It’s wonderful to see the pages of this special alumni edition of *Speak Easy* so full of folks from all corners of the globe. The words and photos of the Communication Studies family tell stories of accomplishment, of triumph, and of the impact of what we have created throughout the decades. As an alum myself (M.S. 2001, Ph.D. 2006), I am proud to say that I’m a saluki, and that I came from the Speech Communication/Communication Studies program. As you read the profiles of our fellow alumni, it is evident that the challenges we face are difficult, and that it is ever more important to support each other. Thank you for doing the good work that you do!

-Dr. Sandy Pensoneau-Conway
Communication Studies Department Chair

**Terry Allen, Ph.D. ’83, allentj@uwec.edu**

I am happily retired, after thirty-eight years of teaching, and now live in Columbia, Missouri with my wife Nancy and our dog Jayden. I am an Emeritus Professor of Theatre Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, where I taught acting, directing and playwriting. I spend much of my time these days playing pickleball and writing poetry. I am the author of the poetry chapbook *Monsters in the Rain* (Kelsay Books, 2019) and my poems have appeared in many journals, including *I-70 Review, Freshwater Poetry Journal, Chariton Review, Third Wednesday, Star 82 Review, Dime Show Review, Popshot Quarterly, Cloudbank, and Main Street Rag*. I have a book of poetry, “Art Work,” coming out in April 2021, also published by Kelsay Books. My poem, “The Rule of Three,” has been nominated by *Into the Void* for the 2020 Best of the Net Award.

**Taylor Ashford, B.A.’10, Instagram: taylord_of_the_rings**

I am working as the Marketing Director at Climb So iLL. We have two indoor rock climbing gyms - one in St. Louis, MO, and one in St. Charles, MO. We just opened our St. Charles location - The Steel Shop - in July. While opening during a pandemic was far from ideal, it has been amazing to see years of hard work come to fruition. While my focus at SIU was not on marketing, the lessons that I learned and theories that I studied while focusing on critical-cultural communication have made me a better, more thoughtful practitioner in a field with which I often feel personally at odds.

**Charlie Beck, B.S.’80 (Public Relations), cba721@aol.com**

Semi-retired after a career in marketing communications in the pharmaceutical industry. Currently indulging a passion for performing arts. (I hold a minor from S.I.U. In Theatre as well as Journalism.) But, with covid rampant not much going on in that realm.

**Barry W. Birnbaum, Ed.D., B.S.’74**

I am associate professor of special education at Western Illinois University.

**Chrisanne Blankenship-Billings; B.S.’81, schmengieinc.com, schmengieinc@gmail.com**

I am the VP and COO of Schmengie Inc, a media production company dedicated to producing material that integrates the human experience through the lens of otherized...
communities. Our recent projects include social media advertising for Sylvania Natural Light products and launch of a hand made greeting card division, Chubby Bunny. My wife, Alexandra Billings and I are blest to support social justice causes including Heifer International and ChildFund International. We spent a glorious 10 day vacation in Southern Israel and Jerusalem in 2019. I am actively engaged in the Unitarian Universalist Church of Long Beach and participated with some fellow church members in the recent Federal and State election.

My plans for the future include producing various Television/Streaming projects, Independent and Mainstream films and developing the advertising consulting arm of Schmengie (Includiance division). My wife and I are hoping to travel to India in 2021 or 22 with my mother. GO SALUKIS!

William Peyton Blewett, Jr., B.S.’85, blewett@mchsi.com

Regional Manager for the Balfour Company 1991-present. We produce school recognition products such as Class Rings, Letter Jackets, Caps & Gowns, Diplomas, and other Graduation Supplies. I also have been playing in local bands (Four on the Floor, The Venturis) for many years.

Doug Bock, Ph.D.’69, dgbock@eiu.edu

Since receiving the SIU degree, I spent the next 30 years in university teaching and research. I taught at Auburn University, University of Florida, Texas Christian University, Utah State University, and Eastern Illinois University. I retired from EIU in 2008.

Since then I have been active in public service. I received the Thomas Jefferson Award for public service in 2019 and the Charleston Illinois Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year in 2020. I am thankful for education and guidance I received from the Department of Communication Studies at SIU!

Vincent S. Boyd, B.S.’94, TheRealDrBoyd (Twitter and IG)

Dean of Academic Affairs at Marshalltown Community College.


I am the co-founder and CEO of Stackhouse, a real estate startup building vertical docking communities for movable container homes. Our goal is to democratize the industry by providing a new entry point for homeownership. My partner and I started the company in 2017 and were recently accepted into the University of Arizona Center for Innovation Startup Incubator. Learn more at www.stackhouse.life


I am working as a purchasing agent for Swan Surfaces in Centralia, Il.

Robert (Bob) Broz, BS’90, rrmbroz@yahoo.com

Bob serves as the Head of Finance Technology and Head of IT Life Solutions for Transamerica Corporation. He is the end-to-end IT owner of all finance and life insurance systems, including over 300 life, corporate, finance, actuarial, and asset liability management applications. Bob is the leader of application development, data engineering, quality engineering and production support, with a span over 350 IT professionals and an annual budgets of over $50MM.

Nanci M. Burk, Ph.D., B.S.’95; M.S.’96, Facebook - drnmburk; Instagram - @nmburk; LinkedIn - Nanci Burk, Ph.D.; Twitter – drburk

May, 2020, retired from teaching after 25 years of teaching at various universities and community colleges in Illinois and Arizona. I’m looking forward to pursuing research, and contributing to community service and social justice organizations. Eventually, I will be traveling extensively, pandemic permitting.

Drewandria Burnside, B.S.’13

I own a body sculpting studio

Carol Smith Bush, B.A.’68, Facebook: Carol Bush

I taught school for 43 tears, teaching speech, English, and theatre. I am currently retired, enjoying my 2 children, 7 grandchildren, and 5 great grandchildren.
Beverley Byers-Pevitts, Ph.D.’80 (English, Philosophy, Speech Communication and Theatre), M.A.’67 (Speech Communication and Theatre), Bev@byerspevitts.com

Retired since 2009, enjoying it and currently staying in and being safe due to Covid-19.

Manuel Sánchez Cabrera, M.A.’16

Manuel Sánchez Cabrera is a PhD candidate in the Romance Studies Department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Drawing upon the work of Stuart Hall, his research revolves around the way in which memory is constructed and used in Central America by documentary filmmakers to tell stories about themselves, and about the region. He is working under the advice of Communication Studies Professor Lawrence Grossberg.

La’Ketta Caldwell, B.A.’98, Instagram: Keytalife_, Linkedin: LaKetta Caldwell

LUMIN Schools is thrilled to welcome La’Ketta Caldwell as its first Director of the Opportunity Academy. In this role, Caldwell will operate LUMIN Schools’ new network-wide career exploration program. Caldwell joins LUMIN with rich experience in youth development, and program creation, as well as a vast network of community connections. Caldwell spent the past 13 years at Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee, most recently as the Director of the Arts program. Her efforts to use the arts to help youth deal with trauma has garnered local and national media attention, as well as hundreds of thousands of dollars in outside funding. In addition, she has worked tirelessly to give underserved youth access to people, places and experiences that will broaden their world views and give them a platform for their voices to be heard. As a result, youth in her programs challenged the outside perceptions that both labeled and limited them based on their ZIP code, skin color or economic status. Caldwell has a gift for creating partnerships. If you know Caldwell, you’ve likely heard her say many times, “My babies deserve the best.” This philosophy has compelled her to form partnerships with the Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Milwaukee Film, business leaders, politicians, foundations and many others who fostered life-changing opportunities for “her babies.” For example, her plea for support to send Club members to Washington D.C. for an educational trip was answered by former Senator Herb Kohl who paid for hundreds of Club members to spend a week in Washington D.C., including at the most recent presidential inauguration. Caldwell is a sought-after speaker, facilitator and performer. In 2016, she was chosen to give a TEDx Talk. She was a Boys & Girls Clubs of America National Training Associate, and she consults, offering training on team-building, social justice and social-emotional learning. She has also been a featured performer on 88Nine Radio Milwaukee. In 2020, Caldwell published her first book, “I Am Not Your Superwoman.” She is an adjunct professor at UW-Milwaukee and was named one of Milwaukee Business Journal’s 40 Under 40 in 2015.

John Capecci, Ph.D.’90,
john@livingproofadvocacy.com, https://www.linkedin.com/in/johncapecci/, Twitter: @capeccicom, @livproof, www.livingproofadvocacy.com

Twenty-plus years ago, I pivoted from college communications professor to solopreneur, taking what I loved about teaching—critical thinking, creativity, helping others excel—to launch Capecci Communications. In the years since, I’ve coached, trained, written, consulted and strategized for a diverse range of nonprofit and for-profit clients—from architects to activists, physicians to farmers, sales teams to survivors—all of whom share a common goal: connecting with their audiences powerfully and authentically. I’m also cofounder, with Tim Cage, of Living Proof Advocacy, (livingproofadvocacy.com) which helps purpose-driven individuals and organizations advocate for positive change by unleashing the power of personal stories. Tim and I also coauthored “Living Proof: Telling Your Story to Make a Difference,” now in its third edition.

Scott Carnes, B.S.’04, Twitter: @scotteugene79

I am a United Methodist pastor and just completed my Doctor of Ministry (in homiletics/preaching). My partner also serves a church and is now working on a Doctor of Ministry. She and I have a two year old boy and are expecting a second little boy any day now. We love camping and traveling. Our most recent trips have taken us to: France, Spain, Morocco, Portugal, Scotland, Israel/Palestine, Jordan, Appalachia, and through a number of Western states over the past few years, but a toddler has meant staying closer to home these past two years ;-)
COVID-19 has changed the very nature of our jobs, so like most of you, we have spent the past 10 months just trying to re-calibrate and re-imagine our professional lives and family life. Much of my time these days has been working alongside others in the church to feed and clothe the most vulnerable of our local community in Abingdon, IL.

**Savannah Coady,**
**B.A. ’20 (Public Relations), www.linkedin.com/in/savannahcoady/**

Shortly after graduation, I joined Town and Country Bank in Springfield, IL as a Marketing Intern. I worked as an intern and administrative assistant for three months before I was hired on full-time as a Marketing Specialist. My primary focuses are internal communication and community involvement tracking. I handle most internal communication across the banks 12 branches, including the monthly newsletter, updated policies, internal events, and more.

As a community bank, we are heavily invested in the communities around us. We have an ongoing community reinvestment campaign divided into three parts: donations, volunteerism, and financial education. A big part of my job is tracking all three of these. I shift through donation applications and request checks for organizations that meet our criteria. I track all corporate and individual volunteer efforts and compile spreadsheets for our Leadership team. Finally, I write press releases and blogs highlighting our community involvement and monthly financial seminars.

In addition to my role in Marketing, I also helped form a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council to encourage a more equitable environment for our employees. I work with the Leadership team to organize diversity training for all employees utilizing content and training materials from the American Banking Association.

**Ryan Cockerill, B.S.’92**

After working in the Chicagoland area for the past 20 years, I recently accepted the Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid role at Northland College in Ashland, WI. I continue to enjoy helping students navigate the college search process and especially enjoy working for an institution that has a strong focus on the environment and sustainability.

**Zenetta McDaniel Coleman, B.S.’93**

Pursuing a degree in Speech Communication was one of the best decisions I could have ever made because it equipped me with effective writing and public speaking skills necessary to thrive in the workforce as well as my personal life. As a university administrator at a number of institutions across the country, I encountered 10’s of thousands of potential and current students and their families, taught courses, engaged with colleagues and presented at national conferences. Beyond working in Higher Education for over two decades, I also served as an elected public official. In 2019, I retired from SIU and currently enjoy traveling, volunteering at my church and various local agencies, being a family advocate for Special Olympics Illinois and substitute teaching.

**Dorothie Jean Dancy Crim, B.S.’58**

I am retired from two positions: School Principal and Staff at California State University. I hold two Master’s degrees: Reading and Special Education.
Michael Dailing, B.S.’95

I am the Corporate Safety Manager for The Knapheide Manufacturing Company. For the first ten years with Knapheide I worked in the Human Resource department then made the move over to Safety. Throughout my career in both HR and Safety people have asked how a degree in Speech Comm has applied. Many times they ask this question in a tongue and cheek fashion trying to take a not so subtle dig at my major. While I love sarcasm more than most, I take the opportunity to educate them not only about the major itself, but on the value of good communication. A lot has changed in the world since my days at SIU. However, clear, concise, and effective communication has always been and still is today, vital in every profession. The ins and outs of most jobs can be taught to the majority of people that have a propensity to learn. It is that person’s ability to communicate that often determines how successful they are. Being able to explain, teach, or relate information to all walks of life, regardless of demographics, separates those that can do a job and those that excel at a job. I firmly believe the ability to speak with confidence and clarity has taken me further in my career than any other attribute. I owe much of this to the skills I acquired at SIU.

John T. Davenport, B.S.’95

I am a Brand Manager for Best Western International. I am responsible for the performance of over 50 Hotels and Resorts in North America. I often use my Speech Communication skills for training hotel staff on how to maximize their performance.

David Davis, Ph.D.’80,

Retired from CDC after career as Health Communication Specialist in HIV prevention. Recently had novel, “The Mistakes,” published (available from Amazon or Barnes and Noble). Also still writing plays, 17 productions so far, including 2 Off-Off-Broadway.

Laramie Dean, Ph.D.’08,

Twitter/Instagram @bvlaramiedean

I’m currently the Director of Theatre at Hellgate High School. I’ve published four plays with Theatrefolk over the past few years, and currently I’m working on edits for my first novel, BLACK FOREST, which will be published by Inkshares.

Dennis Doyle, Ph.D.’88, dennis.doyle6@gmail.com

Completing my 32nd year as professor of Communication Studies at Central College (Iowa). I will retire after this academic year. In retirement I plan to focus on grandparenting, gardening, and golfing!

Patrick Drazen, M.S.’75, patrickdrazen@yahoo.com

Having written 3 books on Japanese animation since 2003 and seen them published, I’ve been spending this year writing about the CoViD Lockdown and other views of life from a Buddhist perspective. I can’t exactly travel much to talk about any of my books just now due to the Lockdown...

Loralyn Duley, B.S.’87,


Currently working at Purdue University Global in the Curriculum and Innovation Dept. as the Sr. Operations Manager. I manage 2 teams, Curriculum Operations Coordinators, and Editors. I also write IT textbooks for Higher Education (not fun) and for Kindle (super fun!)
Cindy Elliott, B.S.’77 (Public Relations), celliott@fhsu.edu

Assistant Vice President for Global Partnerships at Fort Hays State University. Have developed largest dual bachelor’s degree program in mainland China, serving nearly 4,500 students at two partner universities. Of course, this past year, we have converted to online education, which was a first for many US institutions, but particularly a first in China. FHSU has a lot of experience with online education, so the transition was not that difficult. Yet, the public relations challenge to convince the Chinese government, students and parents that online learning is just as effective as classroom-based learning has been an ongoing strategic effort. Thanks to SIU for preparing me for this year of 2020!

Kristina M. (Sholes) Engel, B.S.’85 (Public Relations)

I have worked for the Department of Children and Family Services for nearly 28 years. I earned my MSW in 2005 from Aurora University, and am an LCSW. I am proud to support my “first responders” who work so hard to protect children and serve families.

My husband and I have been married for 31 years and have two amazing, smart and beautiful daughters. We love to travel as a family, photography, play games together, cook and enjoy movies. I am so thankful for this life that I have 😊

Craig Engstrom, M.A.’06; Ph.D.’10, https://linkedin.com/in/craigengstrom, Twitter: @_craigengstrom, YouTube: Crafting Communication Competence

I am currently filling out this form. J/K. I am currently an instructor of business communication and Saluki Success course advisor at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. I am a Certified Professional in Talent Development (Association for Talent Development), a LinkedIn career expert program consultant, and an executive career coach. I volunteer for the Prison Entrepreneurship Program. I like cycling and traveling.

James Fagin, M.S.’72; Ph.D.’76, jamesfagin@gmail.com

I have retired after nearly 50 years of teaching and college administration. During my career I authored 15 college textbooks and provided counseling services to numerous local, state and federal law enforcement agencies.

Jerry Feezel, B.S.’60 (Education)

Emeritus Professor of Kent State University, officer in several volunteer organizations locally. Married 55 years to an SIU alumna.

Janee Ferrari, B.S.’05

I am currently married to an SIU alum. We have two children along with our dog Hoagie and we are living in the north suburbs of Illinois. I have been with Liberty Mutual insurance for the past 10 years and am a top agent in IL offering auto home and life insurance. We are navigating all of the changes 2020 has brought and doing our best with kids e-learning at home.

Diane Ferrero-Paluzzi, Ph.D., M.A.’02, dferrero-paluzzi@iona.edu

I am the Associate Dean of Arts and Science and Associate Professor of Speech Communication (with a concentration in at Iona College in New Rochelle, NY. Recently at Iona, I created an Advanced Certificate in Clinical Communication for healthcare professionals to advance their communication skills to further patient satisfaction and increase empathy and compassion in medical situations. Lastly I am writing a book with Michael Paluzzi (SIU 2003) on the healing power of travel and storytelling showcasing our RV travels on the Al-Can after life-altering surgery in 2017.
Shawn M. Flaharty, B.S.’93, sflaharty@msn.com

Retired Army Major Airborne currently work as Readjustment Counselor for Department of Veterans Affairs

Wendy Krajewski Forbes, M.A.’93, linkedIn.com/in/wendy-forbes-b500126

I am presently serving as the Director of Strategic Communication & Outreach for the Colorado State Patrol. In this role, I manage and lead civilians and sworn personnel from three units including Public Affairs, Creative Services and Community Outreach.

Matthew Friedman, B.S.’99, friedman21@hotmail.com, Twitter: @mattfriedman21, linkedIn.com/in/matthewfriedman21

I am the Director of the Public Sector practice area at Alight Solutions, a leading provider of benefits administration and cloud-based HR and financial solutions for 70% of the Fortune 100. Responsibilities As the Director of the Public Sector practice area, Matthew is responsible for aligning Alight’s breadth of cost containment solutions, thought leadership and ever-evolving innovation in HR and Benefits with the complexities of Public Entities, Scholastic K-12 and Higher Education organizations.

Experience Matthew has spent the last 10+ years managing and consulting organizations on their HR, Benefits and Human Capital Management. Matthew has a unique approach utilizing data and benchmarking to help guide organizations through an in-depth discovery process to align budgets, goals and objectives with best-in-class total re-

wards strategies to more efficiently manage HR and Benefits within their organization. Expertise Public Sector, HR and Benefits Outsourcing, Benefits Administration, Benchmarking

Subject Matter Expert Featured Presenter: “Mapping the Employee Experience" (Public Sector Conference) Featured Presenter: “Employers Role in Addressing the Opioid Crisis” (Public Sector Conference) Volunteer JCAST (coalition against sex trafficking) LCCAHIT (lake county coalition against human trafficking)

Phillip Frydendall, B.A.’65,

Wrote two feature films and two graphic novels.

Jodi Golden, B.S.’01, M.P.A.’05, Jodikgolden@gmail.com

Although Illinois will always be my home, I'm currently and have been a "Hoosier" for quite some time. I am Chief of Staff for Indiana's Lieutenant Governor, Suzanne Crouch. Prior to that, I ran one of her agencies, the Office of Community and Rural Affairs. I have a passion for public service and have been fortunate to have been able to build my entire career around this, in both Illinois and Indiana. In my free time I am an avid traveler, both domestic and international. I love animals so I volunteer for a couple of animal-focused non-profits and enjoy spending time with my pup, Snoop Dog. the pug. I'll always be grateful for the experience SIU and Carbondale provided me.

Dave Gonet, B.S.’81, gonetdave@gmail.com

After graduating with a degree in Speech Comm/ Journalism/ Secondary Ed. I began a career in Illinois Public Education for 35 years. I retired from teaching in June of 2017. I went on and obtained 2 Master’s degrees, ending my career as a high school counselor at Hononegah High School, Rockton, Illinois (a stone’s throw from Wisconsin) My mentors were Marvin Kleinau and Tom Pace, both brilliant and human educators
Gina (Mitchell) Gramarosso, B.S.’84

My entire career has been dedicated to development work -- I spent 18 years in higher education (working for the SIU Foundation for 10 years), then took 14 years off to stay home with our two children & I’m now in in my 6th year with Northern Illinois Food Bank. I am Director of Strategic & Legacy Gifts and am helping the Food Bank secure major and planned gifts. We aim to distribute 100 million meals this year to meet the current increased need brought on by Covid-19. It is important, urgent and extraordinarily fulfilling work! The Speech Communication - Public Relations program prepared me well for this career. Dr. Elizabeth Lance knows that it was during preparation for a research paper for her class that I discovered higher educational development work...and that set the course for my future!

Meg Andrew Grguric, B.A.

I was the Editor for an award-winning business magazine in Naples, Florida for several years and took time off to start a family and move to Orlando, Florida to further my education. For the past 25 years, I have been a family law paralegal and look forward to retiring to North Carolina in about 5 years. Married for 30 years to an attorney and we have one son, Connor. We enjoy participating in a gourmet club, watching Florida Gator and Pittsburgh Steeler football and are both on the Magic Center Board of Directors for Odyssey of the Mind, an international creative problem-solving competition for children from 5 - 21.

Teresa Hall, B.S.’86, Twitter: @drterihall

I serve as the Vice President for Student Affairs at Wichita State University

Mary (King) Hallgren, B.A. (Public Relations)

Three years retired from Con-way Freight where I was a National Account Executive. We live on a farm outside of the Quad Cities where I have a large garden and two Airedales that keep me busy!

Joe Hassert, B.S.’03; M.A.’06; Ph.D.’12, joseph.hassert@csn.edu; Facebook: Joe Hassert

I am a professor of communication at College of Southern Nevada in sunny Las Vegas, Nevada. At CSN, I am the chair of the Queer Inclusive Campus Committee where I administer our Safe Zone program, host LGBTQ educational and social events, and mentor queer and questioning students. I spend my winters hiking the desert and my summers by the pool. Say hi next time you are in Vegas!

Mark Hickson, Ph. D.

Retire in January after 53 years of teaching communication in college.

Nanette Heidtman (ne Cox), B.A.’64, nandance1942@gmail.com

Having retired several years ago, I have been enjoying gardening. I had a wonderful month touring England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. I have moved to the beautiful state of Oregon and am involved with singing in the Rogue Valley Chorale and volunteering at the Oregon
Shakespeare Festival. Currently, I'm working on two novels, Butterfly Dances and The Mystery of the Southern Belle, which will be published on Amazon along with the other books I've written.

Sandra L. (Fish) Herndon, Ph.D.’75, You can find me on Facebook and LinkedIn.

I am Professor Emerita at Ithaca College, School of Communication, Ithaca, NY. After retiring and moving to Washington state, I taught at Olympic College, worked as a hospice volunteer, and served on several boards (literacy services, domestic violence shelter) for several years. I became a member of the League of Women Voters where I have served as President of two different County Leagues, board member of WA State League, and coordinator of the State League Convention. I remain active in League work (a non-partisan organization which provides voter education and information and conducts studies of public issues).

As a member of two book groups, I am an avid reader. Since meetings of all sorts are currently conducted electronically, I spend a fair amount of time on Zoom and Skype. Until travel restrictions intervened, my husband and I took several trips with the Road Scholar program which offers an educational experience to accompany visits to interesting places. We also spend time with family in NY and OR, mostly electronically at the moment.

Beth Hill, Ph.D.’90, bhillseven@gmail.com

Currently I am a social worker (MSW, 2006, Wash U St. Louis) as the Community Resource Sr. Specialist for the Kansas City Public Library system in Kansas City, MO. I work with individuals experiencing homelessness and struggling with life challenges. I use all my interpersonal communications skills every day!

Keith Hoerner, B.S.’84

Keith Hoerner (BS, MFA) lives, teaches, and pushes words around in Southern Illinois. He is frequently published in literary journals both in the U.S. and abroad, as well as in anthologies and other publications. His memoir, The Day The Sky Broke Open, is scheduled for release in 2021 with Adelaide Books, New York / Lisbon.

Dr. Shirlene Holmes, M.F.A.’85 (Theater), Ph.D.’92, sholmes@gsu.edu

I am an Emerita Associate Professor at GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY. (College of the Arts). I retired in 2018. Since then I have continued my career as a professional playwright, educator and have had plays produced locally, nationally and internationally. I have distinguished in the field of theatre and will have a book published by Mad Duck Coalition in 2021.
Jessica Hoyos, B.A. (Public Relations),
sweet_yehi@yahoo.com, toasttopaint@gmail.com,
Facebook/Instagram: @toasttopaint

Currently, I am hosting art classes in Chicago's west side, Galewood community at "Toast To Paint"! I am a small business owner and I love painting for work and even on my spare time. With my degree in communications, I've been able to build relationships within my community, personally and professionally. I hope to be a positive impact to anyone I engage with.

At "Toast To Paint" I am able to share my passion, not only for art, but for every person. I've created a space where people from all walks of life are welcomed, even if it's a quick visit to simply say "hi" because the lights were on in the studio and I was there. It's heartwarming to be able to share and connect with my community and offer my services, to young and old. So many of us just want to feel a connection and be seen by another human being, this is how we will ultimately unite together and bring about a positive change for the better of humanity. I will be that change through "Toast To Paint".

Patricia Cook Hunsaker, B.A.'57, M.A.'60,
phunsaker@charter.net

I retired from Southwestern Illinois College in 2003 where I served as Director of English as a Second Language. During retirement I have been active in community theatre in Waterloo IL, Lebanon IL, and Alton IL. I also volunteer to assist women in securing college scholarships and I tutor in a children’s home.

Dolores A Hutson, B.S.'65 (Education),
M.S.'69 (Educational Psychology), SIU65@aol.com

After teaching English, Speech, Debate, and directing contest theater in Illinois and eventually Texas for 30 years, I retired from teaching which I really enjoyed, opened a daycare in my home and happily kept it open for 14 years. We raised 3 children of our own and had conservatorship of another child who joined our family at 13. We have 8 grandkids whom we adore. Terry and I love horse racing, spend some time golfing, and travel when we can. We do get back to Illinois every other year or so, and we have been to the SIU campus a few times, have driven through looking at all we could possibly take in with our group. I still love to see everything and have taken many pictures when we visit. Last year, we ate at the Italian Village with all our kids and grandkids as well as our kids’ spouses. They loved it! The campus is still beautiful, and I cherish my time there and in Carbondale. It’s so great to see it all and reminisce about my college days! I absolutely loved my years there and have many stories to tell which our kids and grandkids eagerly listen to with laughter and joy!

By the way, several years ago, we watched the Saluki baseball team play against the University of Texas Longhorns in Austin. I was so excited to talk with some of the baseball players who seemed thrilled to have a Saluki fan on their side. We sat among the Longhorn fans, whom normally I would be cheering with, and rooted for SIU. They all understood my being for the other team, but I received lots of good-natured teasing during the game. It was so much fun, and our kids really had a great time... they were excited to be able to talk to some of the SIU guys! I don't remember the year, but I thoroughly enjoyed myself. My husband cheered for them also, even though he played basketball at Illinois State and normally would cheer for the Redbirds if they were playing! I do have a baseball signed by Itchy Jones, I saw Elvis at SIU, as well as many other performers, I met Walt Frazier one time at Cousin Fred's out on Rt. 13, I saw several big politicians who stopped at Carbondale on their whistle-stop tours when they were running for President, I walked along side and/ or behind Jim Hart when he was working on his Masters degree, I survived the sitdowns, the riots, the VietNam protests, etc., etc., during my college days and my teaching days in Carbondale. I finished teaching one year in the
basement of a church because the National Guard was using CCHS as their sleeping and meeting quarters. I was awarded "Secondary Teacher of the Year" at Carbondale Comm. H.S. in the 77-78 school year, a totally unexpected honor which made me very proud! All 3 of our children were born in Carbondale at Doctor's Hospital, and some of our best friends in our entire lives were our friends in Carbondale and Carterville. Yes, our 16 years in that area are some of our best ever in our 56 years of marriage. I'm now 77, but I will never forget SIU and our wonderful life there. Sorry this writing is so long, but I love that area, and I will cherish my time there for as long as I live! "Thanks for the Memories" ..Lorrie Butt Hutson, '65 & '69, a proud graduate of SIU..

Karen Infante, B.S. (Communications),
infante.kar@gmail.com

Currently I'm driving for Uber Technologies. During the initial stages of the pandemic food delivery was essential. I was able to help the restaurants and my community while keeping myself busy. I chose to drive and deliver over the summer providing service to my community while keeping busy. Previously, I'd left my career to care for an elderly parent which was the best decision I've ever made. Our time together was priceless and I will cherish it forever.

Now preparation is being done to expand back into sales and the opportunities are unlimited. As a result, there is some difficulty figuring out which position will have the most benefit for both the employer and myself. I guess you'd call it old school but I'd like to pick a position suitable for the long run. Although my track record speaks for itself, I'm passionate about what I choose to do, which makes me very successful. There are hiccups like the housing crisis had implications for us. My spouse is a Real Estate Broker, and I was originating mortgages. That is when the decision was made to leave Illinois. We love Arizona and anticipate terrific opportunities in 2021. Wishing you the best in all your endeavors!

Amy Beth Katz, B.S.’91, M.A.’94,
www.schooloflivingdreams.com

I'm a photojournalist and have been photographing the Black Lives Matter protests across the country, as well as forest fires, for TV and Print news all over the world, including the Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, New York Daily News, China News, ABC, NBC, etc. I am also a Professional Intuitive and Dream Tender, helping people heal and transform through dreams and deep, imaginative inner work. I am a Poet, and have published three books through my boutique publishing company, "Living Dreams Press".
Ronda Koch B.S. (1991 or 1992), ronda.koch@siu.edu

Fairly previous work I did before getting hired at SIU on 2/2020, that is certainly pertinent in today’s Covid-19 environment, is my efforts within two local health departments involving preparation for public health emergencies, like pandemics. One of several programs I developed I called “Operation Noah’s Ark (ONA),” a mass vaccination clinic preparedness and medical/nonmedical volunteer. I targeted high probability audiences (local churches) to allow for them to function as private vaccination clinics, reducing the number of people that would go to the health department’s county-based vaccination clinic. As the director of emergency preparedness at Franklin-Williamson Bi-County Health (Illinois), our county’s worst case scenario planning was to have capacity to provide vaccinations to all residents (approximately 107,000 people with a 24-hour timeframe). ONA reduced the number of people attending the county mass vaccination clinic by about 50%. As a result of this and other innovative programs, I received IDPH’s Director’s Award for “. . . significant and positive improvements to Illinois’ public health system in the area of emergency preparedness.” You can visit a website I developed to prepare and protect people using electrically-powered medical equipment during power outages, see www.BreatheEasyIL.info. My work was highlighted as workshop session speaker and poster presenter on two separate occasions at the National Preparedness Summit and as session speaker at the Westberg International Conference. Also because of my work, the CDC selected me as a peer reviewer for the American Journal of Public Health’s Fall 2019 emergency preparedness supplement and was selected as keynote speaker (Feb 2019) at the Oregon Medical Reserve Corp conference.

DJ Jeffries, B.S.’17, linkedin.com/thedjjeffries

I am currently pursuing a Masters degree in Adult Learning & Leadership at Columbia University’s Teachers College in New York city. My research focus includes diversity and inclusion, executive coaching, and conflict resolution. I am also a career coach, speaker, writer, and the Founder of the motivation blog, Led2Win.com.

Demetres Jones, B.S.’98 (Interpersonal Comm.)

I work for the University of Michigan-Flint

Nico Wood Kos, M.A.’10, Ph.D.’15,
Facebook - Nico Wood Kos,
Instagram - @nicowildwood, nicowoodkos@gmail.com

I live in Yellowstone National Park with my partner, Rafał (also an SIU alumnus), and our two daughters, Lydia (age 5) and Violet (age 2). During the summer, I work as an Interpretive Park Ranger for the National Park Service, and during the winter, I work as a freelance grant writer, dedicating most of my time to North Yellowstone Education Foundation. I volunteer my time as the head of the grants committee for Electric Peak Arts Council and I am the chairperson for Snoopy Cooperative Preschool. I continue to publish and perform personal essays, both online and in my local community, and I spend as much time outdoors as I can.

Jennifer Kulier, B.S.’91

I am editorial director in the Office of Communications at Colorado College in Colorado Springs, where I have been for 18 years. I am a freelance editor on the side and enjoy outdoor activities like hiking, camping, and cycling. In 1999, I published a book on mountain biking for women. I have been married since 2001 to Chris Hebel, another SIUC alum.

Kurt Kuehnert, B.S.’70, marynkurt@comcast.net

I am the Advertising Manager for White Silo Media, located in Huntley, IL. We publish a print newspaper, an on-line newspaper and provide web site services for the greater Huntley area, which includes a Del Webb Sun City community. We enjoy living in southeastern Wisconsin. I am also a professional musician, and have sung with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, the Elgin Symphony Orchestra, WTTW PBS TV in Chicago and many other musical organizations.
I am currently the Executive Vice President of Communications and a member of the Board of Directors of the Star Harbor Space Academy, a startup company with plans to offer astronaut training, R&D facilities, and education programs for the general public.

During my career I served three terms at NASA Headquarters – twice as a political appointee and once as a civil servant. During the Obama Administration I was the head of Public Outreach. Under the Clinton Administration I established and was Associate Administrator of the Office of Policy and Plans. From 1981 to 1989 I was a civil servant and managed a variety of programs for the Office of Education, the Office of Space Flight and the Office of Exploration.

Based on my experienced in managing NASA’s Space Flight Participant Program (Teacher in Space and Journalist in Space) I recently published “See You in Orbit? Our Dream of Spaceflight.” The book is a comprehensive history and glimpse of the future of space tourism.

I began my career with the aerospace sector while obtaining a MS in Higher Education and serving as the chair of two space conferences held at SIU, New Worlds Week (1971) and SYNCON (1972).
Jen Leavitt, B.S. ’03 (Public Relations),
LinkedIn.com/in/JenniferLeavitt,
Jen.leavitt@gmail.com

Jen is the VP of Product Development at Patron Technology, a company that makes software supporting live events & online ticket sales. Jen earned her masters in Organizational Change Management from the New School in 2012, and she feels really lucky to use that combined with what she learned at SIU.

In her spare time, she volunteers as a tour guide at Hollyhock House, a restored Frank Lloyd Wright house and UNESCO World Heritage site. She also serves as the President for the Board of Directors for the New York NeoFuturists theater company. With the pandemic hitting Los Angeles so hard, she now volunteers her time to a mutual aid network helping unhoused residents of Los Angeles get food & supplies. Jen splits her time between Los Angeles and Palm Springs.

Benny LeMaster, Ph.D. ’16

Note: This update implicates exploitative academic labor and the fetishization of resiliency as it falls on minoritized bodies in academe. Resilience should not be celebrated; rather, it should be held with suspicion. Resilience should press us to ask: Why are the conditions such that one must be compelled to perform resilience at all. And to what end. What is being celebrated exactly? Since leaving SIUC, I have learned a valuable lesson I gift to you as you read on: Implicate what you celebrate because academe thrives on broken bodies and minds.

I am halfway to tenure at a major research institution, Arizona State University, and I have yet to be gendered accurately with any weekly, or often daily, regularity. Still, it is a profound honor to serve as Assistant Professor of Critical/Cultural Communication and Performance Studies in a program that I have long admired. I advise bright doctoral students and am elated to create performance in the Empty Space theater. Prior to my current post, I served as adjunct lecturer in the Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at California State University, Long Beach (where I obtained my BA). There, I worked to reconceptualize the core curriculum so as to affirm transness while centering Black liberation. To be clear, I wanted to teach in the Communication Studies Department at CSULB (where I obtained my MA), but was barred due to the violent cissexist bias organizing the department and, to be frank, the entire discipline—to be clear, this department is not alone in their trans-exclusionary practices—I will return to this momentarily. At the same time, I was teaching online courses for the University of Arizona’s School of Information where/when I taught classes in New Media Theory, Digital Storytelling, and Social Media and Identity. During this time, just as was the case while I was in graduate school, I was/remain the primary caretaker for my family. Thus, the first four years out of graduate school included my hustling to hobble together a make-shift schedule that would ensure access to trans-affirming healthcare. In total, I was teaching between 5 and 7 classes per term. This was a busy teaching season for me; as it was/remains for all adjunct faculty. Still, in order to remain relevant on the academic job market, I continued producing publishable work that I could afford to create on my laughable wages.

My training at SIUC in critical communication pedagogy taught me the classroom was a research space. As an adjunct teaching hundreds of students, I turned to my classroom in order to make sense of my academic voice. This resulted in a series of pedagogical essays in addition to co-editing a special issue of Communication Teacher titled “Unlearning Gender—Toward a Critical Communication Trans Pedagogy,” informed in part by my own experiences as a trans person navigating the violence of cissexism in communication studies coupled with my experiences as an educator working with trans youth and young adults. I managed to publish a series of additional pieces that col-
lectively helped me to maintain a semblance of relevance on the academic market eventually landing me at ASU beginning Fall 2018. I make note of all of this pre-tenure track labor as a first-generation and minoritized scholar because these successes ought not be uncritically celebrated.

We should be angry; I am angry. My body is broken, still. And I regularly ride the edge of burnout. I carry +$180K in student loan debt and have yet to experience one full week in academe when I am gendered properly, whether in my home department, back in graduate school, or at academic conferences—spheres imbued with anti-transness that we are encouraged to maneuver with no support mechanisms in place.

The privilege to quarantine has enabled me to recognize just how much of myself I shed in order to navigate higher education. Indeed, I stopped my own gender transition such that I might obtain a doctorate. And now, at 39, halfway to tenure, in an institution that does not offer trans-affirming healthcare, where I am still misgendered at every turn: Directors, Deans, Presidents, students, colleagues, publishers, … I am halfway to tenure and I have been teaching in higher education for over 12 years. In those 12 years, I have not yet felt seen or affirmed in academe. On paper, my numbers are impressive: 29 journal essays, 9 book chapters, an award-winning co-edited anthology, and over $30K in research grants. I advise 12 doctoral students, my teaching scores are consistently high, I serve in leadership positions at both the regional and national disciplinary levels, and I proudly serve on a number of editorial boards for academic journals. So, in academic terms, my update is incredible and my record impeccable.

And yet, this system is not designed to sustain our minoritized kith and kin. What do we do once we arrive?

In a recent state-wide meeting for folks serving on academic hiring committees, like myself, I asked of the head of HR and the University lawyer how we might entice more trans professor to apply when faculty are denied the trans-affirming healthcare we grant our students. The response was chilling: You hired at the wrong time. We need more trans people like you to brave it out and show us how we can change for the future. I was not surprised, I was/am enraged. This was said in front of a virtual room of over 150 of my colleagues including my Dean and senior administrative figureheads across all 3 Arizona universities.

My status update: I am pissed. And I do not have any more energy or time to waste on cisgender guilt. This institution is violent as hell for trans folks at the intersections of difference. We should all do better at demystifying these realities for our graduate students.

Because even if they land that job, what then? Another award? Another plaque? Another certificate and photo-op to be circulated on institutional social media channels.

What do I want? A pay raise and healthcare. And to work in a space in which resiliency isn’t a thing to be celebrated but a point of departure for fixing cultural ills that make living life harder than it has to be.

If you are a trans academic, do not hesitate to reach out to me for support—you are not as alone as you might feel—though, it might feel that way in your most immediate context. If you are cis, use google for your questions and pay your trans friends for having to deal with cissexist toxicity in classrooms in research and in our everyday lives.

Angie Lesser, B.S.’98

After graduating from SIUC, I moved to Nashville, TN until 2000 when I moved to St. Louis, MO. I live in Kirkwood, MO with my daughter, Sophie (7), and my husband, Mike. I have been a Recruiter and Client Manager in IT for over 15 years, as well as specializing in Data Science and Analytics for the last 8 years. While taking courses in my undergrad such as “Persuasion”, “Rhetoric”, and “Interviewing”, I enjoyed them immensely, but did not realize that I was actually preparing myself for what I do on a daily basis! I feel that having amazing professors like Dr. Suzanne Daughton and her husband Dr. Nathan Stucky, prepared me for lifelong success.
Tom Liesz, B.S.’75

Retired in June 2020 after a 40+ year career teaching various Business courses at several institutions in the West. Still keeping in touch with my Saluki track teammates and others I met while in Carbondale. Loving life in Reno, NV!

Kristy (Cortese) Lofsky, B.A.’08, Facebook and Instagram: @kristyleighcookies

I’m a stay at home mom and started my own cookie business.

Rick Masterson, B.S.’83, info@focusdesignandcommunications.com

21st year of being on my own, directing the efforts of my design and communications firm, Focus Design + Communications. Prior to forming Focus, I was guiding communications and design efforts for a Fortune 200 firm for approximately 13 years.

Raymie E. McKerrow, B.S.’66

I retired in 2015; since that time I’ve remained active as a scholar and served on my discipline’s national professional society’s Finance Committee. I also have more recently begun to be active in community issues. I’m currently serving on a local community relations commission and working with a group that is planning a discussion of racial equity issues within the community.

Gwendolyn McNutt, B.S.’92, linkedin.com/in/gwendolyn-mcnutt-csep-b585a04

Gwendolyn is a Regional External Affairs Manager with Comcast, with more than 25 years of experience. In her current role, she is responsible for managing community impact initiatives, working with nonprofit organizations and administering event sponsorship opportunities. Some of her key initiatives include the Comcast Internet Essential Program, the annual volunteer day of service, Comcast Cares Day and the Comcast Leaders and Achievers Scholarship Program.

Gwendolyn is a lifelong resident of Illinois and has engaged with various community organizations throughout the area. She currently serves on the board of directors of Chicago Women in Philanthropy (CWIP), and is a past member of the International Live Events Association (ILEA) Board of Governors. In 2019, she was awarded a NACE ILEA Chicago Excellence Lifetime Achievement Award, by Chicago area members of NACE (National Association of Catering and Events) and ILEA (International Live Events Association) for her accomplishments within the special events industry.

Gwendolyn holds a Bachelor of Science degree in speech communication from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and a Master of Arts degree in corporate communication from DePaul University. She also holds a Certified Special Events Professional (CSEP) designation, available to only an elite group of qualified industry professionals. Gwendolyn has also contributed to a number of written and online publications including USA Today, Nerd HQ and ILEA Experience.
**MaryLee Montague, B.A.’81, marylee@mlmontague.com**

Mary Lee is the Founder and Chief Consultant for the Chicago based Montague & Associates, a retained executive search firm focused on the non-profit C-Suite community. She brings a unique background and real-world, bottom-line philosophy to nonprofit C-level recruitment. Her vast experience includes both internal tenure and external consulting for a wide range of local, domestic and global nonprofit organizations.

With more than 35 years of experience in nonprofit work, Mary Lee is widely recognized as a nonprofit expert with a deep understanding of the many challenges and opportunities of today’s nonprofits and their volunteer boards regardless of size and mission focus. She spent more than 20 years at two global search firms (DHR International, Heidrick & Struggles), 15 years as a fundraiser for PBS, and recently two years as volunteer President leading a turnaround for a membership organization.

**Jay Moorman, Ph.D.’91, jmoor1@gmail.com**

In Covid Times: Jay and Toni have retired to the Kansas City area. His academic career spanned almost 30 years from SIU to Missouri Southern in Joplin (watch out for tornadoes), Central Michigan University (25 years traveling to military bases throughout the US) and Butler Community College near Wichita, Kansas (Dean and Vice President).

We are gleaning for After the Harvest here in KC and after coaching women’s tennis at Friends University in Wichita, Jay continues to play and we both play pickleball regularly.

We have continued to travel extensively and plan to do so again. Although we have traveled many places in the US there has been much international travel. Many tours were leading student trips, setting up English language schools or exchange programs, visiting our other home in Taiwan or just personal travel. Canada, France, Spain, Vietnam, China many times, Chile, Singapore, Thailand, New Zealand, Japan, and Fiji. At the moment we are close to our daughter and family here and babysitting daily. Luckily diaper changing is not a lost art.

**James Mruk, B.S.’71, jamruk@aol.com.**

Retired from a 40 year career in business communications and public relations, the last 26 with the U.S. Postal Service as Regional Manager of Corporate Communications for the Great Lakes Region. Since retiring in 2012, I’ve been a volunteer docent for the Ellwood House Museum in DeKalb, IL, a volunteer judge for the Illinois History Expo and a substitute teacher for St. Charles School District 303.

**Sara Novak, B.S.’16, LinkedIn: Sara Novak**

Account Manager for a legal technology company.

**John Oldman, B.A.’75**

Elections Administrator for Fort Bend Texas. One of the fastest growing and most ethnically diverse counties in the United States.

**Steve Olsher, B.S.’91, Steve@PodcastMagazine.com**

Steve Olsher is 30+ year entrepreneur, Founder/Editor-In-Chief of Podcast Magazine, original Founder of Liquor.com (exit to IAC in 2019), creator of The New Media Summit and PodXpo, original host of the top-rated podcasts, Beyond 8 Figures (sold to Call For Content) and Reinvention Radio, international keynote speaker, and in-demand strategic coach who helps businesses of all sizes leverage the power of new media to generate visibility, leads and revenue on auto-pilot.

**Jason Padgitt, B.S.’94, jason@nashfilm.com**

Executive Director of the Nashville Film Festival (NashFilm). NashFilm is a globally-recognized 501c3 non-profit organization and cultural event presenting the best in world cinema, American independent films and documentaries by veteran masters, up-and-coming directors, and first-time filmmakers. With Academy Award® qualifying status, the
Nashville Film Festival celebrates innovation, music and the many voices of the human spirit through the art of film. Originally founded in 1969, the Nashville Film Festival is one of the first film festivals in the United States and presented its 51st annual festival virtually in 2020. NashFilm discovers, elevates, and honors filmmakers, screenwriters and music makers from around the world while engaging, connecting and strengthening the Nashville community.

**Brent Palmer, B.S.’20,**
www.linkedin.com/in/brent-palmer-216011122/

I am an Americorps member at Impact America in Memphis, TN.

**Frank E. Parcells, B.S., M.S., & Ph.D., Parcellsf@apsu.edu**

Retired after 21 years at Eastern Illinois University and 18 years at Austin Peay State University.

**Charles Parrott, Ph.D.’11, cparrot5@kennesaw.edu**

I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre & Performance Studies at Kennesaw State University just north of Atlanta, GA. I am the director of the KSU Tellers, a student storytelling ensemble that has presented at local, regional, national, and international festivals and conferences. In 2020 I was award the Outstanding Teaching Award by KSU and was named the Outstanding Arts & Humanities Mentor by the Council on Undergraduate Research. I was recently named Vice Chair Elect of the Performance Studies Division of the National Communication Association. Currently, my scholarly efforts are focused on the creation and presentation of autobiographical solo performance. In 2020, I published a collection of those stories in the journal Text & Performance Quarterly. I have two adorable children and spend most of my free time cleaning up after them.

**Krishna Hart Pattisapu, B.S.’08; M.S.’10,**
https://www.linkedin.com/in/krishna-pattisapu-ph-d-they-them-theirs-56b4b478/

I am the Director of Diversity Recruitment and Retention for the School of Education at the University of Colorado Boulder. In this role, I support first-generation and BIPOC students who are studying leadership and education. I work with students as they are applying for admission to CU Boulder, then help support them through the transition from high school to college. I teach two undergraduate courses: Becoming a Leader and First-Year Success at CU. I also serve as the School of Education’s ambassador to campus-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. I am an active volunteer in community LGBTQ+, youth, and immigrant rights organizing. I live in Longmont, Colorado, with my husband Cole and our cats, Maggie and Scaramouche.

**Bernice Pollack, B.S.’61, M.S.’62,**
Blp5556@hotmail.com

Fifteen years ago I retired from teaching HS English and Speech. After working two years with at risk students, I became the Educator/Moderator at senior centers which I still love doing. The group that I now have weekly are exceptional as it is composed of retired college professors, lawyers, doctors, social workers, engineers, etc. Our group is called Active Minds.

One of the most recent things that just happened during the past election was one of my most wonderful students was our Congressional candidate, District 1, Ohio. She had been in both classes and said the speech class was the most helpful of any class. As a teacher this is what we love to hear. Someday, I hope she becomes Speaker of the House.

**Kevin Purcell, B.A.**

I am currently semi-retired. Having worked for many years at Microsoft as Senior Director of Organization Development in Seattle. I also worked in Springfield, IL as System Director of Organization and Leadership Development for Memorial Health Systems. I just completed 11 years as Adjunct Faculty in College of Business at U of Illinois-Springfield. I am proud to say I co-founded two theater companies: Seattle Public Theater and Over the Moon Productions. I continue to consult on leadership development and am an actor and director in local theater. I currently live in southern Illinois.

**Dr. Karen Ratliff (Leavy), B.A.’03 (Organizational Communication)**

I am a professor of Education and consultant/business owner
Jeffrey Rensch, B.S.’82

I recently retired from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania where I was the Director of Consumer Relations with the PA Liquor Control Board and moved to Florida to improve my golf and pickleball skills and enjoy the sunshine. Before that career, I was with the airline industry, serving in several front-line and management rolls with US Airways and Northwest.

Traveling extensively around the world, I’ve also found time to film commercials and training videos, perform in Shakespeare in the Park events, skydive, bungee jump, mountain climb, white water kayak and scuba dive from the Coral Sea & Great Barrier Reef to the icy waters of the North Atlantic.

SIU was instrumental in grooming me from an immature boy to a successful adult. I credit my professors, peers and other role models, along with my brothers in the Delta Chi fraternity for building lifelong friendships and giving me the courage and strength to never give up and never surrender. Thank you!

Doris McLain Rottschalk, B.A.’69

I am now retired after 34 years of teaching high school Language Arts and enjoying my six grandchildren and excited for first great-grandbaby in February ’21. Still bleeding maroon!!!

Kevin Scholfield, B.A.’10

I am currently getting my masters degree from Arizona State University and working for a urban design firm in Tempe, AZ.

Debra Schroeder Thompson, B.S.’73, debraspelhoerthompson@msn.com

I am a psychotherapist in private practice in Collegeville, Pa. After graduating from SIU, I did graduate work at University of Hawaii and studied at American Academy of Dramatic Arts. I completed a graduate degree in Social Work in 1986 and a doctorate in Family Therapy in 2001. I am now combining my love of theatre and psychotherapy in my study of psychodrama. I am looking forward to directing my own company entitled, DREAM THEATRE: DRAMAS OF ILLUMINATION. I have always been grateful to the Speech Communication Department at SIU for introducing me to the magic of Oral Interpretation.

Danny Schwab, B.S.’99, Twitter: @schwabstatefarm

I am a State Farm Agent focused on insurance and financial services and licensed to assist anyone in Illinois and Indiana.

Bel Scrogham, Bachelors B.S.’00, belscroghamhomes@kw.com

I am currently a realtor in the Denver Metro area. I live in Westminster, Colorado with my husband and fellow Saluki, Jason, and our three kids. Our oldest, Riley, is 13 and recently represented the USA in the St Devote U13 International Rugby Tournament in Monaco as the youngest American rugby team to ever compete internationally. My daughter, Addi, is nine and has helped me start a non-

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Kleinau Twitter: twitter.com/KleinauTheatre
profit called Speak Up For Selective Mutism where we work to ensure schools have more resources for early detection and intervention for kids with Selective Mutism. Our youngest, Kane, is five and loves to skateboard and play rugby. In our free time, we love to spend time in the mountains.

Brandon Sims, B.S.’93, gcmedia@yahoo.com

2020 has been a year of challenges for so many people. I live in St. Louis and have worked for the past 20 years as a professional event coordinator. The COVID-19 pandemic has put my professional career on hold.

I've used my time to help various children's based non-profit organizations, including the Children’s Organ Transplant Association (COTA) and Make-A-Wish. I've worked with Be The Match and Gift Of Life for several years to recruit and register potential life-saving bone marrow donors.

Additionally, I work as a freelance voice-over artist and audio production technician.

Scott O. Shelton, B.S.’91 (Geography), M.S.’93 (Community Development), Drsos@yahoo.com, Facebook: Scott Shelton.

I am currently a Broker with EXP Realty in the metro east

Libby Spellman, B.S.’12. (Double major in Journalism and Communication Studies), libby1388@aol.com

I currently work in the financial industry at Hickory Point Bank & Trust as the Assistant Vice President of Client Experience.

Alisha Smith, B.S.’00

I am currently finishing up a PhD in Mind-Body Medicine and teaching a variety of courses (communication/english/biology/psychology/professional development) at Laurus College. Laurus College is a fully-online, accredited, undergraduate school housed on the Central Coast of California.

Leigh Steiner, B.A.’73; M.A.’74; Ph.D.’78, Facebook- Leigh Steiner

I have worked in the behavioral health care field, serving as the CEO of a psychiatric hospital and as the Commissioner of Mental Health for the State of Illinois. I now work as the Director of Clinical Analytics for Relias.

Jennifer L. Strohl, B.A.’76 (Public Relations)

I am currently retired from a 31-year career with AT&T in Public Relations. I've made my home in Webster Groves, MO and before COVID happily served as a NICU Cuddler at St. Louis Children’s Hospital. I hope to return to that as soon as possible!

Abi Tochalauski, B.A.’18, Abo.Tochalauski@gmail.com

After returning from being a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ukraine early due to COVID-19, I started a position as a Volunteer and Special Events Coordinator at The Salvation Army in Rock County, WI. I oversee their local Red Kettle Campaign and Christmas gift collection programs during the holidays season. During the rest of the year I primarily work on recruiting volunteers and working with other organizations in town to fulfill the needs of low-income residents. Soon I hope to start online classes toward a Master's degree to further advance my career.

Kristen Treinen, Ph.D.’02, Kristen.treinen@mnsu.edu

Since 2002, I’ve been a faculty member of the Department of Communication Studies at Minnesota State University Mankato. Thanks to #45, I've been able to teach Whiteness and Communication (finally!) for the past four years!

Douglas Unger, B.S.

Currently an IT security infrastructure project manager.

Peter VanOosting, B.A.’97, Twitter: @Peter_VO_

I have worked as a criminal defense attorney at the Public Defender's Office in Alameda County for close to 20 years. I have tried more than twenty jury trials. I currently specialize in mental health cases. I also do legislative work for my office and for the California Public Defender’s Association. I have helped draft bills and statewide ballot initiatives. I
have testified in the Senate Public Safety Committee of the California Legislature.

The education that I received at the Speech Communication Department at SIU has been invaluable to me in my career. I am profoundly grateful to all of the faculty - and to my fellow students - for giving me such a rich undergraduate experience.

Ken Vedder, (Public Relations, minor in marketing and journalism), Kenvedder52@gmail.com

I own several companies and have sold my largest company and now I work for Warehouse Direct, i still am an entrepreneur and have several companies and side businesses. One is Sanford and Son junk, another is 2 men and a trailer, not a truck! Third is working hands woman are hired at home to do hand work and Fulfiment jobs.

We do clean outs of home and help people move to retirement homes chapels and we credit their moves to pay for the move with items they can take with them! We then take items to flea markets to sell and make more money. More jobs more money more ideas more money! I have made a low six figure all My life and wonder why some people can’t seem to get going and do something with their lives. 2 men and trailer copied work anywhere? Helping people is the goal not ripping people off. Do what they need during maybe stressful times and my helping others god takes care of you in return. Believe and work hard and all your dreams can come true.

Adrienne Viramontes, Ph.D.

Adrienne Viramontes is an Associate Professor in the Communication Department at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. She also serves as Graduate Director (and advisor) of the M.A. in Professional Communication. She teaches undergraduate courses in research methods, Latina/o Midwestern identity, and oral interpretation (online, hybrid, and F2F). She teaches graduate courses in the Philosophy of Communication and Autoethnography. She specializes in the study of lived experience and her scholarship reflects her personal and professional trajectory as a woman of color, a type-1 diabetic, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and ancestral voice.

Niki Washington, B.A.’99, Nikitwashington@aol.com

I am the Associate Head Coach for Women’s Basketball at Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, FL.

Erika Wentzel, B.S.’07, erika@flesnerwentzel.com

I went to law school after graduating SIU. After graduating from law school, I opened my own law firm. It is in St. Charles, MO. We have 9 employees at present. We focus on family law and consumer protection suits.


I’ve been selling software since graduation. I’m currently a Senior Sales Director for Coupa Software. My career has proven lucrative and interesting. Personally, I still perform in water ski shows, and have two girls that I love dearly.
My name is Sonja Scott Woods and I am a human resources (HR) professional consultant with over 20 years of practice leading HR initiative for Fortune 500 companies and medium sized organizations. I am currently the President / CEO of HRServices and Data Analytics, LLC in the Chicago, IL and Fort Wayne, IN area.

Yvet Youssef, M.A.’17, Instagram: @yvet_youssef

Since graduating from SIU in the summer of 2017 I have moved back to the Netherlands and have recently started a new degree program in the field of Integrative Counseling. It’s basically a psychology degree in very focused Compassionate Communication (Suzanne, I am sending you a big interstellar heart-hug from here). I do need practice-clients, by the way, so if you are interested in working on some issues (minor issues for now, as I am still in training) feel free to send me a message! 😊 Besides that, I’ve been making music with a band, volunteer as a mentor to teens, make images and videos, and have been surviving a global pandemic while witnessing, with a strange kind of hopeful despair, the end of the world as we know it. Hashtag 2020. It’s been intense, no? Take good care of yourselves! Much Love, y.y.

Bin Zhang, Ph.D.’15, bzhang@spscc.edu

I am currently working as a full time professor in Communication Studies at South Puget Sound Community College in Olympia, WA. My course design of Intercultural Communication has been awarded the NIEA (Northeast International Education Association) International Curriculum Grant in 2016. I am also teaching and developing Chinese language and East Asian cultural studies programs for my college. We had our second daughter Ria last year. My kids make me laugh and happy everyday.
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If you would like to contribute to a variety of departmental events, student professional and academic development opportunities, or any of our scholarship and award funds, please visit our department giving page at https://cola.siu.edu/communicationstudies/giving/ or contact department chair Dr. Sandy Pensoneau-Conway (sandypc@siu.edu). Our alumni and friends make a world of difference! Thank you.