

**VOL.  
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Fall 2021

# THE ROAR

TCNJ's Department of  
Communication Studies:  
A National Leader in Student-  
Faculty Engagement

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# DEPARTMENT NEWS



## After 24 Years, Top NJ Communication Program Launches Groundbreaking Health And Wellness Specialization

**EWING, NJ , Feb. 16, 2022 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE)**

- After over two decades of preparation, the department of communication studies at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ), a national award-winning program, launched a new student specialization in Health and Wellness Communication (HWC) in spring 2022. The HWC concentration is available to undergraduates enrolled full time.

The innovative track boasts several faculty teaching courses and conducting research in health communication, collaborating with students in all scholarship phases and supporting student employment and graduate program aspirations. TCNJ's department of communication studies ranks number one in New Jersey and received the 2013 National Communication Association Rex Mix Program of Excellence Award as the nation's best undergraduate communication studies department.

In the HWC specialization, students select their own topics and teams to explore a rich array of subjects while mentored by experienced professors.



For courses in global health and risk communication campaigns and international communication, students explore issues including COVID-19, climate change, child brides, HIV/AIDS, water contamination, traditional healers, human trafficking and child labor. US health and risk communication campaign courses investigate health literacy, public health emergency/crisis communication, universal health care, women's reproductive rights, gun safety, PTSD and opioid abuse.

For interpersonal health and lifespan courses, students learn about patient-provider communication, communal coping with long-term and terminal diseases, end-of-life conversations among family members, sexual conversation strategies shared by parents and children, and family stress reduction. Courses in emerging media technology address telehealth, virtual reality and other immersive media, interactive video games for health, and mobile diagnostics and artificial intelligence. Other topics include social media health misinformation, digital health search and eHealth literacy, online social support communities and social media health campaigns.

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



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US health and risk communication campaign courses investigate health literacy, public health emergency/crisis communication, universal health care, women's reprodIn the HWC specialization, creative professors teach engaging courses and mentor student-faculty research projects.

Building its foundation over 24 years, HWC founder Professor Dr. John C. Pollock co-authored papers, articles, chapters, and a book with over 450 students. His senior-edited 2021 book "COVID-19 in International Media: Global Pandemic Perspectives" included a chapter co-authored by six students, one awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to Sweden, others accepted to leading graduate schools such as Johns Hopkins and Columbia.



*Dr. John C. Pollock*



*Dr. Yifeng Hu*

Associate Professor Dr. Yifeng Hu investigates new media health communication and emerging media technologies, organizing several students to develop "Fresh Start", a narrative immersion video game educating first year college students about mindful drinking, yielding a presentation at the prestigious biannual national University of Kentucky Health Communication Conference in April 2020. TCNJ educates student athletes and other student groups with "Fresh Start" as a modern program for alcohol awareness.

In his courses on interpersonal health communication and health communication campaigns, Assistant Professor Dr. Yachao Li often co-authors with students on the role of health communication in reducing minority health disparities and COVID-19 vaccination information or misinformation, in particular transmitted by social media.

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



*Dr. Yachao Li*



*Dr. Keli Fazio*

Department chair and Associate Professor, Dr. Keli Fazio, partners with students investigating relational and health stressors impacting mental, emotional, and physical well-being, as well as ways communication can buffer negative health stressors, such as the traumatic loss of a family member to the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks. Assistant Professor Dr. Eugene Cho conducts research on customizable voice assistants, finding that Voice Assistant similarity (with subject's own voice) and subject customization can persuade unvaccinated individuals to consider getting vaccinated.

According to Dean of the School of Arts and Communication Lorna Johnson-Frizell, also a Professor of Communication Studies, "I am delighted that the health and wellness communication strength long manifest in successful student-faculty collaboration has been formally recognized in an official Health and Wellness Communication specialization. Our new HWC concentration is clearly aligned with national aging trends, increased federal healthcare spending, and occupational opportunities in New Jersey's flourishing pharmaceutical industries, benefiting students, faculty, and the state's entire population."



*Dr. Eugene Cho*

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



## New Health & Wellness Communication Specialization! Faculty and Courses Taught (Undergrad & Grad)\*

Plus Liberal Learning (LL) designations

Faculty: Professors Pollock, Hu, Fazio, Li, Cho

Questions? Contact: Dr. John Pollock, Professor,  
Communication Studies and Public Health, pollock@tcnj.edu

### Undergraduate

- COM 292:** Health Communication
- COM 293:** US Health & Risk Communication Campaigns: A Social Marketing Approach (BSCP)
- COM 342:** Lifespan Communication
- COM 345:** New Media & Health Communication
- COM 335:** Interpersonal Health Communication
- COM 415:** International Communication (WVWK)
- COM 460:** Global Health & Risk Communication Campaigns" A Social Marketing Approach

### Graduate (MPH)

\*course titles may change

- PBHG 603:** Health & Risk Communication Theory
- PBHG 542:** Lifespan Communication
- PBHG 545:** New Media & Health Communication
- PBHG 615:** International Communication (WVWK)
- PBHG 660:** Global Health and Risk Communication Campaigns: A Social Marketing Approach
- PBHG 677:** Disclosure, Stigma, Privacy, and Health

BE  
INNOVATIVE



SAVE  
LIVES

\*Non-matriculated undergraduates may take two graduate courses for undergraduate credit  
\*If enrolled in the 4+1 graduate program, students may take two additional graduate courses for undergraduate credit

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



## COM Hosts Mini-Course on Cinematography Skills

### Focused Workshop on Cinematography Skills

Held in the Kendall Hall TV Studio at the end of October, the Communication Studies Department hosted a two-day workshop as the first of their mini-course offerings.

Organized by Communication Studies Assistant Professor Matthew Lawrence, the students received some valuable information from a visiting professional cinematographer, Michael Sutter.

Michael Doane '22, a senior in the RTF concentration, gave high marks to the session.

“This workshop was such a great opportunity for students like me who feel like they missed out on in-person, hands-on teaching during the lockdowns. I’ve already found myself applying knowledge of lighting from the workshop in some of my other filmmaking classes.”



Matthew Lawrence, MFA

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



## Collaborating Across Boundaries: Student Researchers Share Their Experiences as Members of “Fresh Start” Video Game Team

By Paige Hammond '22

**EWING, New Jersey** — Empty red solo cups are strewn across lawns and students are walking across campus in the early hours of the morning on weekends. Alcohol consumption is a reality on college campuses across the United States, and too often, unhealthy drinking habits form as a result. The College of New Jersey graduate Kathryn LaCapria '20 and student Deanna Amarosa '21, both Public Health and Communication Studies double majors, have worked with Dr. Yifeng Hu of the Communication Studies department and Professor Josh Fishburn of the Interactive Multimedia department to create and promote “Fresh Start,” a video game which properly educates students on mindful drinking.

The creation of “Fresh Start” was a long process, and contributors from several different areas of study worked on the project alongside LaCapria and Amarosa. These students have benefited greatly from participating in this project, and they have been able to incorporate what they have learned in their classes to the development of “Fresh Start.” Amarosa said, “Throughout this project, I learned how to successfully incorporate health communication concepts and theories into our video game.

Doing so was useful for creating certain dialogues and interactive mini-games in a way that increased the player’s learning and their enjoyment of the experience”. The experience was certainly worth it for the two students researchers. LaCapria stated, “I think one of the best decisions that I’ve ever made was reaching out to Dr. Hu about working on this project because this is what sparked my interest in health communication and education. I am currently finishing up my first semester in the Masters of Public Health program at Rutgers University with a concentration in Social and Behavioral Health Sciences... I have carried the skills that I acquired from this project to my graduate studies and am confident that I will continue to use them in my future career.”



Deanna Amarosa '21



Katie LaCapria '20

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



Participating in this research project has also given LaCapria and Amarosa numerous skills which helped them to grow as students, and which they can apply to their future careers. “Being involved in ‘Fresh Start’ helped me to develop my communication and teamwork skills. While working with an interdisciplinary team consisting of students and faculty from various majors, it was important to clearly communicate my ideas for the project and brainstorm with the team by considering all teammember’s perspectives. I was also able to become more confident in my ability to run a focus group or ask for feedback about our game to campus stakeholders; in total, we interviewed over 100 individuals about ‘Fresh Start’ and applied the information we collected to adjusting and improving our game,” Amarosa said.

One of the most rewarding aspects of participating in a research project is the opportunity to present findings and exhibit the hard work which was put forth by team members.



Katie LaCapria, Dr. Yifeng Hu, Deanna Amarosa, presenting at a conference in New York.



A screenshot of one of the scenarios in the "Fresh Start" video game.

Amarosa has had the opportunity to do so, and speaking on her experiences, said, “It has been very rewarding to attend these conferences and present our project to professionals in the gaming and health communication fields, as they always offer valuable feedback about the game. Personally, I have developed my presentation skills and really enjoyed networking at the conferences as well.”

LaCapria also found the experience to be fulfilling. She stated that, “It was extremely rewarding to finally be able to showcase all of our hard work to scholars in the field and get valuable feedback on the project. I think when we first presented and received positive feedback at The City Tech Health Communication Symposium in Fall 2019, that’s when I really saw firsthand how important this project is and how far along it has come from the start. It was such a rewarding feeling.”

Hopefully, “Fresh Start” will soon be used across campus for all students as a unique way to educate at-risk individuals about mindful drinking habits.

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



LaCapria said, “If ‘Fresh Start’ ends up being used as the mandatory alcohol training for incoming freshmen, I truly do see it making a difference and increasing students’ knowledge on mindful drinking. Based on the feedback that we collected, students do find our game to be engaging and relatable. In our research, we found that engagement increases the likelihood of behavior change, so I am confident that more students will use the mindful strategies presented in the game in real life, which will hopefully lower rates of binge drinking across campus”.



Major Members of the “Fresh Start” team include Olivia Knutson '21, Deanna Amarosa '21, Katie LaCapria '20, Miles Cumiskey '21, and faculty members Yifeng Hu and Josh Fishburn.

“Fresh Start” has given LaCapria and Amarosa the opportunity to not only utilize and develop their knowledge in both the Communication Studies and Public Health fields and collaborate with students and professors from across different fields of study, but also to create a positive change in campus life and teach an impactful and worthwhile lesson about binge drinking for new students at The College of New Jersey.



Professor Josh Fishburn, Gretchen Newell '19 (communication studies alum), Dr. Yifeng Hu, Katie LaCapria '20.



Some Other Members of the Fresh Start Team, from left: Angela Rambert '20 (Public Health), Anthony Mendez '21 (Interactive Multimedia), Eliana Gargiulo '21 (Interactive Multimedia).

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



## Dr. Pollock's New Book "COVID-19 in International Media" Finds Many Countries Trust Social Media to Confront COVID-19

**Princeton, NJ, July 21, 2021 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE)** -- How much do social media undermine collective civic responsibility, and how much do they encourage it? A book published August 13, 2021 explored this question.

Social media platforms are sometimes criticized for the role they play during the pandemic for spreading exaggerated claims about the impact of state lockdowns on personal liberties, generating misinformation about the dangers of vaccination, or challenging the good faith efforts of government and health officials to confront COVID-19. Yet a new book edited by John C. Pollock and Douglas A. Vakoch, "COVID-19 in International Media: Global Pandemic Perspectives", illuminates social media as constructive forces countering the spread of COVID-19. According to senior editor Pollock, "Essays on social media's role in confronting COVID-19 reveal that multiple countries regard social media as responsible platforms amplifying science-based pandemic precautions. Social media can function as trusted stewards of civic responsibility."

Co-leading one of the first efforts to unite an international team of scholars investigating how media address critical social, political and health issues connected to the COVID-19 outbreak, book co-editor Vakoch notes that "The collection combines contributions from scholars in a broad range of countries, large and small, industrialized and developing, dictatorships and democracies."



Senior Editor, Dr. John C. Pollock in Sun Valley, Idaho.



Front and Back of Pollock and Vakoch's "COVID-19 in International Media."

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



The collection reveals several patterns. The first is that governments of several democracies have been effective in deploying social media to promote precautionary pandemic behavior. The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, has made informal appearances on a Facebook app nightly in sweatshirt or pajamas reminding fellow citizens to practice safety precautions and “stay in bubbles”, resulting in some of the lowest COVID-19 numbers worldwide.

Similarly, in the UK, a public health information campaign was launched on January 31, 2020, to advise the public how they could mitigate the spreading coronavirus. Public Health England (PHE), like the CDC in the US, detailed UK government social media policy to inform the public about COVID-19 incidents on its website. Social media shared information and engaged with other platform users, allowing the public to post responses or ask questions. Encouraging social media engagement came with a strict code of conduct. Officials closely monitored posted comments and questions, and the same page detailed a list of prohibited behavior and deleted social posts. The UK government utilized several social media platforms -- Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, SlideShare, and their own blog (Public Health Matters) -- to reach the public with specific health concerns.

The second pattern is that leaders can employ a wide range of role models and cultural influencers to promote personal safety. Foregrounding nationally recognized icons has been effective in energizing support for COVID-19 safety campaigns. Twelve days after Spain declared a State of Emergency on March 13, 2020, the media covered a patriotic initiative: The tennis player Rafael Nadal and basketball player Pau Gasol (one from Mallorca, the other from Catalonia, both sporting icons in Spain), launched an initiative on Twitter with the Spanish Red Cross to raise money to fight the coronavirus. “You, the people of Spain, have never let your sports players down. . . , and we cannot let you down now either,” said Nadal on his official account. Soon, hundreds of professional sports players and athletes came on board and donated to the project. Similarly, the leader of one of the world’s largest democracies rallied that nation’s entertainment community, in particular famous actors, to help make the case for personal COVID-19 safety measures.



# DEPARTMENT NEWS



The third pattern the book illustrates is that although social media platforms are used as instruments of cooperation and representation to popularize lifesaving social norms, they can also serve as instruments of resistance to control or regulation.

Social media are employed as instruments of caution and resistance to official regulation or disinformation. One government employed official or social media allies to attack non-official journalists, “netizens”, who questioned the official narrative that the government had responded swiftly and appropriately to the threat of COVID-19. Netizens were also attacked by another government’s social media platforms for any lockdown measure criticism. Contrary to anti-science behavior of some social media users during COVID-19, Russian-speaking bloggers in the diaspora actively refuted rumors and opposed misleading and unreliable information. They fact-checked, criticized destructive behavior, and encouraged followers to embrace WHO precautionary guidelines.

Whether social media play primarily constructive or constraining roles in the pandemic, book chapters suggest their influence has been limited by pre-COVID social inequalities and disparities, particularly in healthcare access.

For example, resource and health information access “asymmetries” and inequalities persist between the Global North and Global South. According to the book, inequality -- digital divides, knowledge gaps and variations in social support -- in social media and health information access continue to separate populations.

The book outlines three civic responsibility lessons from social media experiences of many countries confronting the pandemic. First, leaders and government institutions can effectively enlist social media platforms and tools to convey nonpartisan, health-promoting messages that benefit everyone. Second, responsible health behavior role models are abundant, especially in sports and entertainment communities, to set examples if authorities mobilize them creatively. Third, disparities in access to economic and social resources, as well as social media, hamper health promotion efforts, but expansion of social media has proliferated channels for lifesaving pandemic messages.

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



## Student-Faculty Research Team Gets Published for Exploring COVID-19 News Coverage

By Emily W. Dodd '03 and Julia Meehan '22

While many college students may have experienced some pandemic fatigue and tired of the constant news reports about the number of cases and how to stay safe, six TCNJ students worked together to study and dissect the coverage, and came out of lockdown with a new title for their resumes: co-authors.

Miranda Crowley, Suchir Govindarajan, Abigail Lewis, Alexis Marta, Radhika Purandare, and James Sparano, all members of the Class of 2021, collaborated with communication studies and public health professor John Pollock last year on a chapter in *COVID-19 in International Media: Global Pandemic Perspectives*, a book recently published by Routledge.

Their chapter, “U.S. Nationwide COVID-19 Newspaper Coverage of State and Local Government Responses: Community Structure Theory and a ‘Vulnerability’ Pattern,” analyzed regional newspaper coverage of state and local government responses to COVID-19, and examined how that coverage is driven by the demographics of the community.

“We primarily looked at articles dealing with school reopening policies, mask mandates, and economic relief during the pandemic,” explained Crowley, who is currently enrolled in the Master of Public Administration program at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.

As a team, they decided whether or not each article spoke positively, negatively, or neutrally about how state and local governments responded to the virus. With that data and city-level population data from the communities served by each newspaper, the team ran statistical analyses to look for patterns between certain community characteristics and media coverage.



Miranda Crowley



Suchir Govindarajan

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



“Our study found that the more vulnerable the city – more poverty, more unemployment, greater crime rate – the less positive the coverage of state and local government responses to COVID-19,” Crowley said.

Over the course of many late-night Zoom calls, the team learned how to standardize data collection, resolve research conflicts, edit manuscripts, and apply for publication.

“Prior to participating in this study, I don’t think I fully grasped the importance of a good research team,” she said. “With seven co-authors, our team was quite large, but effective collaboration became one of the most important components of the research process.”

Each co-author brought different skills to the project. Some were narrative-focused, others brought insight from public health and biology, and others were data-driven analysts.

“In an increasingly connected age, nothing and no one exists in a vacuum – not even a research study conducted in a nationwide lockdown,” Crowley said. “I walked away from this project with an overwhelming appreciation for the people I worked with and the importance of teamwork.”



James Sparano



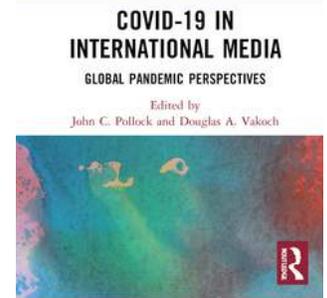
Abigail Lewis



Radhika Purandare



Alexis Marta



As they go on to future studies and careers, the co-authors agree: They value the experience gained from the project.

“As a public health master’s student in nutrition at Johns Hopkins University, group work and cross-sector collaboration is integral to each one of my classes,” Marta said. “I feel so prepared for organizing and participating in even faster-paced graduate studies.”

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



## Text Messaging in Healthcare: Key to Better Patient-Provider Communication: A Featured Interview with Associate COM Professor, Dr. Yifeng Hu

By Talya Meyers, Retrieved from WELL App Website

In recent years, text messaging in healthcare has gone from a niche phenomenon to something that many providers have incorporated into their patient communications. This is even more pronounced in 2021, in the shadow of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone has rapidly adapted to a new wave of telehealth, and we need to be able to remotely communicate as effectively as possible.

Almost 40% of Americans are still fearful of visiting their doctors for a checkup while the risk of COVID-19 remains. 30% of patients have not seen their doctors for a routine checkup since the onset of the pandemic. We need text messaging in healthcare to plug this gap. Patients want access to their doctors, health information, and a positive healthcare experience. But they don't want to expose themselves to unnecessary risks. Text messaging offers the best of both worlds, through SMS appointment reminders, text-based scheduling, and more.

Text messages are powerful because patients like them.

They have a 98% open rate and most are responded to within 90 seconds. This convenience and immediacy makes text messaging for medical offices highly appealing.

Dr. Yifeng Hu is an associate professor of new media and health communication in the communication studies department at The College of New Jersey. She says text messaging in healthcare falls into three distinct camps:

- Health interventions, where texting is used to provide patients with information, reminders, and support.
- Texting as a communication tool between patients and healthcare providers or medical offices.
- Texting is also playing a growing role in AI, which allows chatbots to have intelligent, and increasingly detailed, conversations with people.



# DEPARTMENT NEWS



## Health interventions

Texting as a health-intervention technique is the most common form of text messaging in healthcare. There's strong evidence that these (primarily automated) messages are an effective way to improve public health. Texting helps providers get in touch with patients and help them make sense of complicated health information, particularly if the stakes are high.

One of the biggest applications of SMS for healthcare providers is contacting patients for appointment reminders, follow-ups, and instructions. A 2021 medical study reported 70% adherence of patients to their providers' instructions after receiving motivational messages through text.

Sending patients information and instruction prior to a procedure or appointment positively impacts medical compliance by patients. Ultimately, this results in better healthcare outcomes for patients, says a 2021 Perelman School of Medicine study. In a different research, 81.1% of patients treated for human immunodeficiency virus said they preferred receiving text message adherence reminders. As a result, patients' health literacy significantly improved and travel time to clinics fully accelerated.

Such figures present a strong case why text messaging for medical offices and clinics must be implemented across the board.

## From patient to provider

Text messaging in healthcare enables patients to conveniently and easily contact their providers through a channel they prefer.

In a 2021 study of patients' communication preferences post discharge, 97% of respondents reported text messaging as a tool they use for general, day to day communication. The same study revealed that 76% use it for managing their health, including contacting their providers for appointments, information requests, and regular updates.

*“When patients feel empowered and more in charge of their own health, they will become more motivated and also more informed. The evidence shows that this leads to better doctor-patient relationships.”*

— **Dr. Yifeng Hu, Associate Professor of New Media and Health Communication**



Dr. Yifeng Hu

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



According to Hu, this kind of texting is especially good for doctor-patient relationships. It employs what's called the "transactional model of communication," a two-way social interaction in which both parties listen and contribute, and both have equal power and control over the situation. "Traditionally, healthcare providers have the upper hand, and patients are in the submissive role, so they feel vulnerable," Hu said. Patients frequently emerge from the doctor's office without fully understanding what the doctor has said or what's required of them.

"In healthcare, some of the biggest problems stem from miscommunications. Miscommunications can be in the form of not understanding my diagnosis, or not understanding how to change a dressing [on a wound] or take my medication," Hall said. "How do you disseminate that knowledge effectively?"

According to Hu, implementing text messaging in healthcare affords patients a comfortable space in which to get the information they need. "That empowers patients," she said. "And when patients feel empowered and more in charge of their own health, they will become more motivated and also more informed. The evidence shows that this leads to better doctor-patient relationships."

Hall says there's also simply a pragmatic benefit to SMS for healthcare: "Text messages are really just this short way to disseminate information quickly and with not much effort."

## Chatbots

And finally, although the newest generation of health-related chatbots rarely use the term "texting," Hu says that's precisely what they do. She cites the example of Woebot, which engages users in a text conversation based on cognitive-behavioral principles. The essential idea is to improve your mood—or navigate a high-stress situation—using the chatbot's cues.

There are also chatbots designed to serve as virtual health consultants, like Your.MD and Babylon Health. And lest you think that all chatbots are intended for patient use, the landscape now includes options like Safedrugbot, which gives doctors information about how medications might affect a breastfeeding patient. Such innovations are very promising for the future of text communication in health and social care.

# DEPARTMENT NEWS



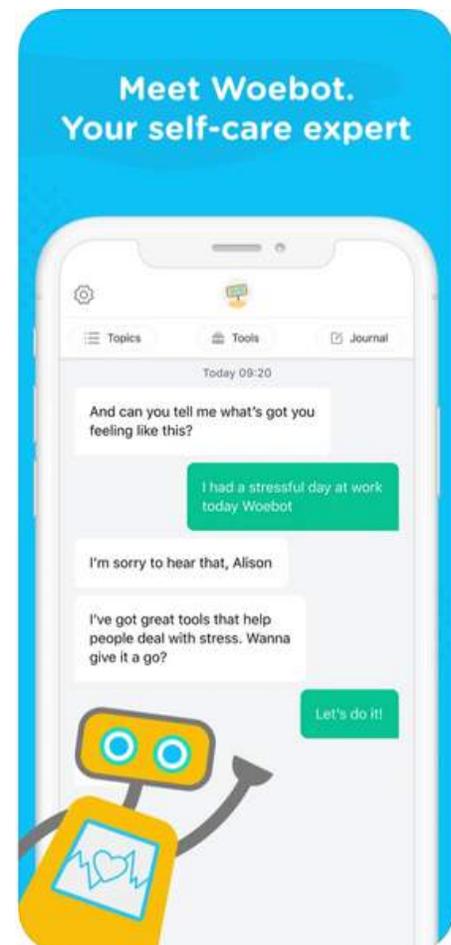
## Moving forward

Texting is far from a new invention: SMS technology is about 30 years old. And in terms of health intervention, Hu said, like providing motivational information and check-ins to patients, it's old news. "Ten years ago it was new, but there are so many newer technologies for intervention. I see fewer articles for texting interventions," she said.

But "a lot of healthcare providers are still way behind in terms of using new media technologies for communication," Hu said. Healthcare organizations are just beginning to explore the possibilities of text messaging in healthcare, the back and forth communication with their patients. "It's a new reinvention of a not-very-new technology," she said.

As for the future of text messaging in healthcare, Hu thinks it will "be immersed into more advanced, encompassing technologies, such as AI-powered SMS appointment reminder solutions, mobile-native health monitoring apps, and medical wearables that track personal health data and connect patients with health providers in real time."

It might not be called "texting" anymore—the term is no longer cutting-edge—but short, back-and-forth messaging will continue to be a part of the healthcare models to come. Text communication in health and social care is only going to get more sophisticated and complex. Nonetheless, Hu says that stand-alone texting will still have some role to play in health interventions, simply because of its convenience and security: "It's low cost, widely accessible, and very universal." ♥



# FACULTY HIGHLIGHT



## Professor Lorna Johnson-Frizell's I Am TCNJ: Docu-Story Highlights Privilege and Differences Among Student Experiences at TCNJ

*Information and Portions of Text Retrieved from the Docu-Story Website*

Lorna Johnson-Frizell, Interim Dean of the School of Arts and Communication and Professor of Communication Studies, has spent several years alongside several Communication Studies students working on the I Am TCNJ: A Docu-Story Project.

The TCNJ Docu-Story is a web-based interactive experience that builds on video-taped interviews with then-current students discussing their perceptions of the campus experience. The focus of the project is on the underlying nature of privilege and difference on the TCNJ campus and directly addresses issues such as microaggressions, unconscious biases, and institutional racism. While the project consists of multiple interviews, users may find it helpful to explore the content by following a specific theme or by identifying the title of respective interviews.

The themes presented in the TCNJ Docu-Story are divided as follows: The American Dream, Assumptions, Classroom Experience, Institutional Racism, Intersectionality, Microaggressions, Race: The Interpersonal Context, Sense of Belonging, Stereotypes, and Where Do We Begin?

The project is intended to provide participants with three different types of reflective experiences: (1) a personalized understanding of biased based issues as operationalized in a college setting; (2) a set of skills to reflect on the contextualized impact of these issues; and (3) a forum to interact with students and consult with colleagues around issues of disproportionality and inclusion.



**CLICK OR SCAN TO  
EXPLORE THE TCNJ  
DOCU-STORY**

# FACULTY HIGHLIGHT



## What is UX? Assistant COM Professor, Dr. Eugene Cho, Shares Insight Into This Area of Her Expertise

Dr. Eugene Cho joined the Communication Studies department this Fall as an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies. Though new to the department, Dr. Cho is already hard at work creating engaging and trailblazing course material for the department. Her expertise is in User Experience (UX) research as well as psychology in new media technology, with a recent emphasis on voice interaction with smart speakers. But what exactly does UX entail? Dr. Cho answers this question and more in a short interview on UX and the courses she is pioneering.



*Dr. Eugene Cho*

### What is UX?

As the term, user experience (UX), indicates, UX encompasses the experiences users go through when they interact with various products or platforms. It includes individuals' feelings, perceptions, and attitudes regarding how usable and valuable those services are to users. It is important to many companies and designers, as negative UX can lead to diminished user base.

### What inspired you to pursue research in this area and design a course around it?

To better identify user frictions and growth opportunities, many companies are communicating directly with users via UX research. Increasingly, UX research borrows advanced methodological techniques from the field of social science including communications, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. As a UX researcher by personal interests, and a communications scholar specializing in media psychology by training, I wanted to share my research experiences and introduce diverse perspectives to TCNJ students interested in UX. That is why I designed COM370 (Com Approaches to UX) offered this spring. I also wanted to develop and conduct UX research together with prospective UX researchers by collaborating with TCNJ students through this class.

# FACULTY HIGHLIGHT



## Has your research into UX yielded any surprising or interesting results?

Recently, my academic research focus has been on smart speakers. One study that just got accepted to a conference this year (CSCW '22) explored if users will feel more emotionally supported when Alexa serves as a better listener by signaling simple verbal cues such as hmm, aha, okay, go on. It turns out not only do users report higher emotional support when they interact with an active-listening (vs. silent) Alexa, but they also express more positive emotions when they talk to Alexa!



# FACULTY HIGHLIGHT



## Dr. Li Receives NCA Gerald R. Miller Book Award

We are pleased to announce that *Navigating Remarkable Communication Experiences of Sexual Minorities* by Dr. Yachao Li (Assistant Professor of Communication Studies and Public Health, TCNJ) and Dr. Jennifer Samp (Professor, University of Georgia) has been designated as the recipient of the National Communication Association (NCA) Interpersonal Communication Division Gerald R. Miller Award for outstanding 2021 book in interpersonal communication.

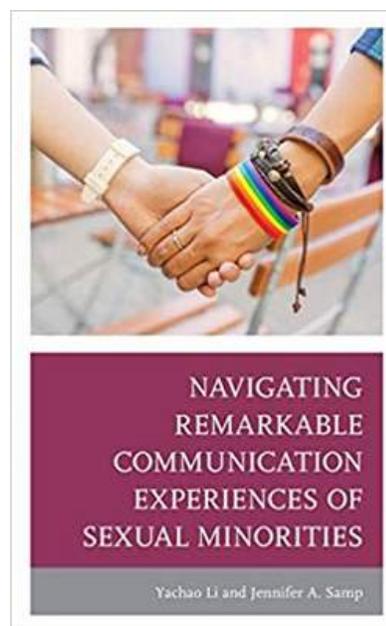
The National Communication Association's Interpersonal Communication Division defines its mission as seeking to "stimulate research on interpersonal communication, develop methods for instruction regarding interpersonal communication, and facilitate communication among those interested in the study of interpersonal communication."

*Navigating Remarkable Communication Experiences of Sexual Minorities* explores unique communication experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people that are crucial to their lives. These include coming out, strategies for sexual orientation disclosure and concealment, among other frequently discussed topics by same-sex couples when making decisions about revealing their relationships.

The book highlights multiple ways in which people communicate their sexual orientation, a process that influences mental health and relationship outcomes. The book proposes the Theory of Coming Out Message Production and the Coming Out Script Theory. It also contributes practical guidelines that LGB individuals might use as they prepare for difficult conversations.



Dr. Yachao Li with his Gerald R. Miller Award.



# FACULTY HIGHLIGHT



## Dr. Yifeng Hu's Advocacy Work Played An Influential Role In Making New Jersey the Second State To Require the Teaching of Asian American and Pacific Islander History

Dr. Yifeng Hu, Associate Professor of new media and health communication, worked closely with Make Us Visible NJ, a coalition advocating for the inclusion of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) history in K-12 curriculum for New Jersey public schools, on the passing of the AAPI Curriculum Bill (S4021/A6100) and the Commission on Asian American Heritage in the Department of Education Bill (S3764/A3369). Dr. Hu rallied and spoke at the NJ State House press conference, provided written testimony to the Assembly Education Committee, called legislators to urge them to pass the bipartisan bills, mobilized multi-ethnic youth advocates to testify, and provided expertise and guidance to MUVNJ. On January 18, 2022, Gov. Phil Murphy signed legislation to make it mandatory for K-12 schools to include AAPI contributions, history, and heritage in their curriculums starting on the 2022-2023 school year. The move makes New Jersey the second state to require the curriculum change.



On 12/2/2021, Dr. Yifeng Hu rallied and testified at the NJ State House for the AAPI Curriculum Bill (S4021), which was added to the Senate voting agenda soon after the rally and passed on the same day.



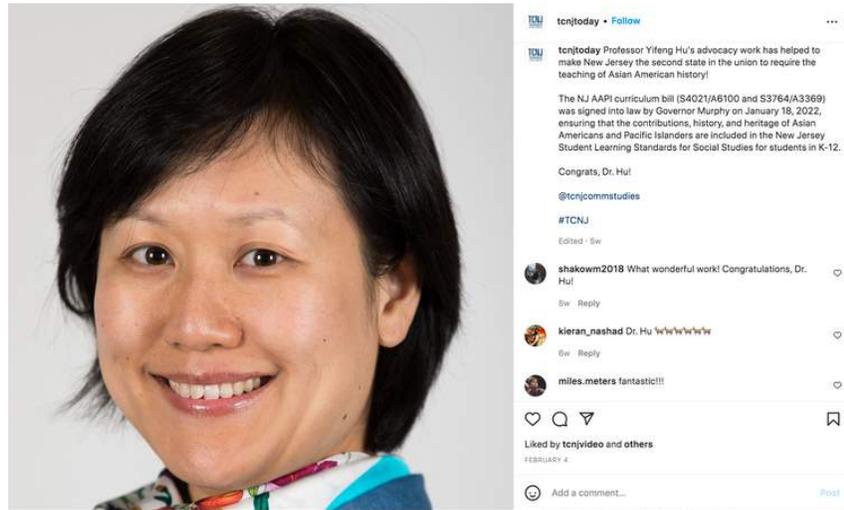
Dr. Yifeng Hu and TCNJ student Gabriella Son, pictured with NJ Assembly Member Raj Mukherji, who sponsored the AAPI Curriculum Bill, at the Trenton State House Rally.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been 10,000+ reported AAPI hate episodes, a glaring issue that has to be solved. Events similar to the killing of Vincent Chin 40 years ago should not still be occurring. The passing of this legislation (S4021/A6100 and S3764/A3369) can help combat hateful rhetoric and violence targeting AAPIs. While the actual impact of this legislation will depend on implementation, its passage alone sends a significant message: that Asian American history **is** American history and is integral to understanding the country's past and present. Not showing up in American history or not hearing about AAPIs in schools contributes to the sense of foreignness.

# FACULTY HIGHLIGHT



The Department of Communication Studies would like to extend a well-deserved congratulations to Dr. Hu for her continuous and devoted efforts that will continue to make a difference here in New Jersey and beyond.



*Dr. Hu has been acknowledged in Green Hall and on TCNJ Today's Instagram for her extensive advocacy work.*

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



## Three COM Studies Alumni Win Admission for Fall, 2021, to Master's Programs at the Nation's Top-Ranked School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University

TCNJ Communication Studies alumni, Cleanthe "Cleo" Kordomenos '17, Lexi Marta '21, and Deanna Amarosa '21 were granted admission to the nation's top-ranked School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University. We are proud to share that our very own COM students are making a difference in the public health field and beyond.

Interviews with Cleo Kordomenos, Alexis Marta, and Deanna Amarosa provide some insight into what our students are doing after learning of their admission to Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, their time at TCNJ, and everything in between.

### What have you been involved in during your time at TCNJ?

**Cleo:** During my tenure within TCNJ's 2017 graduating class, I was deeply involved with the Bonner Institute of Civic and Community Engagement, held internships with then N.J. Assemblywoman Elizabeth Maher Muoio and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's (CHOP) Center for Injury Research and Prevention (CIRP), and served as Lambda Pi Eta's president my senior year.



*Alexis Marta '21*



*Cleo Kordomenos '17*



*Deanna Amarosa '21*

**Alexis:** During my time at TCNJ I was involved with Health and Wellness Peer Education, research with Dr. Pollock, Dr. Seals, and Dr. Borges, served on several advisory boards including Accessibility Resource Center, the Department of Public Health, and Department of Communications, Alpha Psi Omega Theatre National Honor Society, Peer Mediation, TCNJ Musical Theatre, as well as worked for TCNJ audience services.

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



**Deanna:** As a TCNJ student, I've worked on several research projects with the Public Health and Communication Studies Departments. I've also been involved in the service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega as a brother which gave me opportunities to engage in volunteer work both on campus and in the Ewing community. I also worked with many different students as a tutor in the campus tutoring center giving writing consultations and assisting with humanities and math/science classes. At the end of my sophomore year, I became a certified Health & Wellness Peer Educator and assisted with campus wellness initiatives including the Thrive Wellness Expo. I also served as the Vice President of Scholarship & Membership for the Communications Honors Society, Lambda Pi Eta. Lastly, in my senior year I served on the TCNJ COVID-19 Contact Tracing & Case Investigation team as a team leader. It has been a very rewarding experience to know that my efforts as a student have helped keep the campus community safer during the pandemic.

**How was your experience applying to grad schools, and how did you feel once you found out you were accepted to Johns Hopkins?**

**Cleo:** I opted to work full-time after graduating TCNJ in 2017 and later began the graduate school application process in 2019. My experience as a public health professional post-undergrad really affirmed my passion for and commitment to public health, which I then channeled into my MPH program applications.

Admittedly, it was tough prioritizing studying for the GRE while working full-time, and I worried about getting a competitive score. Thankfully for MPH program admissions, a lot of emphasis is placed on relevant experience, recommendation letters, and the personal statement. I made sure my strengths shown through in all of those components. And though I was confident in the applications I submitted, I froze in a state of shock when I got my first MPH acceptance into Johns Hopkins' Bloomberg school of Public Health.

**Alexis:** Perhaps the smallest of silver linings of the pandemic was having the time to apply to graduate schools due to virtual classes and cancellation of most activities. Applying to grad school is definitely involved, especially when you have a niche interest such as myself. You have to really research the programs and discern which align with your personal and professional goals, speak with faculty to get your 'foot in the door,' and research the location to see if they will have good connections for jobs post-graduation.

I spent about 6 months writing three separate essays per school I applied to, attending virtual recruitment events, contacting students and faculty for personal interviews, revising/tailoring my resume, studying and taking my GREs, and writing any supplemental essays each school required.

On December 28th, just a month after submitting my application, I found out I got into Johns Hopkins.

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



I remember waking up and seeing a notification on my phone that there was a change in my application status - I logged on and read the acceptance letter and immediately shut off my phone. I thought it was a practical joke. For three months I only shared the news on a need-to-know basis, meaning, my family didn't find out that I was accepted until February. In fact, when I did tell them I hosted a 'school reveal party' where they had to smash a pinata that contained a puzzle that they then had to put together to spell out which school I would be attending in the fall. It was incredibly funny because they didn't think I got into Hopkins, not because they didn't believe in me, but because they thought I would have immediately told them out of excitement.

**Deanna:** Applying to graduate schools was a tedious but rewarding process. I spent countless hours researching Master's schools and programs, attending information sessions, writing my personal statement, and tailoring different versions of it to fit each school and program I applied to. I applied to four different schools with programs related to my interests in achieving social & behavioral change through health promotion, education, and communication. I am grateful to have been accepted to each school I applied to. I heard back first from Johns Hopkins regarding my acceptance just a few weeks after I submitted my application. I was thrilled when I received my acceptance, especially knowing that this is a competitive program, being the number one rated school of public health in the entire country.



I knew that the program was most specifically suited to my public health interests and has produced many leaders and role models in the field that I wish to emulate in my future career. I know that the school and their vast connections within the field would prepare me to succeed while pursuing my dreams to work with vulnerable communities and improve the population's health outcomes.

**What are your biggest accomplishments after four years at TCNJ?**

**Cleo:** Now four years out from TCNJ—and with four years of working experience as a Public Health/Policy Analyst at research think-tank RTI International - I can confidently say that the research opportunities I was afforded internally through TCNJ's Communication Studies Department and externally through CHOP were the most valuable and rewarding achievements for me and my early career.

**Alexis:** There are three moments I will always look back at with deep pride; for the rest of my life I will be chasing that golden feeling of accomplishment that I felt in these three moments.

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



In chronological order: directing the 2019 Vagina Monologues that raised over 200% of the previous year's earnings for WomansSpace (a charity that provides a safe place for women experience domestic violence) and receiving a thunderous standing ovation following the emotional performance, doing research with Dr. Pollock, Seals, and Borges that earned entry into prestigious books, journals, and conferences, and finally, designing Disability and ADA training that will be required for TCNJ students and faculty. These three experiences were fundamental in developing who I am - I realized I loved advocacy and research and perhaps more importantly learned when I needed to lead versus be led. I am so grateful for the people who included and aided me in these undertakings.

**Deanna:** After four years at TCNJ, I have felt most accomplished working on the project "Fresh Start" and being featured as part of the team led by Dr. Yifeng Hu in an official TCNJ news story. My work was recognized as a Blue & Gold Hall of Fame nominee and I made it to the interview stage of the award process. As a team member, an accomplishment was working with my other team members to interview over 100 on- and off-campus stakeholders about the game. I felt accomplished in gaining the knowledge and skills to successfully run these interviews while asserting myself in rooms of students, professionals, and staff and fostering collaboration, dialogue, and an exchange of ideas.

It was also an accomplishment to present my work on the project at several professional and prestigious conferences and events, and also have our work published. Another paper I worked on in a class taught by Dr. Pollock regarding nationwide newspaper coverage of state and local government response to COVID-19 was also presented virtually at the DC Health Communication Conference. As a result of my project commitments in both the Public Health and Communication Studies Departments, I was awarded as a recipient of the Phi Kappa Phi Student-Faculty Research Award and the Support of Scholarly Activities Grant. Lastly, as a graduating senior, I feel honored to have been awarded the Public Health Service Award for "exemplary involvement, achievement, and dedication to Public Health organizations serving vulnerable populations."

**What do you hope to accomplish in grad school/after grad school? And how will your experiences at TCNJ help you in the future?**

**Cleo:** At Hopkins, I hope to pursue my MPH with a concentration in Health Systems and Policy so that I can better understand incentives within the United States' health care system, and focus on health system payment and delivery reform to better align incentives for equity, quality, access, and affordability.



# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



My work prior to Hopkins largely included government-funded health policy, implementation, and evaluative research advancing the health and well-being of dually-eligible Medicare-Medicaid individuals with complex health and social needs. I hope to continue this work after grad school, focusing on reforms and innovations within America's long term care system and public insurance programs. I'm forever grateful to TCNJ and its esteemed faculty, especially within the Communications Department, for cultivating bright, curious minds. The confidence I carry forward with me as an early career professional is largely a product of the invaluable mentorship and research opportunities TCNJ afforded me.

**Alexis:** It was actually because of Dr. Pollock that I realized what I wanted to do professionally; he encouraged me to apply to graduate programs and invited me to participate in his research. When we started gathering data, analyzing results, and drawing conclusions I realized that research is my passion.

**Deanna:** During grad school at Hopkins, I hope to engage in faculty research projects and opportunities during my coursework, as well as complete volunteer work within the Baltimore community. Once I complete my first year of classes, I will start a field placement position within my field that I hope will match my interests in behavior change/health communication. I am excited that this placement has the potential to occur at a distinguished public health organization.

I also hope to work towards gaining one or more certificates for specific competencies within the field. After graduate school, I hope to work for a large public health organization, such as one within the government, and have a job where I can make meaningful changes through health promotion and communication initiatives. My experiences at TCNJ, especially Fresh Start, have made me feel confident in my future. I am now more confident in working with the public and I understand the importance of seeking diverse feedback on projects in order to make them better suited for a target population. Working with many different students and faculty at TCNJ has prepared me to recognize how one's unique perspective and background alters their perceptions, including those relating to health programs and messaging.

**In your opinion, what are the best things TCNJ has to offer to its students?**

**Cleo:** Hands-down, I'd say student-faculty research opportunities! I also really benefitted from coursework that placed emphasis on tying classroom material to the greater community surrounding it. It's so important to be actively making connections between academic and real-world settings.



Cleo Kordomenos '17

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



**Alexis:** The Communication and Public Health Departments in particular have faculty and staff that truly care about their students and will work to ensure that their students succeed. You have the opportunity to be a big fish in a small pond at TCNJ with the small class sizes, I would encourage all students to take advantage of that because you can excel in ways you never thought possible. Initially, I didn't want to go to TCNJ, but I can easily say that it was the best decision I have ever made.



Alexis Marta '21

**Deanna:** I believe that TCNJ has many unique features and qualities that allow students to succeed. The small class sizes at TCNJ allow you to really get to know your professors, and make connections with the other students in your classes. The majority of students at TCNJ are highly motivated and driven to succeed and participate in class which allows students to learn from each other and have valuable opportunities for collaboration. In addition, TCNJ places an emphasis on faculty-student research and collaboration. Since my Freshman year, I was able to make connections with my professors, and join and create my own research projects. Students should take advantage of the opportunities that TCNJ offers you to grow your experiences and succeed academically.



Deanna Amarosa '21

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



## Health Communication Faculty Mentor Students for Graduate School Success

By Gabriella Lucci '20

As a master's candidate at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, **Lauren Longo '16** remembers how her friends in her cohort assumed she had an undergraduate degree in public health due to her "familiarity" with what she was being taught in her classes.

Although the public health major at TCNJ was not yet established when Longo graduated with a degree in communication studies, she said the undergraduate program "taught as a social science and in the context of promoting health, [is] almost as if you are already studying both (health) communication and public health



*Lauren Longo '16 pictured with Professor of Communication Studies John Pollock.*

Many alumni who have an interdisciplinary concentration in health communication or a double major or minor in public health have attributed their success to their professors and mentors at TCNJ.

Longo said, "I credit the entire [communication studies] department to helping me thrive, including Drs. Pollock, Woodward, D'Angelo, Steuber-Fazio, 2016 adjunct Tom Hipper, and many others," who helped establish the reputation that helped her get into graduate school. Hipper, a 2007 TCNJ graduate, is also a fellow alumnus of the master's program at Johns Hopkins. Longo said her graduate advisor even observed that "TCNJ always sends really smart, kind, and well-prepared students."

Longo, who completed a Master of Science in Public Health with a concentration in health communication from Johns Hopkins in 2018, works as a health education specialist at the Poison Control Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

"I absolutely love my job," Longo said. "As I get to help set the agenda for preventing poisonings through public health programming, engage in advocacy work with city and state government officials, and develop risk communication strategy for communicating about some intimidating

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



topics, like chemical exposures and infectious disease (including COVID-19).”

Longo is among the long list of communication studies students who have successfully graduated and gone on to complete their master’s degree programs at very prestigious graduate schools.

**Daniel Giovinco ’10** graduated from TCNJ with a degree in communication studies with a concentration in health communication and went on to complete both a Master of Public Health degree and DPH at the Rutgers School of Public Health.

“My concentration was in social and behavioral health sciences. In these degree programs, I studied the ways in which multi-level factors -- such as behaviors, community characteristics, and health policies -- interact with each other and impact health outcomes, and how [we] can intervene on these factors to improve population health,” Giovinco said.

Giovinco is a faculty member at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, where he conducts research on substance-use disparities.

“My recent work has focused largely on tobacco use, vaping, and marijuana use. Specifically, I examine how neighborhood factors, such as retailer density, advertising, and local policies contribute to health inequalities among racial and ethnic subgroups,” Giovinco said.

Giovinco’s communication studies courses at TCNJ introduced him to the field of public health. Before taking these courses he didn’t understand what public health was or the types of career options that might be possible with a degree in public health.

“After taking courses in health communication, theories of persuasion, and research methods in the department, I knew that I wanted to continue studying the ways in which effective communication strategies can motivate behavior change,” Giovinco said.

**Katie Ward ’12**, attended Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health after graduating from TCNJ, where she received a MSPH in Health Education & Communication in the department of Health, Behavior and Society. During her second year, she worked for the JHU Center for AIDS Research, where she was trained as an HIV tester and counselor.

“After graduating in 2014, I started working full time for the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in the Division of Infectious Diseases as a Research Program Coordinator,” Ward said. “This work involved developing peer mentor programs and other interventions to link persons with Substance Use Disorders, HIV, Hepatitis C to healthcare services.”

Ward said the TCNJ Department of Communication Studies set her up for success in her field with its collaborative environment and relevant coursework.

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



**Jenna Bjellquist '14**, graduated from TCNJ with an Interdisciplinary Health Communication Concentration within the School of the Arts and Communication.

“My first health communication role was researching new media applications for the healthcare industry with Dr. Yifeng Hu during TCNJ’s Mentored Undergraduate Summer Experience,” Bjellquist said. “Studying at TCNJ prepared me for graduate school, and Dr. Hu and Dr. John C. Pollock guided me through the application process.

Bjellquist said she remained in contact with her TCNJ mentors during and after her graduate studies at the University of Delaware where she received a Master of Arts in Communication. Bjellquist also holds a Medical Writer Certification (MWC) from the American Medical Writers Association.

“Since then, I’ve had the privilege of managing publications and writing for medical organizations who are working to solve unmet research needs and improve patient outcomes,” Bjellquist said. “My current role is with the Type 1 Diabetes TrialNet (TrialNet). TrialNet is the largest international network of healthcare teams at the forefront of diabetes research supported by the National Institutes of Health. I thank TCNJ for launching my successful career!”

After receiving a communication studies degree with a public & mass communication specialization and interdisciplinary health communication concentration from TCNJ, **James Etheridge '15** went on to pursue a Master of Public Health from Columbia University where he focused his studies on comparative and effective outcomes research. Etheridge serves as a strategy director at McCann Global Health which is the public health and social impact company within the McCann World group Network. In this role, Etheridge oversees research and evaluation, communications planning, and collaborates with team members to craft behavior change solutions for a variety of audiences. He has worked on projects spanning over 30 countries focused on vaccination, HIV/AIDS, WASH, sustainability, alcohol harm-reduction, gun safety, tobacco cessation, nutrition, education, and more, according to his bio.



*James Etheridge '15 pictured with Rambo the elephant in 2014 during a three-week summer internship to South Africa for 10 students to study the way South Africans combat gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS led by Pollock.*

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



“I was inspired to pursue public health after taking COM403: Health Communication Campaigns with [professor] Margolis the fall of my freshman year,” Etheridge said.

Recognizing his interest, Margolis introduced him to Pollock who, at that time, was looking to restart the public health communications club.

“Together we restarted the club, and from that point on Dr. Pollock challenged me to further explore my public health interest,” Etheridge said. “Dr. Pollock was an incredible mentor during and after my time at TCNJ.”

**Marc Trotochaud '16** enrolled in a health communication master’s program at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health after he graduated from TCNJ. For the past year and a half he has been working at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, where he has used his health communication background to an array of research projects ranging from misinformation during the 2014 West Africa Ebola epidemic to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Through small class sizes, communication studies faculty get to know each student on a first name basis and provide mentorship throughout the student’s four years at TCNJ.

“My time as a student in the Department of Communication Studies at The College of New Jersey gave me the unique opportunity to learn in smaller classes taught by expert professors, partake in rigorous academic research, and to

build a network of peers and alumni that have been instrumental in my career development,” Trotochaud said.

Trotochaud credits his experience at TCNJ as a major reason for helping him get to where he is today.

**Theresa Soya '16** graduated from TCNJ with a degree in communication studies and then enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania to pursue a master’s degree in public health. She went to school part-time while working in the public health field, and graduated in May 2019.



*Theresa Soya '16 pictured right with Pollock.*

“During my time at TCNJ, I was lucky enough to have Dr. Pollock and Dr. Farbman as mentors,” Soya said. “To be completely honest, I credit them 100% for my success pursuing a graduate career.”

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



Before her senior year, Farbman connected Soya to a colleague of his who worked at a research center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, which led to her completing a summer internship there. After a conversation with Pollock about attending graduate school, where he encouraged Soya to apply for the top tier Master of Public Health institutions, she received her acceptance letter from UPenn.

"Without Dr. Farbman's help connecting me with a fantastic internship or Dr. Pollock's coaching me that I could be a candidate for a high level graduate school, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to go to school at Penn," Soya said. "Like they do with so many of their students, they saw something in me that I didn't even see in myself and pushed me to achieve higher than I had imagined I could."

Soya has worked in research at the Penn Injury Science Center for three years and will be transitioning to a new position at Michael J Hennessy Associates where she will be joining their medical education team in efforts to provide clinicians the opportunity to further their training and be aware of current best practices in their field.

Pollock has continued to be a lifelong mentor of Soya, encouraging her to pursue teaching. He has connected her back to TCNJ where she had the opportunity this past spring semester to teach research methods of public health as an adjunct faculty member.

"I'm hoping in the near future to begin pursuing my PhD in public health, and my dream would be to become a full-time professor and help students the same when Dr. Pollock and Dr. Farbman helped me," Soya said.

Several recent communication studies graduates [headed to top public health and health communication graduate schools in fall 2020].

**Kristine Spike '20** has enrolled in the Master of Science in Public Health (MSPH) program at Johns Hopkins University -- the number one-ranked school of public health in the US. Spike began studies in health communications and work toward a certificate in mental health research [in the fall.]

"I would especially like to thank Dr. Hu, Dr. Pollock, and Dr. Woodward. (All) of them are fantastic professors and their classes taught me skills I will carry with me forever," Spike said. "Whether it was a class on the foundations of formulating messages, or classes that were centered around health, or even the intersection of cultural differences in these areas.



*Kristine Spike '20 (right), pictured with Pollock, presented a paper at the prestigious biannual DC Health Communication Conference in 2019. TCNJ students were the only undergraduates in the nation whose papers were accepted for presentation.*

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



As a career path, Spike hopes to work for a health communication company that focuses on creating health campaigns, preferably, one that has global initiatives as well as local.

“I have always found it important to look at health in terms of the entire world and not just one country,” Spike said. “I am so thankful for the Communication [Studies] department for sparking my interests in health communication, something that I didn’t even know existed prior to my time at TCNJ.”

**Katie La Capria '20** double majored in Public Health and Communication Studies at TCNJ and will be pursuing a Masters in Public Health with a concentration in Social and Behavioral Health Sciences at Rutgers School of Public Health.

As a career path, La Capria would like to become a certified health educator and focus on mental health and/or substance abuse. Because she also majored in communication studies, she would also be interested in becoming a health communications specialist.

“The idea of promoting healthy behaviors through the use of social media and different programs and initiatives excites me,” La Capria said.



Katie LaCapria '20

Before taking the communication courses, La Capria didn’t know the direction she wanted to take in public health.

“The communication studies faculty and alumni at TCNJ gave me the confidence and opportunity to pursue a graduate career,” La Capria said. “All of my communication studies professors made the subject so enjoyable to learn and many showed me how communications and public health go hand in hand.”

Working on a research project with Dr. Hu inspired her to continue her studies.

“From that project, I learned that I really enjoy doing research and being a part of something that could truly make a difference and elicit behavior change,” La Capria said. “Therefore, I decided that I wanted to explore social and behavioral health sciences further in a graduate program. I’m hoping that I will come across more opportunities like this and am excited to keep learning about this area of study that I have become so passionate about.”

**Alessandra D’Ugo '20** transferred to TCNJ as a communication studies major with a specialization in public and mass communication, but was unsure of the path she wanted to take. Pollock, who was her academic advisor, introduced her to the public health program at TCNJ.

“His (Pollock) passion and excitement for the program sparked my interest in health communication and I began taking courses,” D’Ugo said.

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



"I then realized this was the path I wanted to take. I declared a double major in communication studies and public health."

After talking to Pollock about master's in public health programs, she was introduced to Theresa Soya, who was her professor for research methods of public health as well as her mentor. Both Pollock and Soya helped her determine which graduate school she would attend.

"I will be attending the University of Pennsylvania in the fall where I will pursue my MPH on the global health track," D'Ugo said. "I am so thankful for all the opportunities TCNJ has given me and I am so excited to begin this next chapter of my life."



*Appearing with other TCNJ students presenting papers at the 2019 New Jersey Communication Association annual conference, Kristine Spike is second from left, Alessandra D'Ugo is third from left.*

# INTERNSHIP SPOTLIGHT



**Name:** Brenna Kiefner

**Major:** Communication Studies

**Track:** Radio/TV/Film

**Graduation Year:** 2022

**On-Campus Involvement:** Alpha Xi Delta, Student Multimedia Council, TCNJam



**When and where did you intern:** I interned at 94.5 PST during the summer of 2020.

**Describe your internship and your role:** I interned under Kayla Thomas, who hosts the night show at 94.5 PST. I would write blogs for the 94.5 website and show recaps for the Popcrush website. In the middle of my internship, Popcrush offered me to become a writer for the remainder of my internship so I could write my own stories and let my creativity flow easily. Along with writing, I would help interview celebrities such as Katy Perry, Powfu, and more. Finally, I would write segments for the show that Thomas and I would talk about together. We would talk about going back to college, birthdays, psychic readings, and more.

**How did Communication Studies help prepare you for your internship?**

The Communication Studies program helped me a lot to prepare for my internship. I understood the production of radio, what listeners want to hear, and what makes a story memorable. I also used my creativity to it's maximum which I learned in a lot of my RTF and production classes.

# INTERNSHIP SPOTLIGHT



**Name:** Wandally Vargas

**Major:** Communication Studies

**Track:** Public/Mass

**Graduation Year:** 2022



**On-Campus Involvement:** CUB, WTSR, Brower Student Center Manager, PMP, Press-Paws Campaign, Delta Phi Epsilon

**When and where did you intern:** NBC Universal: Oxygen- Spring 2022

**Describe your internship and your role:** I work as an Editorial Intern and I edit and write articles for the site as well as working with video production team to detail videos for the website.

**What is one skill that you improved upon while at your internship?**

I improved upon my writing and my understanding of television networks.

**What drew you into Communication Studies?**

Communication Studies allowed me to focus on my field of interest and tailor it to the entertainment field while also learning about interpersonal skills.