

CONVERSATIONS

A publication for College of Communication alumni

DEPAUL
UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION



Communication students who study abroad discover new perspectives on our global world. Read more on page 6.

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THE NEXT 10 YEARS

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We welcome your story ideas, questions and comments. Please contact Jacob Sabolo (LAS '12) at (312) 362-8820 or jsabolo@depaul.edu.

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As the College of Communication approaches its 10-year anniversary, I hope you are as impressed as I am with the incredible growth we've achieved. Our community has grown and continues to expand—this fall, our freshman class was 10 percent larger than last year and graduate enrollment increased 17 percent. Our alumni saw gains in employment rates. Bachelor's degree holders experienced a 6 percent increase in career outcomes (either employed or in a continuing education program), and master's degree holders saw a 9 percent increase from the previous year. Moreover, the employment rate of our alumni was 7 percent higher than the 2015 national average. Many of our initiatives are also thriving. Leading experts continue to visit our classrooms to enhance student learning; in fact, 300 guest speakers visited last year. To kick off the academic year, Rishad Tobaccowala, chief strategist with the advertising and public relations firm Publicis Groupe, delivered a keynote address on disruption and the future of the communication landscape. The Innovation Lab sees healthy use, with more than 15 classes incorporating the resource into their course curriculum. In the fall, the Center for Journalism Integrity and Excellence held its inaugural lecture, "Confessions of a Diehard Political Reporter in an Apocalyptic Election Year," delivered by co-directors Carol Marin and Don Moseley. Plans are underway for the college to host the International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies conference in summer 2018, and the college will offer certificates and workshops through the continuing and professional education division. Topics include communication apprehension, crisis communication and portfolio creation. Visit learning.depaul.edu for more information.

As alumni, you are among the reasons the college continues to thrive. I can't wait to see what the next 10 years will bring.



ALUMNA WORKS TO INSPIRE HER COMMUNITY

As director of communications and engagement at Evanston Township High School (ETHS) in Illinois, Evangeline Semark (CMN MA '14) proudly touts the equity focus of this learning community. Ranked in the top 1-2 percent of all U.S. high schools, ETHS educates more than 3,300 youth from every neighborhood in Evanston, Ill., representing many racial and ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic statuses. The high rate of student success at ETHS is attributable, in part, to the conversations between students and staff about racial equity and building an environment that affirms all perspectives and identities.

This approach suits Semark perfectly. "I lead the public relations and communication efforts to help create a more culturally responsive learning community for our students," Semark says. "My goal is to provide our students and families with the information they need to be inspired to learn."

Semark believes her role stretches beyond the typical duties of a public relations practitioner. "Whether it's to invite families to learn more about the school, facilitate workshops to discuss issues of racial equity or teach freshmen about their 'online tattoos' via media literacy programming, I position myself as an educator," she says. "I continuously create opportunities to empower others."

I was encouraged to stretch my learning, to question what was known and to imagine possibilities of resistance and change.

A former graphic designer with a passion for community-based work and social justice, Semark wanted to "understand the human factors, communication patterns and cultural contexts behind the designs. The communication field is inherently interdisciplinary and provides those who are interested with many avenues for expansion." After working in the field for several years, Semark decided to pursue a graduate degree at DePaul in organizational and multicultural communication.

"My graduate studies gave me the critical framework to interrogate ideological systems of power such as racism, classism, ableism and heterosexism," Semark says. "I was encouraged to stretch my learning, to question what was known and to imagine possibilities of resistance and change."

Semark says as a white cisgender woman working in education, she finds that one of her biggest challenges is continuously examining her role in perpetuating the systems of oppression that create the stories of who is valued and why. During her time at ETHS, she has spearheaded removing gender pronouns in communications, helped create events that expand beyond the able-bodied experience and worked to ensure that the majority of the student body—youth of color—are highly visible and accurately represented in marketing materials.

Semark encourages others to use their talents to disrupt all forms of bias. "As public relations professionals, we are uniquely positioned to help shape how someone or something is viewed in the public realm," she says. "We have the opportunity to recenter the communities we serve professionally through a social justice framework."

Tips on Community Building from Evangeline Semark

It's not about you. It's about creating the story of "us" by lifting up the shared values of your organization and the various peoples who live in the communities you serve.

Communication strategies should build partnerships. I use tactics to position students and parents as key communicators.

Create plans that disseminate audience-centered messaging through approaches that build brand advocacy and meet people where they already are.

Allow all voices to be heard via surveys, focus groups, feedback sessions and voting, if appropriate. Pushback from those who feel unheard might lead to project failure.