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The newsletter of TCNJ's
Department of
Communication,
Journalism, and Film:
A National Leader in
student-faculty engagement

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NATIONAL STUDENT NEWS



TCNJ Student Papers “Provide Renewed Hope for our Discipline and our World” at National Health Communication Conference

Ewing, NJ: TCNJ student papers “provide renewed hope for our health communication discipline and our world” according to Dr. Anne Nicotera, professor and organizer of the national biannual DC Health Communication Conference hosted by George Mason University May 1-3, 2025, in Herndon, VA, adding “to see this caliber of work produced by undergraduate students is rare and exceedingly gratifying.” Praising the quality of a record-breaking 14 student papers accepted for presentation, all selected in blind, refereed competition, Nicotera marveled that TCNJ undergraduate presentations often meet or exceed professional standards expected of PhD candidates.

Co-authored by 45 students, all 14 papers were written in fall, 2024, classes taught by Dr. John C. Pollock, professor in the two departments of Communication, Journalism, and Film (CJF) and

Public Health (PH). Choosing their own topics and exploring the impact of society on media, undergraduates tested “community structure” theory, seeking systematic relationships between different community demographics and variations in news coverage of critical issues. Comparing coverage among major US cities, students explored topics such as abortion access, climate change, disability accommodation, homelessness, obesity, and opioid use. Comparing coverage among nations across the world, students examined abortion access as well as conflict zone migration, drug trafficking, human trafficking, male contraception, men’s mental health, pandemic mental health, and sexual violence.

The “Top Undergraduate Student-Led Abstract Award” for the entire conference went to a TCNJ paper presented by senior author Theresa “Tess” Leighton ’25 (co-authored with Blen Tesfahun ’27, Samantha Matson ’27, and Roman Fabbriatore ’25) on cross-national coverage of migration from conflict zones. At the closing awards ceremony, conference organizer Nicotera hailed the TCNJ paper as among the “top 20” among all 280 submissions to the conference, including papers from graduate students and professors throughout the world.

The award-winning paper compared media coverage among



STUDENTS PRESENTING AT DCHC IN MAY 2025

NATIONAL STUDENT NEWS



TCNJ Student Papers “Provide Renewed Hope for our Discipline and our World” at National Health Communication Conference

23 countries, finding that larger populations “buffered” from economic uncertainty in a country (with higher proportions of national resources such as natural gas, coal, and electricity production; length of road network, and health access – hospital beds/100,000) were associated with news coverage opposing government assistance to new migrants from conflict zones. Pollock said these results illustrate a “violated buffer” pattern, with news media viewing the rapid influx of immigrants as a “threat to a cherished way of life.”

TCNJ undergraduates attending the conference, some presenting more than one paper/poster, included Jacqueline Faulk '26, Emily Ferrer '25, Mabintou Fofana '27, Natalie Roesch '25, Jennifer Romero '25, and Samyuktha Senthil '25. Student comments revealed the significance of the conference in launching new careers.

Christopher DeSantis '25: “It was an honor to present undergraduate work with outstanding scholars from around the world.” Caroline Dowd '26: “After months of preparation, sharing research was exciting and fulfilling.” Rebecca Heath '25: “It was eye-opening and inspiring to present original research and to learn first-hand from scholars making an incredible impact on the health communication field.” Tess Leighton '25: “Grateful to attend

the DCHC conference, I look forward to the next steps of my professional career including the possibility of graduate school.” Kyle Levy '25: “I engaged with seasoned professionals, absorbing their wisdom; the DCHC conference represents a practical, prestigious exclamation point to my undergraduate public health experience.”

Commenting on student collaborative achievements, Dr. Susan Ryan, chair of the Department of Communication, Journalism, and Film (CJF), said: “The department is tremendously proud of all the DCHC national conference student presenters, whose hard work on important issues deserves widespread recognition.”

Dr. Natasha Patterson, chair of the Department of Public Health (PH), added: “These student-faculty collaborative achievements underscore the strength of interdisciplinary collaboration at TCNJ. Dr. Pollock’s joint appointment with Public Health and CJF creates a unique space for students to explore public health through the lens of media and society. The caliber of these presentations speaks volumes about the relevance of their work to real-world health challenges and the exceptional mentorship guiding them.”

NATIONAL STUDENT NEWS



Beyond the Classroom: TCNJ Students Present Intercultural Insights at NYSCA

On October 19, 2024, four communication students, Brianna Carrie, Maja Dziuda, Jacqueline Faulk, and I (Natalie Roesch), presented at a panel in the 82nd New York State Communication Association (NYSCA) annual conference in Callicoon, NY, along with our professor, Dr. Yifeng Hu. The panel, titled "Music, Food, and Friendship - Exploring Intercultural Interactions Using Mini-Ethnography," focused on cultural patterns found in various environments and groups: TCNJ Best Buddies, TCNJ i-Tunes, and an Indian restaurant in Princeton.

These projects were developed from Dr. Yifeng Hu's Spring 2024 Intercultural Communication class where we explored how to engage and communicate effectively with people from diverse cultures. To apply what we learned in the classroom, we conducted semester-long ethnographic projects through which we immersed ourselves in cultures different from our own. . My specific research topic was TCNJ i-Tunes, an on-campus intercultural acapella group. I found that TCNJ i-Tunes is a unique organization that provides new learning opportunities that lead to personal growth of the members. The group also provided me new perspectives on cultural influences and highlighted often-overlooked connections between culture and creativity, especially music.

After the semester was over, during the summer, Dr. Hu introduced us to NYSCA, a regional professional conference. She encouraged us to be part of a panel that she organized that consisted of our individual projects. Throughout the preparation for this conference, I received feedback from Dr. Hu on how I can improve my public speaking skills and enhance the typical presentation style used at conferences. Going through this preparation made me feel much more confident heading into the event.

I found the conference to be an excellent platform for networking, sharing my work and gaining meaningful experiences. One of the standout features of the conference was the high level of the feedback from the respondent, who offered constructive critiques that we could apply to our ongoing work.

The feedback I received was incredibly valuable to my learning and will be helpful for my future projects. One student, Maja Dziuda, noted, "Presenting at the NYSCA conference in front of an audience and Anastacia Kurylo, the author of the Intercultural Communication book was a rewarding experience for me. This experience enhanced my communication skills and my understanding of effective presentation techniques. As an adult student, I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in such an impactful event."

NATIONAL STUDENT NEWS



Beyond the Classroom: TCNJ Students Present Intercultural Insights at NYSCA



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: BRIANNA CARRIE, JACQUELINE FAULK, DR. YIFENG HU (CHAIR OF THE PANEL), MAJA DZIUDA, AND NATALIE ROESCH



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: BRIANNA CARRIE, JACQUELINE FAULK, MAJA DZIUDA, NATALIE ROESCH, AND DR. ANASTACIA KURYLO (RESPONDENT OF THE PANEL)

NATIONAL STUDENT NEWS



TCNJ Students Shine with Nine Presentations at Annual Conference of the 2025 New Jersey Communication Association

The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) fielded student paper presenters at the annual (2025) conference of the New Jersey Communication Association on Saturday, March 15. Pictured left to right: Natalie Roesch, Theresa “Tess” Leighton, Rebecca Heath, Samyuktha Senthil, Christopher DeSantis, Jennifer Romero, Christine Chen, and mentor (Dr. John C. Pollock). Not pictured was an earlier presenter, Kyle Levy. TCNJ thanks Dr. Richard Dool, conference organizer, and the multiple gracious NJCA volunteers from Rutgers University, which hosted the conference. Thanks, too, to Gary and Marie Radford, who were among the indispensable “founders” of NJCA, and whose announced retirement reminds us all of the many generous contributions they both made to the NJCA and the wider community of communication scholars throughout the world. Gary and Marie, we shall miss you both! TCNJ students made nine presentations on a wide range of topics, including cross-national media coverage of pandemic mental health, men’s mental health sexual violence, vaccine hesitancy, food security, and migration from conflict zones. Additional papers were presented on US nationwide multicity coverage of abortion access and climate change. Students from The College of New Jersey deserve appreciation from throughout TCNJ for reinforcing the national reputation of its Dept. of Communication, Journalism, and Film, which in 2013 won the National Communication Association’s “Rex Mix Program of Excellence” award as the nation’s “best undergraduate communication program.” Congratulations, TCNJ student presenters!



L-R: Natalie Roesch, Theresa Leighton, Rebecca Heath, Samyuktha Senthil, Chris DeSantis, Jennifer Romero, Christine Chen, and John C. Pollock

STUDENT AND FACULTY COLLABORATION



Faculty, students present work at ASIANetwork Annual Conference, organize a film festival

Associate Professor of Communication Studies Yifeng Hu and students involved in the TCNJ Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Advocacy Campaign are raising the awareness of AAPI experiences through recent presentations at the ASIANetwork Annual Conference in March and an upcoming two-day film festival on campus on April 30 and May 1.

Hu, two seniors and one alumnus recently presented at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas.

Maya McKelvey '25, Natalie Roesch '25 and Ann-Kerry Donaus '24 discussed their individual projects in the multiple years' AAPI Advocacy Campaign at the inaugural student panel. Hu presented her three-year journey of the AAPI Advocacy Campaign as well as her experience last summer at the Mellon grant panel.

McKelvey gave a presentation on a course she took her sophomore year where students were challenged to develop and execute an Asian American film festival by the end of the semester.

McKelvey walked the audience through each stage of the project including conceptualization, curriculum integration, film curation, organization, and execution. She emphasized Hu's vision of a class centered on accurately representing and acknowledging Asian American history, experiences, cultures, and issues.

McKelvey said presenting became one of the highlights of her senior year and was an experience unlike anything she has done before. She said stepping out of her comfort zone allowed her to expand not only her academic perspective, but also helped her grow personally.

"This experience showed us that when we commit to learning and open ourselves to new perspectives, we can grow into more empathetic and effective advocates," McKelvey said. "Thanks to the incredible support from Dr. Hu, I was able to prepare effectively for the conference."

Natalie Roesch '25 said the conference gave her the opportunity to connect with people from across the country and around the world and learn about the projects they were working on.



L-R: Maya McKelvey, Yifeng Hu, Natalie Roesch, Ann-Kerry Donaus

STUDENT AND FACULTY COLLABORATION



Faculty, students present work at ASIANetwork Annual Conference, organize a film festival

“Each presentation offered a unique insight that inspired me to continue developing my own research and apply what I’ve learned in both my academic and professional life,” Roesch said. “The diverse perspectives I encountered helped me reflect on my own identity and work, and I’ve since been able to incorporate these insights into my daily life and future goals.”

Roesch said she believes her presentation helped to spread awareness and shows how advocacy and education go hand-in-hand. Once people are educated about the AAPI experience and the issues the community faces, they can start meaningful conversations, share that knowledge, and work toward preventing the repetition of harmful patterns in history.

“Even if our message reaches just one person, it can still make a powerful difference. Every step toward understanding helps create a more inclusive and equitable future,” Roesch said.

Hu, who has been working with the students, said the conference is a culmination of their years of hard work. “Throughout the entire process, they have demonstrated the utmost professionalism and work ethic,” she said.

Hu said the students took pride in their work, allowing them to deliver cohesive and passionate speeches which earned rave reviews from many attendees.

“As their professor, advisor, and mentor, I can’t be prouder. I wholeheartedly believe they represent the best of our TCNJ students, and I wish them the very best in their future careers,” she said.

As part of the TCNJ AAPI Advocacy Campaign, Hu and her students currently enrolled in COM 487/HON 370: Student-Faculty Advanced Research are also hosting the 2nd biennial Asian American Film Festival on April 30 and May 1. The two-day festival will feature student-led interviews and discussions, screenings, multiple raffle prizes, etc.

Bryanna Carrie '25 who is involved in the film festival said it has been impactful to students on both their education and worldview.

“I can’t wait to have thought provoking discussion panels with the directors and audience, spark interest in AAPI films, and start closing this cultural divide on TCNJ’s campus,” Carey said.

This year, four film directors have been invited to participate in a Q&A with the campus community.

“We are beyond ready to share some of the most authentic and impactful films representing Asian American experiences—not just with our campus, but with everyone,” Hu said.

STUDENT AND FACULTY COLLABORATION



Professors and Students Showcase TCNJ Health Communication Strength at National Conference

TCNJ professors and students demonstrated the strength of the health communication specializations in the Depts. of Communication, Journalism, and Film (CJF) and Public Health (PH) at the biannual DC Health Communication Conference hosted by George Mason University May 1-3 in Herndon, VA.

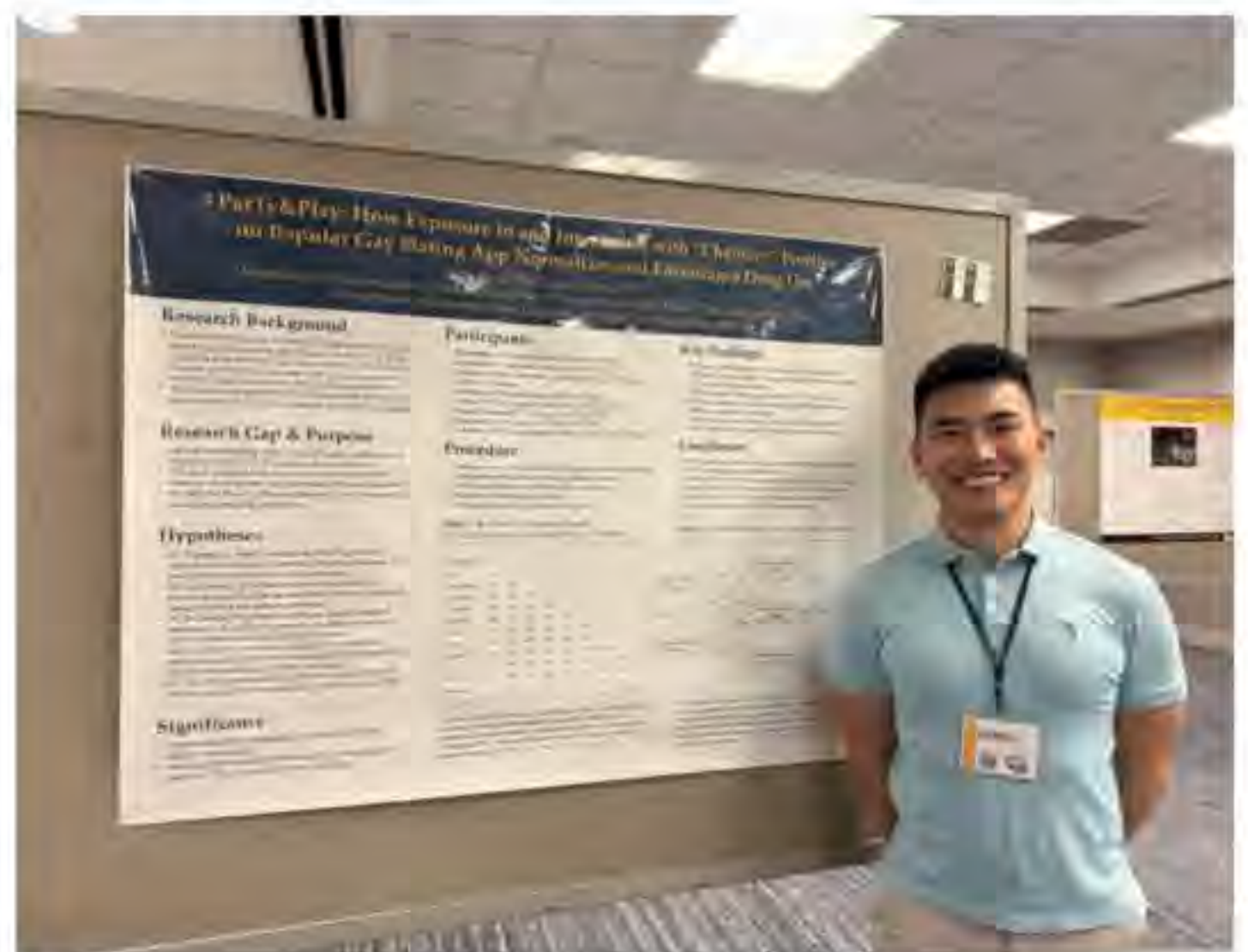
Both professors Dr. Yachao “Bruce” Li and Dr. John C. Pollock, each with shared appointments in Communication, Journalism, and Film and Public Health, participated in multiple panels and poster sessions, as did ten students from TCNJ, who presented a total of 14 papers or posters.

Dr. Li made two presentations. “Pathways from Sexual Stigma to Mpox Preventive Intentions” investigated how different types of stigma affected gay and bisexual men’s intentions to take preventive measures against mpox during the 2022 outbreak in the United States.

A survey of 439 gay and bisexual men and found that certain forms of experienced stigma – specifically how individuals perceive and internalize negative societal attitudes – paradoxically “strengthened” their intentions to take protective health measures.

A second study by Dr. Li, “#Party&Play: How Exposure to “Chemsex” Content on Popular Gay Dating App Normalizes and Encourages Drug Use,” revealed how content on dating apps may shape attitudes and behaviors around the intentional use of drugs during sexual encounters, known as “chemsex,” among gay and bisexual men.

A survey of 293 U.S. gay and bisexual men found that by changing users’ perceptions of social norms and attitudes about chemsex, simply seeing chemsex-related content directly influenced “intentions” to participate in chemsex, even without changing users’ attitudes or beliefs about the behavior.



DR. YACHAO “BRUCE” LI AT THE DCHC

STUDENT AND FACULTY COLLABORATION



Professors and Students Showcase TCNJ Health Communication Strength at National Conference

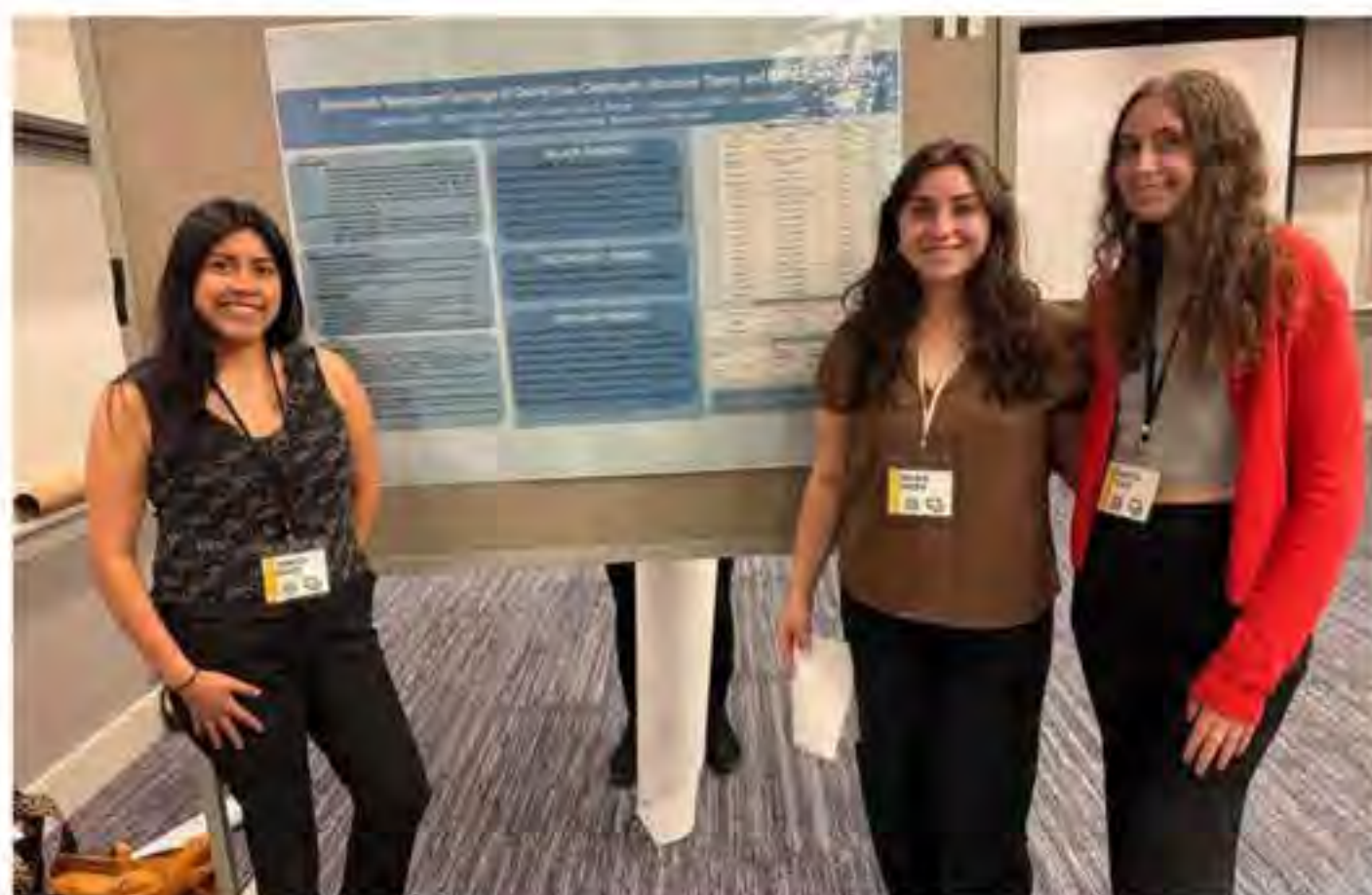
At the 2025 biannual DC Health Communication Conference hosted by George Mason University, Dr. Pollock experienced a “personal first:”

His 2021 book “COVID-19 in International Media: Global Pandemic Perspectives,” was raffled off to a doctoral student from the University of New Mexico, Dora Nentoola, from Ghana, who asked Dr. Pollock to autograph her copy of his book, an unusual request for authors of academic scholarship!

Student participation was made possible in part by a scholarship fund established by Charles and Barbaranne '68 DiMarco in memory of their son, Garrett DiMarco '10. The fund provides financial assistance to sophomores, juniors, and seniors majoring in communication studies to help defray expenses incurred to present research at academic conferences.



DR. POLLOCK AT THE BOOK RAFFLE



JENNIFER ROMERO, REBECCA HEATH, NATALIE ROESCH



FOUR DIMARCO SCHOLARS: (L-R): CAROLINE DOWD, REBECCA HEATH, JP, CHRISTOPHER DESANTIS, NATALIE ROESCH

FACULTY NEWS



Advancing AI Literacy in Communication: Dr. Yifeng Hu's Pioneering Research on Generative AI and Stereotypes

Dr. Yifeng Hu, a prominent scholar in communication and technology, has released two exciting new publications that take a closer look at how generative artificial intelligence (AI) interacts with stereotypes. These works explore how AI can shape the way we communicate and provide valuable tools for anyone—whether in the classroom or in the professional world—looking to develop a critical understanding of AI and its impact on society.

In her book chapter, “Screaming Out Loud in the Communication Classroom: Asian Stereotypes and the Fallibility of Image Generating Artificial Intelligence” (published by IGI Global, 2024), Dr. Hu and co-author Dr. Anastacia Kurylo explore how AI platforms like DALL-E, MidJourney, and Pika

Art can unintentionally highlight and even amplify harmful stereotypes. They demonstrate that these tools not only reflect societal biases but often magnify them, bringing unconscious stereotypes to the forefront through the images they generate.

Dr. Hu emphasizes the importance of communication students recognizing and confronting these biases, stating, “AI doesn’t just reflect society’s biases—it amplifies them, often shouting them out loud through the images it creates.” The chapter calls for students to understand these dynamics and actively resist them in their own use of AI.

Dr. Hu’s second publication, “Generative AI, Communication, and Stereotypes: Learning Critical AI Literacy Through Experience, Analysis, and Reflection” (published in *Communication Teacher*, a flagship journal of National Communication Association, 2024), takes a more hands-on approach to AI literacy. In this article, Dr. Hu shares a fun and engaging assignment from her COM 265 Emerging Communication Technologies course.

In the assignment, students use AI tools to explore and analyze stereotypes.



Dr. Yifeng Hu's
Pioneering
Research on
Generative AI and
Stereotypes

Advancing AI
Literacy in
Communication



FACULTY NEWS



The goal is simple: to get students thinking critically about how AI can reinforce biases and help them question and challenge those ideas. “Building critical AI literacy isn’t just about understanding the technology—it’s about equipping students to recognize the stereotypes AI may reinforce and to create more inclusive, responsible communication,” Dr. Hu

explains. Together, these publications emphasize the growing importance of addressing AI’s role in perpetuating stereotypes. These works encourage educators, students, and professionals to think more critically about AI and how we can use it more thoughtfully and responsibly as it continues to shape our media and society.

Journalism Professor Kathleen Webber receives The Robert Anderson First-Year Seminar Distinguished Instructor Award

Professor and Program Coordinator of Journalism and Professional Writing Kathleen Webber received the The Robert Anderson First-Year Seminar Distinguished Instructor Award at TCNJ’s Teaching and Learning Summit held during the spring semester.

The award is given to a faculty member who develops one or more intellectually engaging and supportive course(s), shows long-term dedication with at least eight semesters of teaching, embodies the goals of the program to serve the campus with consistent excellence in teaching, and provides evidence of positive impact on students over many years. Professor of English Lincoln Konkle nominated Webber for the award.

Webber, who has been teaching at TCNJ since 2012, is a part of the First Seminar Coordinating Committee. Her passion for writing about sustainability regarding fashion began during her second semester teaching in 2013 when 1,133 garment workers were killed in Bangladesh during a factory collapse.

As a result, she was inspired to teach her First-Year-Semester course, The True Cost of Fashion. The FYS course explores the environmental and human rights concerns within the fashion industry. It educates students on the significant waste and pollution associated with producing fast fashion and highlights the harsh conditions that factory workers are subjected to for little pay.

FACULTY NEWS



Journalism Professor Kathleen Webber receives The Robert Anderson First-Year Seminar Distinguished Instructor Award



Webber said teaching the course to a diverse range of majors has been a rewarding experience because all individuals, regardless of what field they are in, have something to contribute to sustainability.

“I try to say to them to solve this problem and think about it critically, it takes people from public health to come up with solutions. It takes policy makers so they get to see where they can contribute,” Webber said.

She said she is very grateful to be recognized by the college for her work on the FSCC and in the program. “To me, this class is my heart. It’s all about my research,” Webber said.

She explained that although it is nice to express oneself through fashion, human rights and environmental issues are not discussed enough. “My hope is that students leave this class and think more about where they see their place in solutions when it comes to things like social and environmental justice,” Webber said.

FACULTY NEWS



Journalism Professor Kathleen Webber receives The Robert Anderson First-Year Seminar Distinguished Instructor Award

Political Science major Lacey Okamura '27, who took the course during her first-year at TCNJ, said that Webber's teaching went beyond the classroom, encouraging students to become more involved in the community. "Professor Webber was an engaging professor that truly cared for her students and the topics in which she taught," Okamura said.

She said although the class material was very different from her normal coursework, it was one of her favorite classes. She recalls a time when she worked alongside Webber to host a free clothing drive which inspired her to take action.

"It meant so much to have Professor Webber as a mentor, someone who cares deeply for the environment, reducing waste, and spreading awareness through her journalism," Okamura said. "I've learned so much from her and am so pleased to see her dedication and hard work recognized."



FACULTY NEWS



Journalism Professor Kim Pearson receives the Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award



Professor of Journalism and Professional Writing Kim Pearson received the Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion award during the Faculty Senate Awards at this year's Teaching and Learning Summit at TCNJ.

The award recognizes a full-time faculty member who has made an exceptional contribution to the college's aim of becoming more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist.

Pearson said that her career as an educator was heavily influenced by her father who received his GED and went to graduate school all while raising her. Pearson, who became her father's research assistant at the age of 10, said that growing up with a direct experience of the transformative power of education made her value the idea of providing opportunity for all.

She received an AB in Politics with a certificate in African American Studies from Princeton University, a MA in Journalism from New York University, and began teaching full time at TCNJ in 1990. She has taught a diverse range of courses including Media Entrepreneurship, Health and Environmental Journalism and Race, and Gender and the News. She also co-founded the interactive multimedia program.

Prior to teaching, she was a lay counselor for the Cancer Information Service and the writer and editor of a newsletter for allied health professions. Her research has received funding from Microsoft Research, the National Science Foundation and the New Jersey Council of the Humanities.

During her career, Pearson has reported on a range of issues. "I was influenced by the lack of representation of the kinds of people I knew. The communities I grew up in did not reflect anywhere near the reality understood," Pearson said. "When I left the corporate world and came to academia, what I wanted to do was create learning environments in which students grapple with these emerging real world issues." 15

FACULTY NEWS



Journalism Professor Kim Pearson receives the Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award

Pearson said she believes it is important to create pathways for everybody to realize their potential in the economy and civic space that is emerging, and in order to understand that, it is important to have knowledge of history.

"What I hope I've done is helped students ask themselves what stories aren't being told, to have some curiosity that is rooted in understanding that we're all fundamentally human, flawed, and complicated," Pearson said.

Tristan Weisenback '25 said Pearson has been a great mentor throughout his four years at TCNJ.

"I had the opportunity to take four classes with her, and each one gave me a unique experience in journalism," Weisenbach said. "I've used a lot of what she's taught me in my work for The Signal and beyond. She's always willing to help and support her students."

Communication Studies Professor Yifeng Hu awarded Innovation in Teaching Award

Professor of Communication Studies Yifeng Hu was named the recipient of the 2025 Innovation in Teaching Award at this year's Faculty Senate Faculty Awards. This recognition affirms nearly two decades of visionary work in transforming how communication is taught at the college.

"Teaching innovation is not just a professional commitment but a personal passion," Hu said.

"This award serves as a meaningful validation of my dedication over nearly two decades."

Over her 18-year career at TCNJ, Hu has continuously pushed the boundaries of education, creating immersive learning experiences that resonate with students throughout their college career. From adopting virtual worlds in the classroom as early as 2008 to integrating cutting-edge technologies like virtual reality and AI today, Hu's approach to teaching has always been driven by two core values: experimentation and student-centered learning.

"I'm constantly exploring how to make learning more dynamic and effective," Hu said. "My goal is to spark genuine intellectual curiosity while preparing students for real-world challenges."

FACULTY NEWS



Communication Studies Professor Yifeng Hu awarded Innovation in Teaching Award

Nowhere is this more evident than in her COM 265 course, Emerging Communication Technologies. Through projects like the AI Literacy assignment, students analyze chatbot interactions, critique AI-generated images for bias and offer recommendations for ethical AI use.

“This assignment transforms fear into competence,” said Hu. Her students have gone on to present their findings at the Celebration of Student Achievement.

The course also includes VR-based professional development. Students use VR headsets to simulate job interviews, practice public speaking and engage in perspective-taking scenarios.

Beyond technology, Hu’s innovative methods also focus on community engagement and real-world advocacy. In Intercultural Communication, students conduct ethnographic research and take the Intercultural Development Inventory to grow their global competence. Another standout project is her interdisciplinary course on anti-Asian racism, which led to the creation of the AAPI Advocacy Campaign and a regional Asian American Film Festival.

“My students and I presented at conferences and created award-winning exhibits,” she noted, pointing to the #NotYourStereotype photo project, which received the Alan Dawley Social Justice Award in 2022.

Hu has also led collaborations between communication and other disciplines. In one initiative, her students teamed up with computer science majors to design VR prototypes addressing real-life issues like ADHD, autism, and anxiety. In another, a partnership with graphic design students produced a COVID-19 mental health exhibit that blended research with visual storytelling.

For Hu, the award is not just an end but a new beginning. She plans to continue leading campus workshops on AI ethics, publishing actionable teaching frameworks, and mentoring faculty in innovative course design. She also aims to elevate student voices by scaling projects like the AAPI Film Festival into national models.

“Teaching should light intellectual fires. These technologies aren’t just tools – they’re gateways to professional readiness and personal growth,” Hu said.

FACULTY NEWS



Dr. Yachao Li Published International Research Examining Climate Communication and Youth Media Exposure

Dr. Yachao Li, Associate Professor of Communication Studies and Public Health, has published two significant research papers in collaboration with international scholars, advancing our understanding of climate change communication and youth media exposure.

In the first study, published in *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Dr. Li worked with researchers from the Natural History Museum of Denmark to examine how different approaches to climate change museum messaging affect public response. The research found that messages focusing on systemic solutions and renewable energy transition generated more hope among audiences compared to traditional climate communication approaches.

“Our findings suggest that museums and other institutions should emphasize the achievability of systemic changes in climate communication,” said Dr. Li. “When people understand that solutions like renewable energy are becoming increasingly viable, they’re more likely to engage in both systemic and individual climate action.”

In a separate study published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, Dr. Li collaborated with researchers from Vietnam’s Hanoi University of Public Health and Georgia State University to analyze

tobacco and alcohol content in popular Vietnamese YouTube music videos. The study revealed that one-third of top music videos contained alcohol-related content, while nearly 9% featured tobacco-related content, raising concerns about youth exposure to substance use through social media.

“These findings highlight the need for stricter regulations regarding substance-related content on platforms like YouTube, especially given their popularity among young audiences,” Dr. Li explained.

Both studies reflect TCNJ’s commitment to fostering international research collaborations that address pressing global challenges. Dr. Li’s work bridges communication studies and public health, demonstrating the value of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and addressing complex societal issues.



YACHAO LI, COMMUNICATION STUDIES

FACULTY NEWS



Associate Professor of Communication Studies and Public Health Yachao (Bruce) Li has published two significant international studies advancing our understanding of climate communication and youth media exposure.

Published in "Curator: The Museum Journal," the first study with Danish and American colleagues found that museum exhibitions emphasizing systemic solutions to climate change generate more hope and engagement than traditional approaches. The second study, published in the "Journal of Medical Internet Research" with Vietnamese and American researchers, analyzed substance use content in popular Vietnamese YouTube music videos, finding that one-third contained alcohol-related content and 9 percent featured tobacco-related content. These collaborations demonstrate TCNJ's commitment to addressing global challenges through international research partnerships.



YACHAO LI, COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Scholarly Shoutout

Professor of Media and Political Communication Paul D'Angelo, along with colleagues from around the country, have co-authored "Part of the Gig: Negotiating the Press Conference Rite Surrounding Naomi Osaka's "Bombshell" Decision, which was published in Journalism: Theory, Practice, Criticism. This study analyzes UK and French digital news coverage of Naomi Osaka's decision to withdraw from press conferences at the cusp of the 2021 French Open, showing that journalists use a variety of ways to cover their own involvement – not always positive – in athletes' traumatic moments.



DR. PAUL D'ANGELO, COMMUNICATION STUDIES

FACULTY NEWS

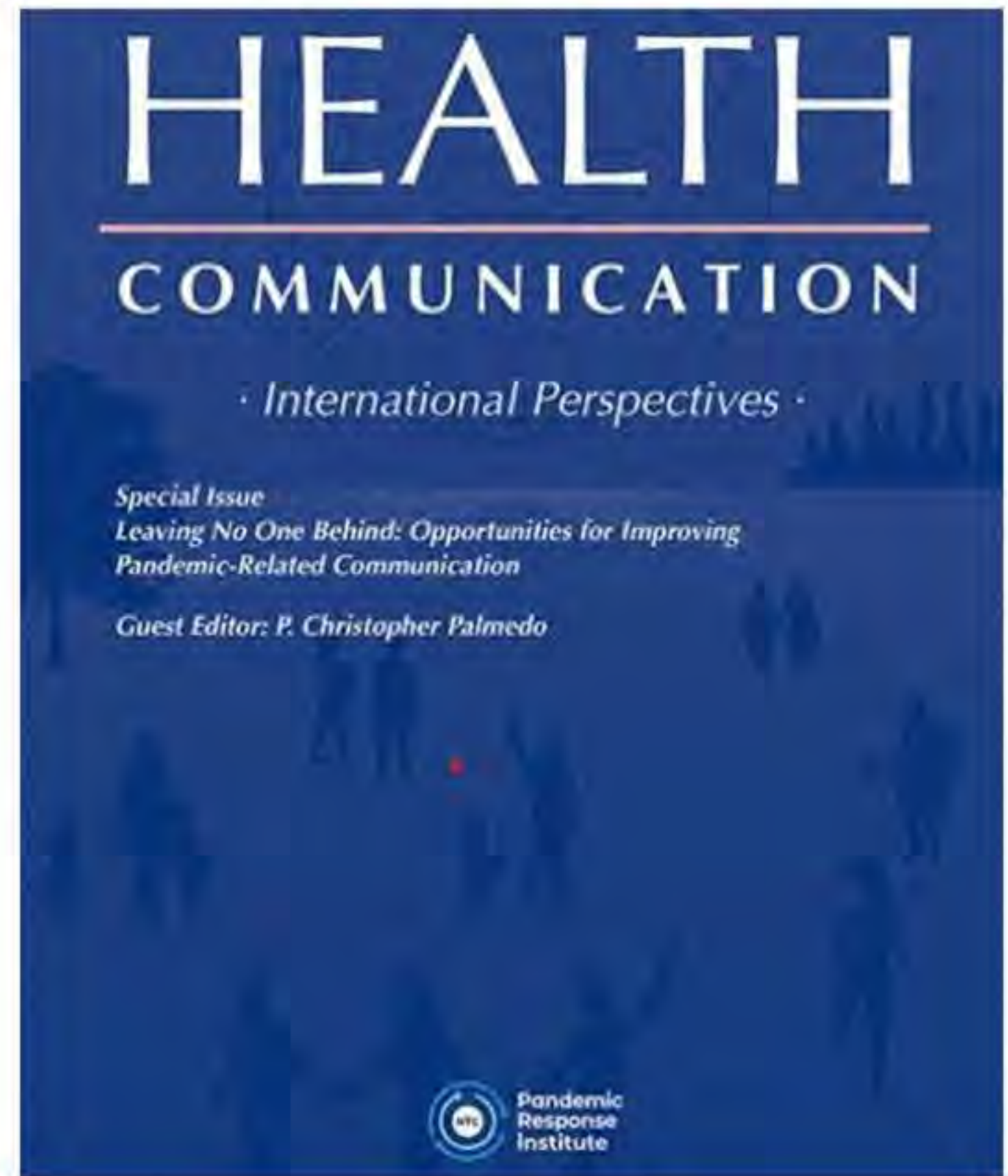


NEW PUBLICATION WITH FORMER UNDERGRADUATES!

Pollock, J.C., Crowley, M., Govindarajan, S., Lewis, A., Marta, A., Purandare, R., & Sparano, J.N. (2024, March 10). US nationwide multi-city media coverage of COVID-19 responses: Community structure theory, belief system, and a "violated way of life". *Journal of Health Communication*, 29(4):256-264. DOI: 10.1080/10810730.2024.2324845

I am grateful for the opportunity to co-author with so many of our talented undergraduates, who have gone on to a variety of graduate programs or occupational positions. Miranda Crowley earned a MPA from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse U., the top-ranked master's in public affairs/public administration program in the US. Abigail Lewis earned a MPH from Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health. Alexis "Lexi" Marta (now Petry) earned a MSPH from Johns Hopkins. Radhika Purandare went to Sweden as a Fulbright Scholar for a year, then earned a MPH from Columbia. Suchir Govindarajan is the Special Assistant to the Secretary and a Policy Analyst at the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education. James Sparano is an accomplished landscaper.

We have been blessed to enjoy the contributions of so many committed students in our joint Public Health/Communication Studies health communication endeavors!



DR. JOHN C. POLLOCK, COMMUNICATION STUDIES

FACULTY NEWS



CJF professor Matthew Lawrence brings original horror-comedy film to the big screen

Filmmaker Matthew Lawrence is no stranger to creating unconventional horror-comedy movies. But when he started the script for “Bloody Axe Wound” nearly a decade ago, Lawrence never anticipated that this emotional slasher would later become his largest feature film to date.

Lawrence, a 2005 alumnus and professor at the College, released his third feature film in Dec. 2024. “Bloody Axe Wound,” produced by Bullmoose Pictures and Dynamatt Productions, follows a teenager navigating her first crush while her family business, a video store, sells tapes of real-life killings.

Despite a series of challenges, including budget constraints, plans to create the film were officially set in motion in 2020, after “The Walking Dead” star Jeffrey Dean Morgan and his wife, actress Hilarie Burton, reached out to Lawrence following the release of his second feature film, “Uncle Peckerhead.”

“They loved it,” Lawrence said. “They basically signed me saying, ‘Listen, we will shop your projects, we’ll put our name behind it, but you can’t shop these projects with anybody else.’”

After Morgan agreed to make an extended cameo in “Bloody Axe Wound,” Shudder, a streaming service dedicated to horror and thriller movies, and AMC Networks agreed to fund the film, officially giving the project the “green light” in 2023.

“[Morgan] alone got the movie made,” Lawrence said. “Obviously you’re indebted to this person because they put their name behind it, and as a result, you got to make the movie that you’d been waiting to make since like 2016.”

Lawrence said the final cut of “Bloody Axe Wound” is a far cry from its original concept, which was a “horror-comedy version of ‘The Office.’”

“I love movies that, even if they are comedies or they’re juvenile, have heart to it, they’re heartfelt. And I realized those first couple of drafts were missing an emotional core,” Lawrence said.

Two CJF students, Nikos Degruccio and Nate Witowski ‘25, worked on the “front lines” of the film set as production assistants, helping to ensure the production was a “well-oiled machine,” Lawrence said. Degruccio later leveraged the experience to work on high-profile films like “Smile 2.”

“That’s what college should be, is getting these real world experiences before you leave so you get a real taste for what it takes to kind of exist on set and...making sure that it’s running smoothly, because you’re just kind of anticipating and putting out fires constantly,” Lawrence said.

Lawrence, who started teaching in 2009, said he “fell into” an adjunct professor role at the College during

FACULTY NEWS



CJF professor Matthew Lawrence brings original horror-comedy film to the big screen

a transitional time in his career shortly after graduating with his MFA in film production from Boston University.

“I ended up really liking it,” Lawrence said. “I have so many teachers in my family, so this is kind of like baked into our DNA.”

After launching his career in academia, Lawrence landed teaching roles at a number of institutions – including an eight-year stint as a professor at Monmouth University – while he freelanced on the side. Lawrence returned to the College as a full-time professor in 2020.

“I wanted to come back because TCNJ has the best students,” Lawrence said.

Although Lawrence has dedicated the past fifteen years to developing his craft as a filmmaker, he said he still often faces failure and rejection. But these moments turn into “valuable lessons” he can share with his students.

“What I love about filmmaking or just this art in general, is that there's no such thing as a perfect movie,” Lawrence said. “I'm always learning to be a better storyteller, a better writer, a better director, a better editor.”

-**Rebecca Heath '25**



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MATTHEW LAWRENCE

REMEMBERING



Remembering Asaka Park: A Life Full of Passion



Asaka Park had a deep passion for writing and journalism, writing frequently about her disability and her life (Photo courtesy of Edward Park).

Every time we walked into the AIMM journalism room, we were greeted with a friendly face and lively conversation from Asaka Watanabe Park. A senior journalism major, Park was an extraordinarily kind person and a gift to the journalism department at the College. We are heartbroken that Asaka died of natural causes while at her home in Cresskill, New Jersey on Sept. 29.

“Asaka was kind and compassionate to everyone,” said Kathleen Webber, journalism program coordinator and advisor to The Signal. “She attended every event and class with an open mind and a smile on her face, always grateful for the opportunity to learn and be with our community. She taught us kindness and understanding and she will be forever missed by her friends and professors in journalism and communication.”

Park had a deep passion for writing and journalism. She frequently wrote about her disability and her life, as she was a strong advocate for people with disabilities.

Her most recent piece was a memoir, titled “#TechnicallyAutistic,” about living with a dual diagnosis of autism and ADHD.

She had also published several articles in The Signal during her time at the College.

“Asaka always worried that she wasn’t doing enough,” said Kim Pearson, professor of journalism. “What she did with the short time she had [was] nothing short of amazing. She did more than build a portfolio. She made a difference.” Pamela Barnett, dean of the School of the Arts and Communication, said she is “heartbroken” by the loss of Park. She described Park as “an engaged student who made the most of college.”

“Just five days ago, we were together for a visiting speaker and afterwards Asaka wrote to me and Professors Webber and Pearson,” Barnett said. “She thanked us for the event and also said how wonderful and supportive the JPW program was [and] that she would miss us when she graduated.”

Park’s hard work and dedication to storytelling were recognized by many, including Emilie Lounsberry, a former professor of journalism and Signal advisor. She detailed her experience having Park in her classes and underscored her enthusiasm for the craft of writing.



REMEMBERING



Remembering Asaka Park: A Life Full of Passion

“Asaka loved writing and was willing to put in the hard work it takes to get good at it,” Lounsberry said. “She had a kind of thirst for knowledge that we love to see in our students.”

Park recently worked as an intern for The Journalism Salute, a podcast created by Mark Simon '97 that highlights journalists and their careers. In her role, Park wrote essays about interviews and provided her own unique perspective for the podcast's newsletter.

“Asaka had a distinct journalism voice,” Simon said. “She was passionate and courageous and a strong supporter for college students and for people with disabilities. She approached her writing for my newsletter with a high degree of enthusiasm and a strong desire to improve as a writer. I am saddened by her loss but grateful for having had the opportunity to know her and be touched by her writing.”

Gabriel Salazar '18 served as a podcasting mentor to Park, and he also noted her dedication to the causes that drove her.

“From our very first conversation, I immediately felt her passion in telling her story of being a person with autism,” Salazar said. “What I really came to admire about Asaka in my short time of knowing her was how she wrote and spoke about her lived experiences with so much candor, vulnerability and passion. I know her writing and her work advocating for people with autism and disabilities will help others who have similar experiences feel seen and heard.”

Jenna Rittman, a senior journalism major and correspondent for The Signal, said her friendship with Park expanded beyond the classroom. “I met Asaka in my freshman year of college because we were both in Her Campus together,” Rittman said. “We became even closer friends when we took Media Ethics and Magazine Journalism together. I had always looked up to her due to her writing skills. She even inspired me to make a Substack account myself. I will miss her dearly.”

Park also became close with those she met outside of journalism. She connected with Gianna Barone, a senior psychology major, during a Chinese Student Association trip to Chinatown two years ago, where they bonded over learning about Chinese culture.

“She would tell me that she wasn't sure she would make it as a journalist, so I'm really glad that I hopefully was a part of encouraging her to keep going,” Barone said. “She wanted to be a writer for well-known journals one day, and it always inspired me how much work she put into her writing and kept pushing forward to graduate.”



REMEMBERING



Remembering Asaka Park: A Life Full of Passion

Park was also involved in Breaking Down Barriers, the College's disability awareness and inclusion club, where she held an executive board position. Park welcomed others into the program and was an advocate for many.

"Asaka was one of the students that introduced me to Breaking Down Barriers," said senior public health major Gio Adu-Gyamfi.

"She was a really talented writer and journalist who could relate with any student."

She was an inspiration to many, especially for her strong voice and passion for everything she did. "Her and I both listened to the same music," Rittman said. "We would even do homework together in her dorm room and the journalism room sometimes. She always seemed so accomplished in my eyes."

Park's interests lay in arts and culture, humor, creative nonfiction and much more. She loved to share these interests with others and write about them.

"She didn't want to only be known for her disability advocacy," Barone said, "rather she wanted people to know 'Asaka.' Her disability was a part of her life, but she also wanted to share her beauty advice, hot takes, and be a free spirit when writing. To only know her for her advocacy is great, but it discredits all of the hard work she put in to be seen as a college girl aside from that."

Growing up, Park was the first daughter of Edward Park and Junko Watanabe. She was raised in Bergen County, along with her younger sister.

"Asaka's early years were marked by a love for animals, but it was her growing passion for writing that truly defined her," her obituary read. Park will forever be remembered by The Signal's staff, the journalism department and the College.

-Signal Editorial Staff



THIS PHOTO IS FROM A JANUARY 2024 REUNION WITH ALUMNI OF THE SIGNAL (PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHLEEN WEBBER).



ASAKA PARK (PHOTO OBTAINED FROM @BDB_TCNJ ON INSTAGRAM)

STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



TCNJ Student Soars with NASA Summer Internship

Matthew Kaufman spent his summer spacing out – at a 10-week NASA internship that was the perfect blend of science and writing that allowed him to interview top scientists and nab some bylines on NASA’s website.

From June through early August, the rising senior journalism major interned at NASA’s Goddard Space Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, honing his skills in science communication and deepening his appreciation for the intersection of technology and space exploration.

“What surprised me the most is the range of NASA’s ongoing smaller missions, such as satellite missions and Earth science projects related to climate change,” Kaufman said.

As part of his internship, Kaufman wrote tech-focused stories that would eventually be published on NASA.gov. For one article, he interviewed a researcher developing a machine-learning algorithm designed to distill complex data, enabling scientists to make faster, more informed decisions. Another project involved speaking with researchers focused on navigation technology, providing insights into innovations that could significantly impact space exploration and other industries.

“I really started to understand the importance of science and technology communication during



Matthew Kaufman holds a meteorite as fellow interns look on.

my internship,” he said. “You have to be able to explain complicated topics in a simple way to convince people why it matters.”

Kaufman credited his education at TCNJ for preparing him for his summer internship, especially when it came to finding story topics and conducting interviews – skills that felt intimidating as a freshman, he added.

“The experience I had in my classes and as editor-in-chief of The Signal, where I manage 12 editors and 20 to 30 writers, helped me gain skills to work in a professional newsroom,” Kaufman said.

The internship culminated with Kaufman and fellow interns heading to NASA’s headquarters in Washington, D.C., to meet with the agency’s chief scientist.

-Carmen Cusido

STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



Anastasia (Anya) Dolson

Anya Dolson is a communication studies major with a specialization in digital filmmaking.

Anya's essay, "The Diversity of Fandom Practice and Their Connections to Social Media" will be published in an upcoming issue of the Journal of Student Scholarship. In this essay, she explores how people create and maintain fandom experiences on various social media platforms.



Natalie Roesch

My internship with the Journal of Communication in Healthcare (JCIH), an academic health communication journal under Taylor and Francis, was an incredibly rewarding experience. JCIH focuses on publishing scholarly work that addresses health disparities, making it a great match for my academic interests. This remote internship allowed me to apply what I've learned in the classroom to real-world work, primarily by creating promotional content for the journal's publications and upcoming events.



I initially pursued this opportunity because of my growing interest in health communication, sparked by several related courses I had taken. While I wasn't sure at the time if it would be my long-term career path, this experience gave me valuable insight and helped me build versatile skills I can carry into any field. Even without the structure of an in-person internship, the challenges I faced pushed me to grow on both a personal and professional level. I'm proud of how far I've come and excited to continue learning as I take the next steps in my journey.



STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



Students to watch from the Class of 2025- TCNJ Magazine

Melanie DeLeon

Watch for her at The Met

A job at TCNJ's Sarnoff Collection and an internship at Grounds for Sculpture inspired Melanie DeLeon's goals to be a museum educator. She's moving to Washington, D.C., for an internship with the Smithsonian's Latino Museum Studies Program.



Nikos DeGruccio

He had a blast interning at NBCUniversal Media

"He is just a total hustler," says film professor Matthew Lawrence of communications studies major Nikos DeGruccio. Lawrence, who wrote and directed the movie Bloody Axe Wound for AMC, hired DeGruccio as a production assistant. "He came up to me every week saying he would do any job; he'd sleep in his car. He just wanted to be on the film set," says Lawrence. "Who doesn't want that guy on their crew?"

DeGruccio has already made it to the top – at least to the top of 30 Rock – having completed a yearlong internship at NBCUniversal. He's earned production assistant credits for TV shows and movies streamed on Netflix and Paramount, too.



Arianna McCleod

She'll bounce from sports to health

A volunteer role as an EMT assistant in her hometown of Bound Brook, New Jersey, and an internship with the online publication On New Jersey Sports set up this student-athlete for her next big game as a grant writer and associate for the medical strategy team at MJH Life Sciences



-Renee Olson

STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



Maya Mckelvey

Maya has had several internships through this past school year. The following is three highlights:

Journal of Communication in Healthcare (JCIH) Communications, Technology, and Social media Intern- May 2024 - Dec 2024

For this internship, I was tasked with creating weekly social media posts for Twitter and LinkedIn promoting new articles published on JCIH's website, as well as promoting the overall journal. I developed a weekly schedule for each month and created six posts each week (two posts for Mondays, two posts for Wednesdays and two posts for Fridays). I also tracked the analytical data from Twitter and LinkedIn to view which posts received the most engagements and impressions. Through this internship, I used Canva, Twitter and LinkedIn analytics, and Linktree.

DDO NY Artist Agency Voiceover Intern- Jan 2025 - Present

For this internship, I worked within DDO NY Artist Agency's Voiceover department where I am edited and labeled casting audition voice recordings. Each day there was a list of auditions that were due at specific times and I would need to relabel them (as instructed by the audition), edit them using Audacity editing software, and upload the edited file into Dropbox for the casting company to submit the audition. Through this internship, I used Audacity for audio editing, InEntertainment for talent and audition information, Dropbox for recording file organization, and Google products (Excel and Gmail).

Public Strategies Impact (PSI) Association Management Meetings and Events Intern- Feb 2025- Present

For this internship I worked within PSI's Association Management which works with New Jersey associations from New Jersey Tourism Association, New Jersey Recyclers Association, New Jersey Association of Engineers, etc. I often used Canva to create social media posts, flyers, registration forms, and visual content for these associations. As well assisting in drafting marketing emails, letters, mailing labels, and meetings and events materials, while also providing administrative support. Through this internship, I used Canva and Microsoft Suite. After graduation, I will continue to work at PSI in a full-time position.



STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



Ashlyn Nolan

Ashlyn is a rising senior who studies World Languages & Linguistics (specializing in Spanish) and Communication Studies (specializing in Emerging Communication Technologies) at TCNJ. She also just started her Masters in Education.

On top of her academic life, Ashlyn is also an actress and a filmmaker. This past spring semester she got the chance to act in multiple projects (including student films, a feature film, a music video, and voiceacting for an animated movie!). But what she's most proud of is that she wrote, directed, and starred in her second short film, FREA.

FREA is a tale of loss and suffering, but also of resilience and hope. This film features a warrior, a talking skull, a dark lord, and three ghosts, all trapped in an endless, cursed forest... Which sounds completely crazy to make (and it was!).

In order to film this movie, Ashlyn bought swords, armor, cloaks, masks, and a LOT of fake blood, hiked into the woods with a group of her closest friends and fellow filmmakers, and brought in a professional stunt coordinator and medieval battle reenactor (both to act and help choreograph a fight scene!).

All together, they spent a little over 3 days filming in the woods, and had to wake up at 6:30AM each day in order to get everyone into makeup and costumes! There were ticks, spontaneous sword fights, picnics, hikes, singing, and a lot of laughter. It was absolutely the most ambitious and insane thing she's ever done, but she loved every second of the process. Ashlyn is so beyond grateful for all the amazing people that made it possible. Making movies is truly a magical experience.

If you want to see some of her work (and stay updated on FREA's release!) you can find Ashlyn on all platforms @ashlynnolan!

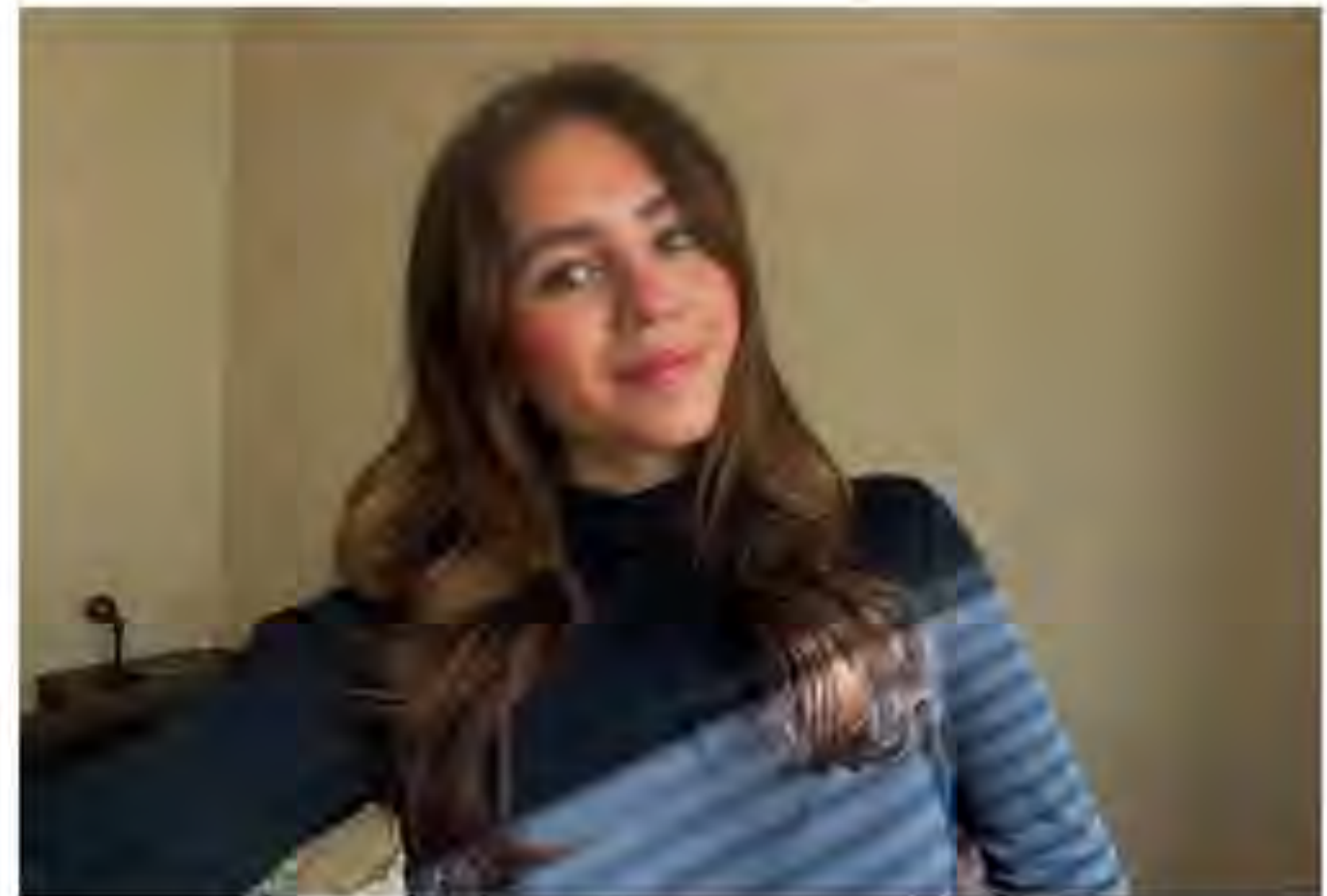


STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



Lara Newton

"I'm an incoming senior Communication Studies major with a minor in Marketing at the College of New Jersey! In Spring 2025 I was lucky enough to take Dr. Caleb Mezzy's course Digital Media, Communications, PR in Sport (COM 370-02). In this course, several guest speakers were brought in, including Eric Nemeth, the owner of Eric PR & Marketing.



I was so inspired by his work and presentation. He had mentioned one of his clients named Sluggball, a new baseball phenomenon founded by several former MLB players. Intrigued, I ended up connecting with him on LinkedIn and landing an internship with him as a social media intern, where I primarily deal with Sluggball's content and social media!



Eric and his wife Sara have been nothing short of incredible. This internship has taught me so much about content strategy and digital marketing. I have been able to see the rollout process for a new company/brand and what the behind the scenes looks like.

This internship has also highly improved my editing skills for social media, skills that I will be able to leverage for the rest of my career!

I would love to thank my professor Dr. Mezzy and Eric for this wonderful opportunity. This just goes to show you how important networking is- don't be afraid to reach out, you never know what can happen!"



STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



Paige Perez

"I am a Senior Communication Studies major with minors in Human Resources Management and Leadership at TCNJ. I am focusing on pursuing a career within Human Resources (HR) and I have learned a lot about HR through the various job opportunities I have had the privilege to participate in.

My first internship in HR was in the Summer of 2024 where I worked for DoughMain Financial Literacy Foundation, a non-profit organization in Princeton, as one of their three HR interns. At that internship I worked on revising their employee handbook and onboarding process, I managed job applications on LinkedIn and college career sites, and I conducted various interviews.

From there, I was hired to work in TCNJ's HR office where I am currently employed during the school year. In this role, I got exposed to how HR functions within the realm of higher education. I got to learn how to scan various I-9 documents, I assist with preparing the department for their monthly New Hire Orientations, and I create physical employee profiles.

This summer I had the opportunity to work in Princeton University's HR Office. This internship provided me with free housing and dining throughout the time of my internship. Princeton allowed me to shadow various HR professionals within their immense department and assigned me tons of different projects to work on from creating employee profiles once employees completed their I-9 process to revamping their outreach processes."



STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



TCNJ Alumni Turned Graduate Students

Natalie Roesch

“TCNJ has prepared me to succeed in the prestigious Public Relations master’s program at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. Continuing my education was an easy choice, as I wanted to gain hands-on experience and explore areas of public relations I hadn’t fully considered during my undergraduate years. At Newhouse, I’m expanding my skill set through experience based courses to enhance my professional portfolio and strategies that will support my future career in public relations.”



Nicole Woods

“Nicole recently enrolled at Johns Hopkins University to get her Master's in Mental Health Sciences. It is a nine month full time online program focused on mental health as a public health problem and how to best assess and address the issues that present when looking at it through that lens . It is currently the only department of mental health at a school of public health in the country. ”



DEPARTMENT NEWS



TCNJ Launches New Department of Communication, Journalism, and Film (CJF)

“We see this as an exciting union and our community will grow as will the opportunities to study, do research, collaborate, and share resources, including our esteemed faculty and state-of-the-art facilities,” explained Professor of Communication Studies Susan Ryan, who will lead the department as chair.

The department will house the college’s film and television studio, radio station and journalism room. Students will gain hands-on experience through their coursework and student media organizations, including Lions Television, WTSR 91.3, The Signal and HerCampus.com.

“Communication Studies and Journalism have a long history of working together,” said Professor Kathleen Webber, who will coordinate the Journalism and Professional Writing program. “We believe that it will provide new opportunities for our curricula, student media organizations, and for joint events.”

Recently, the college was awarded funding from the state’s Equipment Leasing Fund (ELF) to support health education. As part of the grant, the television studio is upgrading its equipment to include new 4K cameras, switcher, record decks, routing and play decks.

“It’s pretty much a new TV control

system, complete with a new greenscreen and floor, which will allow immersive scenery and the ability to create realistic sets. Our studio will be set up to give students the same kind of conditions if they were to go out to work in a network or studio,” explained Kevin Potucek, assistant director and coordinator of media facilities. “We also plan to create environments that relate to the health industry, including demos for health and panel discussions.

The grant is also supporting the purchase of virtual reality equipment, which will be used in communication studies courses, including Emerging Communication Technologies; New Media and Health Communication; and Special Topics: Student-Faculty Advanced Research: Virtual Reality for Social, Cultural, and Health Impact.

“The VR equipment will support students in studying the social, behavioral, and psychological dimensions of the design, use, and effect of virtual reality,” explained Associate Professor of Communication Studies Yifeng Hu. “Students will also acquire professional insights of developing user-facing strategies and gain perspectives on how to use immersive technologies such as VR to offer creative and innovative solutions to critical problems such as social justice, health disparities, and cultural competency.”

-Meaghan Resta

DEPARTMENT NEWS



School launches ArtsComm Connectors program

ArtsComm Connectors is a peer mentoring program introduced this year in the School of the Arts and Communication. This program was created by Assistant Dean Erica Bagnarelli with the support of Dean Pamela Barnett.

The program connects new students (first-year, transfers and pathway) with a mentor who is an already established student. Mentors help guide new students with making their transition into TCNJ more comfortable.

"I believe in layers of support for any of our students, especially the ones that are most vulnerable coming in the door and maybe not feeling connected," Bagnarelli explained. "If you had just one more person that said 'Hello', that was a smiling, friendly face, that makes a difference. Even better, if you really had someone that could help guide and navigate when there were challenges that we as a team could help brainstorm."

ArtsComm Connectors act as another layer of support for students in the School of the Arts and Communication. Even if mentors do not know an answer, they can still help guide students with finding someone who does. Bagnarelli emphasized that a program like this is important because its goal is to help new students feel a sense of community and belonging.

Not only do new students benefit from this program, mentors benefit as well. Students who become

mentors can gain skills in leadership and mentoring.

They also help foster more connections within the ArtsComm community, can add to their resume with valuable experience in student engagement and support, and contribute to the success and cohesion of the school and departments. Along with those benefits, many Connectors joined because they just wanted to help guide and support new students. They understand the challenges of being a first-year student in college or being a new student.

"I decided to be a connector because I think the School of the Arts and Communication has so much to offer, and I love being able to help share all of those great opportunities with new students," said Tristan Weisenbach '25, a journalism and professional writing major. "Coming to college for the first time as a first-year or transfer student can be tricky and scary at times, so I think it's great that we now have a team of experienced students who can help guide and support those who are just starting out on their journeys."

In the future, Bagnarelli hopes to create an E-board which would give mentors a chance to hone skills they are most interested in and connect them with alumni. "I have so much hope for this program. I can't wait to see it grow," Bagnarelli said.

Find out more about the ArtsComm Connectors on the School of Arts and Communication website.

-Ashley Peng '25

AWARDS & GRADUATION



COM 2025 CJF Department Award Recipients

Please join us in congratulating our 2025 Communication, Journalism, and Film Department Award winners!

Promise of Achievement Award

Bryanna Carrie
Caroline Dowd
Ryan Maurer
Mckenna Miller
Ashlyn Nolan

DEPARTMENT SPECIALIZATION AWARDS

- **Mass Media & Social Media**
Gabrielle Smith
- **Interpersonal & Strategic**
Joseph Arocho
Dylan Vidro
- **Emerging Communication Technologies**
Natalie Roesch
- **Digital Filmmaking**
Nicholas Degruccio
Vivian Rudolph
- **Health Communication**
Rebecca Heath
Kyle Levy

John C. Pollock Health Comm Award

Shannon Allen
Christopher DeSantis

Community Engagement Award

Kaitlin Bavaro

Leadership & Advocacy Award

Alyssa Hemsey
Natalie Roesch

M. Wasser Internship Award

Nicholas Degruccio
Leah MacCauley
Angelina Odatto



Dr. John C. Pollock with winners of the Promise of Achievement Award



Paul D'Angelo and Gabrielle Smith



Kyle Levy and Rebecca Heath

AWARDS & GRADUATION



COM 2025 CJF Department Award Recipients

Please join us in congratulating our 2025 Communication, Journalism, and Film Department Award winners!

Andy Polanski Award
Bryanna Carrie

Faculty Award
Maya Mckelvey

Journalism Award
Matt Kaufman
Tristan Weisenbach

Student Media Award
Delaney Smith

Tiffany Award
Baileo-Burgess Simmons

Professional Writing Award
Kayla Del

Bob Cole Award
Matt Kaufman

Lambda Pi Eta Award
Alyssa Hemsey
Skye Frawley

LPH Faculty Recognition Award
Dr. John C. Pollock



Alyssa Hemsey and Skye Frawley awarding Dr. John C. Pollock with the LPH Faculty Recognition Award



Matt Lawrence and Vivian Rudolph



Dr. Hu and Natalie Roesch



AWARDS & GRADUATION



2025 CJF affiliated awards

Several clubs and people affiliated with the Communication Studies, Journalism, and Film department won nationally ranked awards this year. Please join us in congratulating them!

The Signal recently won six awards at the New Jersey Press Foundation's College Newspaper Contest. The student newspaper won four first place, one second place, and one third place awards.

The WTSR recently won two Intercollegiate Broadcasting System (IBS) Awards at the the national conference in New York City! The IBS awards recognizes the exceptional achievements of college and high school radio stations nationwide.

Congratulations to Bryanna Carrie '26, a communication studies major, who is the recipient of this year's Polansky Fellowship Endowment Scholarship. This is a competitive award for students involved in projects that show leadership and have the potential to make a difference in the communities they serve. Projects should show a commitment to building socially and economically vibrant programs that help build the capacity for community enrichment.



Members of The Signal with their awards



Members of WTSR



AWARDS & GRADUATION



The Signal earns six NJ Press Foundation awards

This year, The Signal staff doubled the number of awards they won last year for the New Jersey Press Foundation's College Newspaper Contest. The student newspaper at TCNJ won six awards with four of them being first place and were presented with plaques and certificates at a luncheon on April 26.

The award recipients include:

First Place

- Liz Ciocher – Rewriting the 'Trash Chute' narrative: The untold story of John Fiocco Jr.
- Isabella Darcy – Alcohol-related calls to TCNJ Campus Police rise to pre-pandemic numbers
- Victoria Gladstone – 'Be Kind 4 Michael': TCNJ staff member honors late son by spreading painted rocks around campus
- Andre Paras, Isabella Darcy, Tristan Weisenbach, Ally Uhlendorf – Trump executive orders could impact TCNJ policies and programs

Second Place

- Andre Paras – WTSR Underground brings local indie music scene to TCNJ

Third Place

- Sky Pinkett – TCNJ Art Gallery features modern interpretations of an ancient art form: Chinese calligraphy

The Signal's first ever video editor, Andre Paras '28, won a first and second place award.

Getting recognition just as a first-year student from the NJ Press Foundation has been awesome," Paras said.

The first place video story "Trump executive orders could impact TCNJ policies and programs," which was created alongside Isabella Darcy '26, Tristan Weisenbach '25, and Ally Uhlendorf '26 was The Signal's first video story ever created.

"This idea of students' education being put at risk felt like an important story for us to tell as journalists," Paras said. Paras, who is a Communication Studies major with a specialization in mass media and social media, said before this semester, he did not really consider doing journalism after graduation. "But this recognition has made me wonder if video journalism could be a path for me in the future," he said.

Darcy, who serves as managing editor, also received a first place award for her first investigative story about alcohol-related calls to TCNJ Campus Police rising to pre-pandemic numbers. "It feels gratifying to be recognized by the NJ Press Foundation," Darcy said. "I'm so glad that the dedicated journalists I have had the pleasure of working with are receiving some well-deserved recognition."

Darcy said everyone on the editorial board has a thirst for publishing hard-hitting stories and she hopes that the momentum continues. "I am lucky to have a talented team beside me, and I have truly been inspired by our current editors and editors who I previously worked with," Darcy said.

AWARDS & GRADUATION



The Signal earns six NJ Press Foundation awards

Victoria Gladstone '25 said she is extremely honored to win first place for her story "Be Kind 4 Michael": TCNJ staff member honors late son by spreading painted rocks around campus." She said writing the story was extremely impactful and validated the level of importance this story is to the TCNJ community.

"Mental health awareness is so important to me and my peers so I was really appreciative of the opportunity to write this story," Gladstone said. Gladstone, who is graduating this May, said she is proud of everyone on The Signal for their accomplishments this awards season.

"Getting to celebrate all of The Signal's awards was a great way to wrap up the end of my college career at TCNJ," Gladstone said. "I am looking forward to the future of The Signal and I know there's more great things to come."

- Emilia Calabrese '27

The Signal



WTSR earns two Intercollegiate Broadcasting System Awards

WTSR earns two Intercollegiate Broadcasting System Awards

Posted on April 21, 2025

WTSR 91.3, TCNJ's student-run radio station, was recently nominated for seven Intercollegiate Broadcasting System Awards, and earned two awards at the national conference in March in New York City. The IBS awards recognizes the exceptional achievements of college and high school radio stations nationwide.

WTSR Production Director Sam Herman '26 won Best Production Director and community volunteer

and alumnus Thomas Kelley '97 won Best Community Volunteer Program.

The nominees included Delaney Smith, Sarah Neil, Kevin Potucek, Jenna Rittman, Skye Frawly (Best Political News - "Live Election Coverage"); Delaney Smith (Best Program Director); Addie Dipietro (Best Music Director); Matt Post (Best Sports Director); and DJ Landau (Best Business Director).

AWARDS & GRADUATION



WTSR earns two Intercollegiate Broadcasting System Awards

Herman, who has been with the station for three years, said it is nice to see his hard work being rewarded. He said he is not just proud of himself but rather the whole production staff and WTSR board.

Herman, who did not have a background in radio during high school, chose to pick it up for fun when he came to TCNJ. Although he is an English Secondary Education major and not a Communication Studies major, he said it showed him that anyone is capable of doing great things.

Herman said earning the award has inspired him to leave his comfort zone and try new things.

“Open your mind, see the world, give something new a try, and who knows, you may discover some kind of secret passion you would have never even dreamed about,” Herman said. He said as a production director, one of his goals was to create new bumpers which are short clips of songs, used to transition between different elements of a program, different from the ones they had been using for many years.

“I’m proud of all the things we made... I’m also proud of how much I was able to organize and clean up our selection of things to play between songs,” Herman said.

Kelley got involved with WTSR as a student. He subbed for shows in 1994 and also solo hosted weekly radio shows from 1995 through 1997. Kelley came back to WTSR in 2000 as a community volunteer with a summer show called Dreamfasting.

In 2002, he started Transmission Control focusing on electronic alternative bases like synthpop, new wave, industrial, and more and it will be nearing its 1,000th show.

In 2019, he started a second program called the Starliner which was dedicated to Berlin School and progressive electronic music. Kelley, who is close to 4,000 hours of radio on WTSR, said he wishes to continuously improve program quality.

He said although receiving recognition is nice, he is most proud of the feedback he gets from listeners.

“My listener feedback represents a personal connection to all the people who are indeed out there on the other side of the microphone,” Kelley said. “The bottom line is that there is no point to radio without listeners, so hearing from mine makes it all worthwhile.”

– Emilia Calabrese '27



AWARDS & GRADUATION



CJF Spring 2025 Graduation Photos



Dr. Pollock and Rebecca Heath



Dr. Pollock and Kyle Levy



Dr. Pollock and Christopher DeSantis



From left to right: Rebecca Heath, Kyle Levy, Shannon Allen, Christopher DeSantis



Dr. Pollock and Natalie Roesch

MEET THE EDITORS



Meet the Editors of The Roar



Rebecca Heath, 2025

Rebecca earned a B.A. in Communication Studies and Psychology, with a minor in Professional Writing in May 2025. On campus, she served as an editor for The Signal, was a Bonner Community Scholar, and a member of Theta Phi Alpha, Honors & Scholars, Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, Psi Chi, and Lambda Pi Eta honor societies. She now works as a Breaking & Local News Reporter at NJ.com.



Caroline Dowd, 2026

Caroline is a rising senior Honors & Scholars Communication Studies major, specializing in Mass Media and Social Media with a minor in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. On campus, she is the Publicist and part of the Graphics Team for the TCNJ Tap Ensemble and the Dancers of New Jersey, along with being a Teacher's Assistant. She is also a member of the Communication, Journalism, and Film Student Advisory Board, ArtsComm Connectors, Healing Arts Club, Alpha Alpha Alpha (First Generation) Honor Society, Iota Iota Iota (Women, Gender, Sexuality) Honor Society, and Lambda Pi Eta (Communication Studies) Honor Society.

Thank you to Dr. John C. Pollock, faculty advisor to "The ROAR," for the opportunity to edit this newsletter. We are excited to see future editions of the ROAR!

MEET THE EDITORS



Meet the Editors of The Roar



Christopher DeSantis, 2025

Christopher earned B. A. in Health Communication with a minor in Fine Art. On campus, he was a member of and the Public Health Communication Club who created banners for their social media, was a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, Magna Cum Laude, and was a multi-semester facilitator of Dr. John C. Pollock.



Kyle Levy, 2025

Kyle graduated from TCNJ with the class of 2025, earning a double bachelors in both Public Health and Communication Studies. With his time at TCNJ, Kyle was a part of the honors and scholar's program, phi beta kappa and lambda pi eta. In addition to working as a college ambassador, Kyle was involved in the college orchestra, Alpha Epsilon Pi's e-board, and the fencing club.

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