25) and Lydia Evans ('25), and the festival is their biggest event. The classmates wanted to create a space to share ideas, develop skills and network outside the classroom, where they haven't always been comfortable being their full selves. "I really wanted to make a club with Black voices and Black stories at the forefront, both in front of and behind the camera," Asare-Bediako says. »



organizes an annual people of color casting session, timed with the start of film projects for the college's advanced production courses.

The efforts are already paying off, the founders say. They've noticed more people of color in classes and on-screen. "You can see the difference in student films, before and after," Evans says. "It's cool that we have more space here now that BlackBox is a club."

THE PRODUCERS

In spring 2024, BlackBox launched a club-supported film project. "The idea was that all of the heads would be Black people—Black director, Black producers, Black cinematographer," says Evans. The club put out a call for pitches and chose an idea from club member Chanel Holguin. BlackBox financed the film, and members of the executive board filled the crew.

"When you're a film major and you're around people who have a lot more experience, it can be really scary to even want to join those places or to take certain classes," says Evans. That, she adds, creates "an endless loop where, if you don't have experience, people don't want you on their crew, but then you can't get experience."

Holguin ('27) had joined BlackBox her first semester at COM and appreciated the community it provided. But she had never written a script or directed a film. "You're putting yourself out there. It's a very vulnerable process," she says.

BUILDING A BLACK SPACE

A film and television major, Asare-Bediako was accustomed to being one of the only people of color in class and on set. "When I pitched ideas that pertained to my experience as a Black woman, there was always a lot of explaining that had to be done," she says. She attended COM's 2022 Black Media Symposium and heard alumni talk about student clubs they'd participated in—but there was no film club where Black experiences might be better understood.

So she created one.

Lack of diversity in film and television isn't a problem unique to COM, higher education—or Hollywood. In the 96-year history of the Academy Awards, no Black filmmaker has won an Oscar for directing, cinematography or editing. Few have even received a nomination—in part because so few have filled those roles. A 2021 McKinsey & Company study found that fewer than 6 percent of the producers, writers and directors of US films were Black. Compounding the situation, Black talent was often shut out of projects unless a Black person held a senior role. For example, less than 1 percent of projects without a Black director had a Black writer.

Asare-Bediako shared her club idea with classmate Lydia Evans. "My first thought was that it was necessary," says Evans. "Most of the stuff I've worked on, there weren't many Black people. It can feel a bit isolating."

They asked Tunji Akinsehinwa, an associate professor of the practice of production in film and TV and cinematography, to serve as a faculty advisor. They created an Instagram account and, in spring 2023, began holding events.

They host film screenings and organize cinematography, sound and writing workshops for Black students. They held their first film festival, for Boston-area students, in 2023 and opened up the second one to the entire East Coast in 2024. They've also established events that they hope will improve diverse representation across COM's film and television department. Akinsehinwa leads a series of workshops on how to properly light dark skin tones, and BlackBox

The seniors hosted the second BlackBox Film Festival at the Coolidge Corner Theatre in September 2024.



Her film, *Estranged*, tells the story of a middle-aged woman celebrating her daughter's birthday while struggling with memories of a sister who had died at the same age. It's based on the experiences of someone Holguin knows. Balancing her vision for the personal story with feedback from others was a new challenge, but the club made it possible, she says. "Having solid people there I knew I could trust is what really allowed this to flourish. I'm forever grateful to Lynn and Lydia because they put trust in me."

Holguin finished editing *Estranged* in October 2024 and premiered it in December. As she works her way toward COM's upper-level production classes, she has a newfound confidence. "It's everything to me. I know that I can do it. I know that I'm capable of it."

Evans, who served as an executive director on the film alongside Asare-Bediako, agrees. "BlackBox and the projects I've worked on have made me feel more confident in myself as a filmmaker and have taught me that you don't have to be accepted for your experience to be valid," she says. "I feel less of a need to make myself smaller or to fit in. I feel I can just exist."

READY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

After the applause died down and the theater lights came up at the Coolidge Corner Theatre in September 2024, Akinsehinwa

thanked the audience. "Festivals like this [give] Black filmmakers the chance to showcase their work, their identity, and share their experience of the world," he said. Then he pivoted to a row of eight Black women in the front of the theater—the club's executive board. "[We're here] because of the remarkable young women who got together almost two years ago to create something that would provide a better understanding of the lived experience of Black filmmakers," he said, prompting more cheers.

Asare-Bediako and Evans say the two film festivals have been the highlight of the past two years. They've enjoyed seeing the reactions of the filmmakers who, in many cases, are sharing their work publicly for the first time. "When it comes to student films, you don't always get to have a big audience," Asare-Bediako says. "To have that for Black filmmakers was a really great experience."

Akinsehinwa has pushed his students to think big about the club and festival—to grow them while also making them sustainable. Holguin has already agreed to step up as the next club president. The college has been consistently supportive of BlackBox. "Everything we've asked for, we've gotten," Asare-Bediako says.

Although she won't be around to meet them, Asare-Bediako has a message for the next generation of COM students: "If you're Black and interested in filmmaking or in cinema, there is a space for you." /



“WHEN IT COMES TO STUDENT FILMS, YOU DON'T ALWAYS GET TO HAVE A BIG AUDIENCE. TO HAVE THAT FOR BLACK FILMMAKERS WAS A REALLY GREAT EXPERIENCE.”

—LYNN ASARE-BEDIAKO

THE NEW

WEBER SHANDWICK EXEC KELLY SULLIVAN
IS EXCITED ABOUT AI AND IS SHAPING
HOW ORGANIZATIONS USE IT

By MARC CHALUFOUR
Photos by Chris Sorensen

THOUGHT

Kelly Sullivan is an artificial intelligence evangelist.

Two years after ChatGPT made generative AI publicly accessible, she's helping organizations put what she calls "the ultimate technology disruption" to work. "I get real excited about this," she says at the start of a recent interview. "You might have to tell me to rein it in."

Sullivan ('94,'96), an executive vice president at the global communications agency Weber Shandwick, works in a division called Futures. The self-proclaimed "AI accelerator" has simplified a Fortune 500 company's cumbersome access to business intelligence by designing a bot that employees access through Microsoft Teams. They've built a "sandbox" to safely experiment with generative AI tools without training public AI models. And their narrative intelligence tools analyze how information and misinformation spread through networks—and who, or what, is doing that spreading.

"There's no shortage of people pontificating about whether generative AI is going to ruin the world or be our savior. Everybody's talking about that," Sullivan says. "And they're important conversations. Our charter is to dig into the platforms, to understand what they mean for our work, and ultimately, the future of comms." She spoke with *COM/365* about why the present and future of generative AI excite her.



LEADER

Kelly Sullivan and Weber Shandwick's Futures team help clients navigate technology disruption. "It's never been a more exciting time to do what we do," she says.



COM/365: What's the history of the Futures team?

Kelly Sullivan: When our chief innovation officer asked me to partner with him on this about five years ago, to help leaders decode tech-fueled media change, I jumped at the chance. Our charter is to help our clients—whether you're a healthcare innovator or a global nonprofit or a consumer brand—to think about navigating technology disruption. It wasn't originally the intent to focus on AI. But we realized that it was supercharging everything in our orbit—media fragmentation, new influence, immersive experiences. Technology disrupting communications isn't new, but this time it's much faster, it's much more existential. So it's never been a more exciting time to do what we do.

How does Futures fit into Weber Shandwick?

We're a media lab that's all about clients. This is not a group of people researching cool stuff and trying new tools for the sake of it. We are all about the applications and implications of generative AI. Some clients will come to us and say, "We don't understand what generative AI means to our busi-

ness. Can you help?" But others are saying, "I have a problem with x. What do you think we should do?" How do we figure out what's keeping a client up at night, and how do we fix it? That's kind of our jam.

So you were thinking about AI even before ChatGPT went public in 2022?

Yes. For us, that moment was awesome because it took a conversation that may have been more on the fringes and really put it front and center. It has been quite a whirlwind in the last two years.

What do you say to someone who's hesitant to use generative AI?

I totally get it. I used to feel that way. There are important things we all must be vigilant about—ethical use and confidentiality are just a couple. Once you get into the platforms, when you see how important it is to get the prompts sharp, how important your own perspective is to generating meaningful outputs, when you realize that the value comes from having an exchange with the platforms versus a transaction, it changes everything. It continues to

amaze me—the impact and the possibilities and the new applications that we’re just starting to realize.

What sort of requests do you get from clients?

When we started Futures, the questions were surprisingly consistent. How do I orient to this overwhelming thing? How do I help a team think about this totally new vector in the work that we do? How do I make the work better today? Over the last six to eight months, the questions have started to get sharper. Clients might ask us to upskill their whole staff, to help them apply AI tools to their strategic comms works. That’s particularly interesting, because it’s not so much a technology problem as a culture problem. They’re also asking about things like machine readability. What happens when people don’t have Google open as much on their desktop? What happens when people are going to LLMs [large language models] versus search engines?

“Understanding what makes something go from zero to zeitgeist is really interesting.”

Do you have a favorite project you’ve worked on?

One project our Mexico colleagues led that I just love was for a news organization called *Animal Politico*. They wanted to raise awareness about mis- and disinformation during an election cycle. They thought, “We have a moment to do this in a way that will stand out.” So they created a fact checker. Anyone could throw a story in and it would tell them if it was true or false, using AI. If the system said the story was false, it went to a team of designers who used MidJourney [an AI art tool] to create incredibly visceral images that they posted in a Gallery of Lies. This was a really powerful way to help people understand what’s true and what’s false by creating an unmissable moment that people couldn’t turn away from.

How do you help clients navigate the ethics of AI usage?

It’s a huge part of what we do. This is a major change for how we do things and how clients do things. It’s one

of the reasons we don’t use just one platform. We want to be constantly looking at how everyone is revisiting their guidelines and protocols to make sure everything we do is returning the most ethical results and we’re not falling prey to bias that can exist in systems. We have brought on some partners with specific expertise to help us dig into that.

How do you use AI in your workday?

I use ChatGPT as a thought partner. For example, “Here’s something that I just wrote—the audience is this, here’s what I’m trying to convey, What points am I missing?” I never use exactly what comes out, but it helps me think. I’m also regularly experimenting with new agents. The latest mindblower? NotebookLM. Have you tried the podcast generator? Wow. It’s glitchy, but it certainly gets you thinking about what’s possible.

Sometimes I’m running from meeting to meeting and I’m stuck. What ChatGPT produces is 80 percent crap, but it’s something to respond to. Sometimes responding to, as opposed to initiating, can really help get my brain moving.

In education, there’s a tension between the value of learning to use AI tools and the opportunities they create to cheat. Is there a balance to strike?

We’re all still figuring this out—and, for sure, there is a balance to be found. AI absolutely changes the learning dynamic, and I think we’re going to have to figure out how to help students use the tools in ways that help them learn. I believe there are many opportunities to use generative AI to expand our opinions and perspectives as opposed to replacing them.

We have a Futures Fellows program that’s open to college students, graduate students and recent grads. Last summer, they all came to this role with what we started calling the “electric fence perspective” on generative AI. One fellow went to journalism school and was told, “If you use it, it’s plagiarism.” Another was advised they could use it in one class but not in another. Overwhelmingly, they were told, “Stay away!” But in the professional business universe, it’s not just acceptable, it’s increasingly expected that you’ll use gen AI to fuel your work—and do so strategically and ethically. So, indeed, the balance is TBD.

What’s on the horizon?

There’s lots cooking. One thing that’s exciting is the work around narrative intelligence. That is understanding how a topic or a conversation is advancing through information networks and who is driving that. Are they people? Are they bots? Are they of a particular political party? Understanding what makes something go from zero to zeitgeist is really interesting. /

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

why we swipe



FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO ONLINE DATING TO SEXTING, KATHRYN CODUTO RESEARCHES WHY
AND HOW WE USE APPS AND THE INTERNET TO CONNECT WITH ONE ANOTHER

By STEVE HOLT



When dating apps like Tinder and Bumble were gaining popularity in the mid-2010s, Katy Coduto was not that impressed.

“I always had a hard time taking them seriously,” says Coduto, an assistant professor of media science who was working as a researcher for an advertising agency at the time. “There was an element of novelty, and it still felt kind of like a game.”

Coduto had played around with the apps but says she “never did anything serious with them.” So when a friend downloaded the apps and started swiping nonstop in an effort to find a long-term partner, the researcher in Coduto was mesmerized. “There were times when I would watch him swipe or watch him try and figure out who he would be interested in,” she recalls. “I remember being so intrigued by how deep that thought process was. And I felt like I was watching someone learn this new technology, or apply things they knew about dating to a new technology. That’s really where things started to click.”

Coduto wanted to study not only online dating, but how people are integrating technology into their lives more broadly as a way to connect with others—sometimes compulsively. She’s researched why people stream music rather than buy CDs, send sexually explicit texts and photos, and choose to look for in-person romantic relationships using dating apps. She’s even studied people’s use of social media during ongoing national news events—such as a splashy crime investigation or the January 6 insurrection—and dove into the world of Reddit support groups for families of QAnon conspiracy theorists.

Coduto is interested in what leads to compulsive online behavior.



“All of this technology is just fascinating and changes how people behave,” Coduto says. “A lot of my work is looking into how people use it, and specifically if they’re compulsive users. Whether it’s online dating, or Twitter, TikTok—I do think [these apps] have an element where they want you to stay on them. Most of my work in social media looks at what drives people to that ongoing, compulsive use.”

SOCIAL MEDIA SLEUTHS

When protesters stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, many Americans turned to social media rather than traditional news sources for information. Coduto—then on the faculty at South Dakota State University—wanted to understand why. Within 48 hours, she and her research partner sent surveys to hundreds of college students to measure their engagement with social media during the riot. They discovered that the majority of students had turned to social media channels because they didn’t trust traditional media for accurate and up-to-date information.

“There’s definitely been a shift in what people perceive as ‘good information’ or a valid source, which is scary,” she says, because many skip over legacy media sources in favor of voices they deem to be closer to the event as it happens.

Coduto and her colleague found that those who were checking social media compulsively during and just after January 6 were not doing so passively. They also posted their own thoughts and opinions about what was unfolding. Similarly, in a research paper that is under review, Coduto studied social media users who were compulsively following several crime investigations in 2023, including the murder of four University of Idaho students. Coduto spoke with social media users who did more than read about the cases; they also inserted themselves into the investigations by finding and commenting on the personal pages of both victims and alleged perpetrators. A number of these users told Coduto their obsession with following crime stories online was interfering with their jobs or schoolwork, affecting their mood, or leading them to feel like they needed to disconnect from social media. Coduto believes the true crime study may have implications for

Cydney Scott

public policy—particularly in response to the type of social media users in her study.

“Do we automatically make a victim’s social media private?” she offers. “Because once you start getting commenters flooding, whether they’re offering support or crazy theories, it becomes a lot harder for law enforcement to utilize that digital trail that’s been left.”

DIGITAL ROMANCE

Coduto happily admits that her favorite subject to research is all manner of online romance, from dating apps to sexting—the sending of explicit content over a text messaging app. The opportunity to study online dating compelled her to get her PhD after all.

She’s looked at online dating from several angles, including what happens when psychologically vulnerable people overuse the apps (it can increase anxiety, depression and loneliness) and frequency of pornography use among online daters (users seeking casual relationships view more of it).

In her most recent study, Coduto set out to define success in online dating. She asked 37 people a series of questions about their dating app use, then looked on while they swiped left and right, paying attention to what they appeared to be looking for in a partner. Generally speaking, online daters prefer to see lots of photos and longer descriptions in the profiles of potential matches, eventually use other messaging apps to communicate, and like to feel in control of the chats until trust is established. This can lead to some light hypocrisy at times: One woman Coduto observed kept declining matches with men whose bios were too short in her eyes—despite not having an extensive bio herself.

“One of the things with online dating—and I think it’s why I’ve always been so interested in it—is that it is ultimately a very personal, vulnerable activity that you’re putting a lot of faith in technology to assist you with,” Coduto says.

In speaking with online daters, Coduto began to hear from people—mostly women—saying that instead of getting date requests, they were being sent unsolicited explicit photos and messages. So Coduto set out to understand sexting, and what resulted was her first book, *Technology, Privacy, and Sexting: Mediated Sex* (Lexington, 2023). Before that, most of the academic work on sexting centered on the legal framework around the activity and tended to qualify sexting as a negative behavior. While Coduto has certainly observed negative examples of sexting—a lack of consent between parties, notably—she spoke with many people who’ve found it beneficial. “There’s a lot of reason to think that sexting can actually be really good, especially for people who are in committed relationships,” she says. “For some people, it’s a way to express themselves or express



**“Online dating...
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—KATHRYN CODUTO

desires that might feel initially uncomfortable in person. It’s great for people in long-distance relationships, whether that’s long-term or short-term.”

While Coduto says she’s observed an uptick in in-person modes of connection, like speed-dating and singles mixers, digital technologies promising to help people form connections in real life still saturate our culture. She’s found that people use social media, including dating apps, compulsively in part because they can’t stop thinking about them and what they might be missing out on or what they might see next.

“These platforms promise something new with every swipe or scroll,” she says. “In a way, I understand it, because that’s how I feel about my own research—what’s the next thing that will jump out and surprise me?” /

SHOOTING FOR THE STARS

*WITH HIS WHIMSICAL,
NATURAL STYLE, JEFF
LIPSKY HAS BECOME ONE
OF THE MOST TRUSTED
PHOTOGRAPHERS IN
HOLLYWOOD*

By MARC CHALUFOUR

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In

February 2012, Jeff Lipsky drove to Malibu, Calif., to photograph actor Sharon Stone. He brought a truckload of lighting equipment, but as he looked at the weather and surveyed the surroundings, he decided to rely on the sun instead. As an assistant splashed some light onto the star of *Basic Instinct* and *Casino* using a small reflector, Stone snapped, “You’re not lighting me with that!”

“She’s scary,” Lipsky says. But he pushed back. Nothing in his truck could create a nicer light than that day’s sun, he explained. “You need to trust me,” he said. “And she said OK.”

The story highlights two reasons Lipsky (CGS’86, COM’88) has become one of the most trusted and sought-after photographers in Hollywood: He’s able to put some of the world’s most famous and camera-weary subjects at ease, and he consistently creates stunning portraits. His photos of Stone blend the earthy tones of her shirt and sweater with the sunlight to create a golden glow.

If you’ve waited in a grocery checkout line or visited a movie theater in the past 20 years, you’ve seen Lipsky’s work. His celebrity and lifestyle photography has appeared in *Vogue*, *Esquire*, *Outside* and *Vanity Fair*. He’s shot Banana Republic campaigns and blockbuster movie posters. He’s photographed Kevin Hart, Brad Pitt and Taylor Swift.

Recent projects include photographing singer Michael Bublé for *People* and actor Rebel Wilson for the *Sunday Times Magazine*. He photographed football star Travis Kelce for a flu and COVID vaccine ad. He’s in the process of collecting his photos into a book about natural light.

“I always loved looking through magazines,” Lipsky says. “And my photo heroes were all portrait and lifestyle photographers—Herb Ritts, Richard Avedon, Gordon Parks, Bruce Weber and Annie Leibovitz.”

Lipsky has taken hundreds of thousands of photos. Millions, probably. Only a select few make it into print. Here are four photo shoots that helped to shape his style and define his career.

DARYL HANNAH

Although Lipsky received a Nikon camera as a Bar Mitzvah gift—he developed his film in the family bathroom—his path to professional photography was long and circuitous. He studied advertising at COM and imagined a career with a New York City agency. But first, he wanted to go skiing.

After graduation, Lipsky drove to Telluride, Colo., where the chairlifts reach the edge of town and the slopes are open 200 days a year. He planned to ski for one season but stayed for 10. He gave snowboard lessons in the winter and led fly fishing trips in the summer.

Eventually, the ski bum began thinking about photography again. He got a job shooting for the Telluride newspaper and saved his tips from waiting tables to buy a high-end Hasselblad camera. And he began planning a leap into commercial and editorial photography, which meant moving to California and building his portfolio.

In 1998, a snowboarding client offered to help: “Daryl Hannah was kind enough to understand my plight,” he says. The star of *Splash* and *Wall Street* needed photographs for an upcoming profile in *The Sunday Times* and offered Lipsky the job. He’d begun assisting more established photographers in Los Angeles and was learning how to manage a complex shoot. For this project, there was no location scouting, no hair and makeup staff and no lights. He showed up at a ranch in Santa Ynez, Calif., with some black-and-white film stuffed into one pocket and color film in the other, and his new camera. “I barely knew how to load it,” he says.

What he did have, from years spent outdoors, was an eye for good light. And his goal for that day wasn’t much different from how he approaches celebrity shoots today. “I just wanted to capture her for who she was,” he says. With Hannah, that meant photographing her next to a horse paddock and in a barn. “She had a dirty T-shirt on and she was lying down in the stall, and the horse was just stepping all around her,” he says. “That’s who she is—she just is one with her animals.”

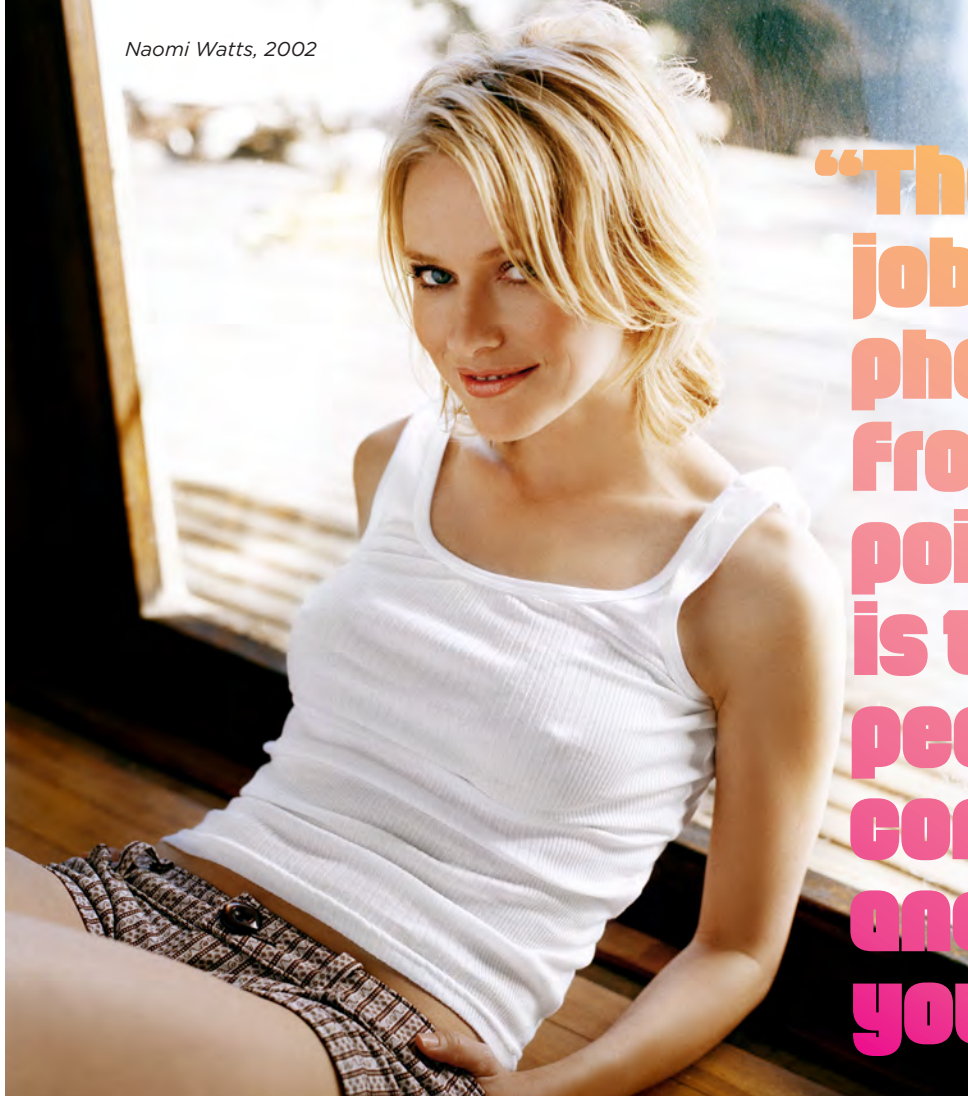
With the Hannah photos anchoring his portfolio, Lipsky began networking. One photo editor introduced him to another and, in 2002, he got his biggest assignment yet: a cover shoot with actors Paul Walker and Naomi Watts for *Premiere*, the now-defunct movie magazine.



Daryl Hannah, 1998

Jeff Lipsky (x3)

Naomi Watts, 2002



“The whole job of a photographer, from my point of view, is to make people feel comfortable and trust you.”

Paul Walker, 2002



2 PAUL WALKER & NAOMI WATTS

Premiere’s creative team gave Lipsky specific guidelines: He had to shoot Walker and Watts individually, on blue backgrounds, so the designers could create two covers for the 2003 “Sex & the Movies” issue. “I was nervous as hell and I never really liked the images,” Lipsky says.

With the images he shot for the magazine’s interior, he had more freedom. “I still hadn’t come into my own and figured out what my aesthetic was,” he says. But he did have the confidence to pack up his lights and take advantage of the beach house they had rented for the day. He photographed Watts leaning on a sun-splashed window and Walker driving a convertible.

“There’s a stigma about natural light in the photography world,” Lipsky says. “Some people think, ‘Oh, you don’t know how to light’ if you’re using natural light. But natural light is really hard to work with because of the timing.” To get the shot he wants, his subject has to be in the right place, at the right time, in the right weather conditions.

On that day in Malibu, Lipsky was establishing a style that has come to define his career—he just didn’t know it at the time. It’s bright and natural, and it’s a contrast from the way we typically see celebrities—as though he’s providing a genuine glimpse behind the costumes and makeup and special effects. “I looked back at that shoot and it has the same natural, organic vibe that I’m still doing today,” he says.



Jason Momoa, 2018

JASON MOMOA

For Lipsky, certain magazine assignments are significant benchmarks in his career. *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue* and the *ESPN* Body Issue were the places where he saw the work of photographers he admired, so they were the publications he strove to shoot for. “It was so superficial,” he says. “But it’s a validation of who you are as a photographer.”

As he made his way up to that level, he became more confident in his style—and how to achieve it. “Being a good photographer means you’re steering the ship. You want everything in your favor so that you can take better pictures,” Lipsky says. That means he’s scouting locations, choosing the wardrobe and picking his team, from assistants to hair stylists. Several weeks of preparation can go into a single shoot. But with all of those variables controlled, he can focus on the biggest challenge: getting his subjects to let their guard down.

“The whole job of a photographer, from my point of view, is to make people feel comfortable and trust you,” Lipsky says. “Without that trust, you don’t get good images.”

His fun-loving personality emerges in unexpected places. Visitors to his website can play a silly game, dragging and dropping various hats onto an image of Lipsky, experimenting with how he looks in fedoras and beanies and baseball caps. A portion of his Instagram account is devoted to lighthearted self-portraits that give the impression that Lipsky is levitating.

He says that getting some subjects comfortable is as simple as playing the right music. For others, he has to get more creative. When he got an assignment to photograph the notoriously camera shy John Cusack, Lipsky organized a barbecue in a friend’s backyard, set up some photo backdrops, and invited the actor over. “Let’s hang out and take pictures,” he told him.

In 2018, *Men’s Journal* asked Lipsky to photograph Jason Momoa in a pond. He resisted. “That was the last thing I wanted to do,” he says. He didn’t want to be forced into creating an awkward connection between the actor and his *Aquaman* character—he wanted to photograph the person behind the character. Lipsky moved the shoot to Momoa’s property, where he photographed the star throwing axes, rock climbing and gardening. “He was comfortable,” Lipsky says. “I got much more material than I would have gotten in the water. It’s one of my favorite covers.”

LADY GAGA

In 2017, Lipsky received a dream assignment: archival portrait photographer for the Academy Awards. From 2017 to 2019, he was a fixture backstage, taking the official portrait of each winner.

It’s the antithesis of how Lipsky usually works because he has so little control. He’s limited to a small set, constructed under the direction of the Academy. It’s night, so he has to use artificial light. He doesn’t even know *who* he’s photographing

until their names are read onstage, minutes before they walk into the makeshift studio. But the job is irresistible in other ways.

“I’m the first person they come to, even before they get their champagne. You get them in this intimate moment,” he says. “They’re all stunned. They’re all freaking out. Everyone in the world is looking for that person. It’s so much fun.”

For Lipsky, the gig meant reuniting with many stars he’d photographed before. But in 2019, there was one person he was hoping to capture for the first time: Lady Gaga. The singer had been nominated for Best Actress and Best Original Song for *A Star Is Born*. She was the biggest star on an evening devoted to stars.

“We assumed we weren’t even going to get her,” Lipsky says. Oscar winners aren’t required to sit for official portraits, though most do. Lady Gaga went on to win Best Original Song and, after accepting the award, she made her way backstage: “Jeff, I want you to take pictures for me, for my family,” he remembers her saying. In the relative quiet of the studio, the significance of the moment began to hit her.

“The only thing I wanted from her was her true emotion,” he says. “And I caught her at her most vulnerable moment. She was just ready to cry. I let her eyes make the picture.” /

Sharon Stone, 2012



Lipsky (Momoa, Stone); Huey Tran (Lipsky and Lady Gaga)



For three years, Lipsky took the official portraits of Academy Award winners, including Lady Gaga in 2019.

TERRIER HEADLINES

From the Pulitzer Prizes to the Emmy Awards, COM alumni took center stage this year



In a liberal democracy, good journalism shines a light into the places where darkness reigns. A news story informs the public, keeps those in power honest and, at its very best, can help right a wrong. In recent years, **Kirsten Berg ('11)** has been at the center of some of the most powerful investigations in journalism. As a research reporter at the nonprofit *ProPublica* since 2019, Berg was part of a team nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for its reporting in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. And, in 2024, she was part of the team that won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for an investigation into the ethics and oversight of the US Supreme Court.

"Investigative journalism is such a foundational part of journalism, which is about holding power to account and telling stories of communities," Berg says. Reporting projects at *ProPublica* take months or sometimes years to finish, and the work is a collaborative effort. As a research reporter, Berg specializes in obtaining and verifying information—through court records, filing public records requests, mapping out the structures of organizations and conducting archival, legislative and historical

research. Often, she is looking for information that the institutions and people at the center of *ProPublica* investigations do not want to be made public.

By the time she joined the team investigating ethics questions at the nation's highest court, *ProPublica* had already published the bombshell report showing Justice Clarence Thomas had accepted unreported gifts from a Republican megadonor. Berg was brought on to research the Judicial Conference of the United States, the national policy-making arm of the court system tasked with investigating alleged ethics breaches. "There seemed to be a pattern of scandal, of ethical breaches, that seemed to be swept under the rug—of judges being defended, of oversight being thwarted," Berg says.

ProPublica's deep dive into the Judicial Conference, which Berg coproduced with Brett Murphy, is part of the "Friends of the Court" series that led to a Senate Finance Committee investigation and to the Supreme Court adopting a first-ever conduct code. Besides its real-world impact and the Pulitzer Prize, the series won the Selden Ring Award for Investigative Reporting and the George Polk Award for national reporting.

"I feel like it's sort of cliché, but right now there's a lot of distrust of media," Berg says. "To be able to put out something so transparent and nuanced and ironclad was, in addition to accountability, such a great way to educate the public about how investigative journalism works."

—Steve Holt



Matt Damon, director Doug Liman, Hong Chau and Casey Affleck (from left) at the world premiere of *The Instigators*.

In the Boston-based comedy *The Instigators*, which opened in theaters and on Apple TV+ in August 2024, Oscar-nominated actor **Hong Chau ('01)** plays a therapist who, against her better judgment, joins a patient on the lam after his heist goes wrong. She says the gates to the city were opened thanks to the film's two stars, Matt Damon and Casey Affleck. "We were given such access because Matt and Casey are so beloved in the city," says Chau, perhaps best known for her role in the 2022 film *The Whale*. Fans didn't hesitate to show their love. "People kept driving by and honking their horns and going, 'Hey, Matt, Casey, how do you like them apples? We love you!' and all that. It felt like going to another country, but being invited by royalty. It felt really special."



In 2020, more than 400 journalists were attacked in the United States. And 80 percent of those attacks were allegedly at the hands of the police. The *LA Times* short documentary *Flashpoint: Protests, Policing, and the Press*, which was directed by **Max Esposito (CGS'08, COM'10)** and edited by **P. Nick Curran ('09)**, highlights the dangers

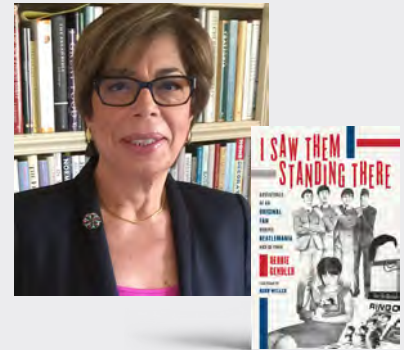
journalists face at the hands of police when covering protests, despite the protections offered by the First Amendment. Using raw footage from protests as well as interviews with practicing journalists and lawyers, Esposito and Curran created a documentary they hope will spark a broader conversation about the treatment of journalists—specifically journalists of color—when covering pivotal moments of civil unrest.



The first book from **Mike De Socio ('17)**, a freelance journalist based in upstate New York, *Morally Straight: How the Fight for LGBTQ+ Inclusion Changed the Boy Scouts—and America* (Pegasus Books, 2024) tells the story of the quarter-century fight for LGBTQ+ inclusion in that truly iconic institution. De Socio's own story of Scouting—he became an Eagle Scout as a teenager—and coming out offers a quiet counterpoint. “So much of my life has been shaped by Scouting,” he says. “I couldn’t be this person who was so deeply connected to the program and a journalist and not bring those two things together.”



As reporter **Anupreeta Das ('07)** covered Bill Gates over the years—first at the *Wall Street Journal*, and then at the *New York Times*—she became fascinated by the billionaire Microsoft founder’s many personas: genius, tech tycoon, philanthropist. “I began questioning: Who is this person? And what is it about our fixation with billionaires? What does it say about us?” she says. Das grapples with these questions in her new book, *Billionaire, Nerd, Savior, King: Bill Gates and His Quest to Shape Our World* (Simon & Schuster, 2024). Her reporting reveals much about the financial, social and political landscapes in the US. “I try not to be prescriptive, not to say, ‘Oh, this is what we must do,’” says Das. “Rather, I try to get people to think about all of these ways that we don’t connect wealth and inequality.”



When John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr arrived at JFK Airport for their first US tour in February 1964, **Debbie Gendler (CGS'70, COM'72)** was there. When the Beatles took the stage of *The Ed Sullivan Show*, Gendler was there. Her unwavering devotion to the band had taken hold in 1963 when, at the age of 13, she listened to the Beatles debut album, *Please Please Me*. She later became the band’s New York fan club chapter secretary and got to know the members personally. In her new memoir, *I Saw Them Standing There: Adventures of an Original Fan during Beatlemania and Beyond* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2024), Gendler provides an intimate glimpse of an era most people only saw on television.



For the second year in a row, **Liz Patrick (CGS'91, COM'93)** received the Emmy for Outstanding Directing for a Variety Series for her work on *Saturday Night Live*. Patrick, the fifth director in the show’s 50-year history, received the 2023 Emmy for an episode cohosted by Steve Martin and Martin Short and the 2024 Emmy for an episode hosted by Ryan Gosling.

Betsy Dribben ('24) enrolled in the master’s in journalism program in 1967, when COM was named the School of Public Communication, but dropped out the following year. When she approached the journalism department in 2023 with the idea of completing her degree, Maggie Mulvihill, an associate professor of the practice of computational journalism, was assigned to advise her. Dribben, 78 and the head of advocacy for the Multifaith Alliance, a nonprofit organization that provides humanitarian aid to Syria, wrote her final project—a 2,500-word story about her father—and graduated in May 2024.



Reporting by Joel Brown, Marc Chalufour, Amy Laskowski, Eden Mor, Mara Sassoon, Sophie Yarin

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“I am thankful for the inspirational professors at COM who are encouraging positive change for female filmmakers.”

**—Ariel Narayan
(’25, CFA’25)**

WHY I GIVE

Colleen Markley (’97) is on a roll. She just finished writing her first novel, *Lilith Land*. Several of her other works have been published in anthologies and magazines. She’s received multiple writing accolades, including the Nickie’s Prize for Humor Writing and the Erma Bombeck Writers’ Workshop Humor Writer of the Month.

Success can change a person, but that hasn’t been true for Markley. Warm, down-to-earth and with a wry sense of humor, she talks openly and candidly about her humble upbringing in New Jersey. She remembers that receiving an admission offer from BU—along with a generous financial aid package—was a turning point in her life.

“A lot of people like me don’t wind up in college; a lot of people like me don’t have opportunities for that kind of an education,” she explains. “I didn’t have the greatest grades in high school. So, I was grateful for BU for saying, ‘Yes, we believe in you and think you’ve got the potential to do well here.’”

Determined to prove BU right, Markley thrived as a film and television major at COM. She wrote several original screenplays and won the college’s most prestigious undergraduate honor—the Blue Chip Award—before graduating cum laude. Post-college, she landed her first job at WNET, New York’s public television station.

Now, as a donor to COM, Markley supports student scholarships and the general COM Fund. “I’m a huge believer in making your way to a place where you feel comfortable, and



then turning around and reaching a hand back and pulling up whoever else needs to get there,” she explains. “Not everybody starts out in the same place. There are a lot of us that have some catching up to do.”

Markley also believes in sending BU students the same message she once received: “I want them to know: We care about you. We think you’re worth the investment, too.”

—Rachel P. Farrell

WHY I GIVE



Elizabeth Butson ('60) still has vivid memories of her journalism professors—particularly photojournalist Harris G. Smith.

“He was fierce. An ex-Marine,” she says. “So it was like: ‘You missed the deadline: 6 o’clock, it’s due. 6:05? You’re out.’ Well, it did teach me a lesson!”

She laughs, before recounting a time she made *him* laugh. Assigned to find a politician to photograph, she realized

that, as a recent Greek immigrant from Istanbul, she knew no one. But she did know that Boston Mayor James Michael Curley had recently died. She went to where he was lying in state, talked her way past the guards, and took her shot. Back to Professor Smith she went. “I still hear him laughing,” she says.

Butson’s adventurous spirit served her well after she graduated. She wrangled an interview with Guatemalan rebels during that country’s civil war—despite her editors at *Life* refusing to assign her because “you’re a girl”—and then sold the photos herself. One buyer, an editor at the *Toronto Star*, was so impressed he gave her a few freelance assignments. (And later married her and ran a newspaper with her, but that’s a story for another time.)

“But I had to be realistic,” she says of her career path. With no family in the United States, she had to support

herself. So she did PR for Philip Morris, ultimately becoming the first woman named vice president for the firm.

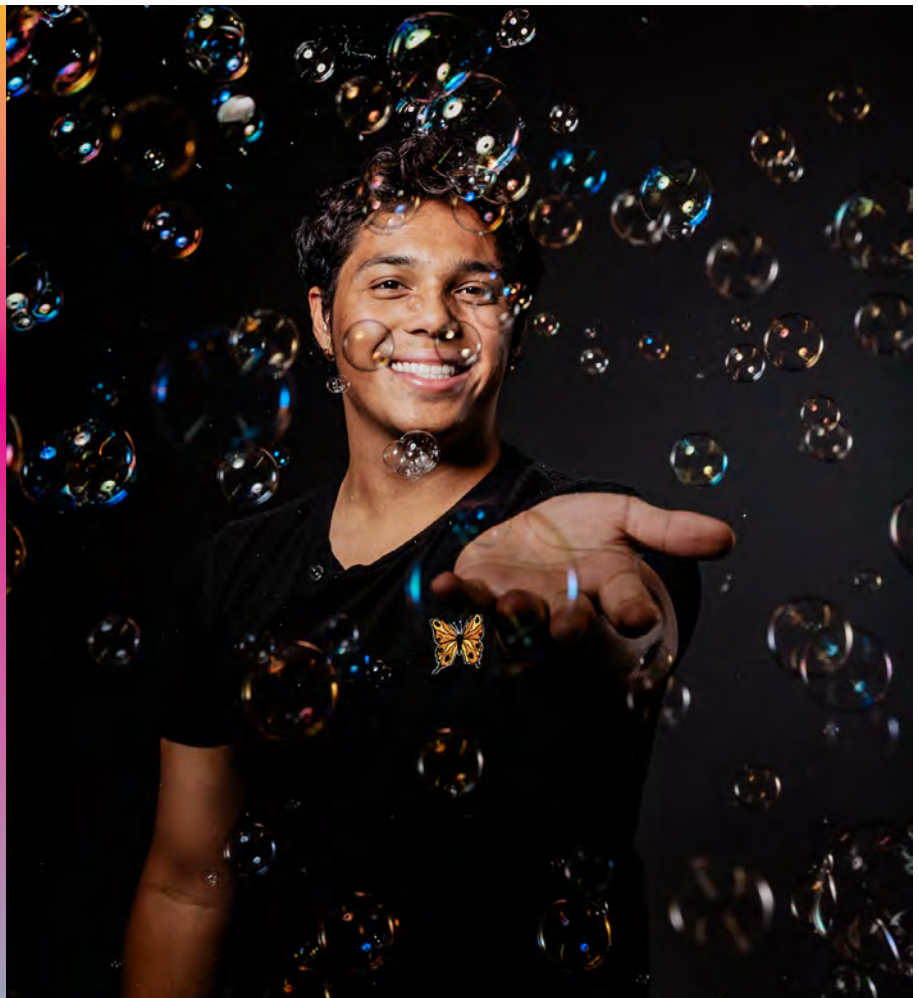
“I did very interesting things,” Butson says. Those included the first corporate gala at the Guggenheim Museum and a trip to Nigeria with James Brown. “And I fought a lot of battles,” she says. “What I value a lot about my career is opening doors for others and recognizing the doors that were open for me—and understanding the obligation of returning that favor.”

At COM, she’s doing so by endowing a graduate scholarship in investigative journalism and funding internship stipends. Why?

“Well, because I love what journalism is all about, from A to Z,” Butson says. “I think journalism is a mission. There are certain fields that are not just about getting paid. It’s much bigger than that.” —*Louise Kennedy*

“I’m thankful to COM for reaffirming my ideas and recognizing my potential as an individual. I am confident that I am ready for the next steps in my professional and academic career.”

—**Lorenzo Mendiola**
(’24, CFA’25)



John Lamparski/WireImage (above left); Conor Doherty (left and above right)

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**"I'd like to thank
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AND DISCOVERY.**

WE PREPARE STUDENTS TO ADAPT TO
CHANGE AND SHARE THEIR VOICES IN A
TRANSFORMATIONAL MEDIA WORLD.

WE GENERATE KNOWLEDGE THROUGH
RESEARCH AND THEORY BUILDING.

WE INTEGRATE PROFESSIONAL AND
ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES ACROSS
COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINES.

WE NURTURE A CULTURE RICH IN
DIVERSITY, CRITICAL THINKING AND
CREATIVE EXPRESSION.

WE CHAMPION COMMUNICATION
GROUNDED IN AUTHENTICITY,
EFFECTIVENESS AND PURPOSE.

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