Master’s Program in Communication

Incoming Graduate Students

2017-2018
Alyssa Hernandez
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Health Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Intercultural Communication, Public Health, Women & Gender Studies, Sex Education
**Biography:** Hello everyone! My name is Alyssa Hernandez and I’m from Spring Grove, Illinois. I graduated from Augustana College in Spring of 2017 with a double major in Public Health and Communication Studies. During my time as an undergrad I hosted a Public Health Fair in which my booth educated the general public on barriers to transgender health. I also created a transportation system for women living in a domestic violence shelter as my senior capstone project, and became a certified victim advocate against sexual assault and domestic battery. I assisted in the creation of “Take Back the Night” for the 2017 spring run, and studied maternal health and HIV awareness in Uganda for 4 weeks during the summer of 2016. I somehow found time to be the founder of Historian chair, and Vice President of my local sorority chapter. In my spare time I love to hangout with my chihuahua and find dry and obscure comedies to watch on Netflix. I follow politics as closely as possible since I think it is important to understand that hot mess. At ISU, I’m looking forward to expanding my knowledge of Communication, and would like to create a career in education, particularly as a professor. I also hope to find more dry and obscure comedies on Netflix along the way.

Ashley Morrison-Sain
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Organizational & Leadership Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Intercultural Communication
**Biography:** This past May, I graduated from Illinois State University with a Bachelor’s Degree in Organizational & Leadership Communication. During my time as an undergraduate student, I aided students as a Resident Assistant for three years, and participated in a number of Registered Student Organizations. (Some of which, I am still a member of today.) A lot of my concerns and interests revolve around diversity and inclusion. I believe that the continual pursuit of these two things fulfills my desire to be a life-long learner. I enjoy building meaningful relationships with others, and I am excited to see what new relationships will form during my time as a graduate student and a Graduate Teaching Assistant. When I’m not in class, I love to spend time with my family and friends, read, watch movies, and serve others. I am really looking forward to collaborating, learning, and growing with my soon-to-be students, cohort, and faculty.
Brianne Richards  
(Fall 2017 Cohort)  
**Interest Areas:** Intercultural Communication, Organizational Communication, Social Change, Social Media  
**Biography:** Hello! My name is Brianne Richards, but I go by Mika. During my first two years of college, I attended IWCC, then transferred to Illinois State, where I received my BA in Organizational and Leadership Communication. I have been a collegiate athlete (women’s soccer) all four years. My team at IWCC earned the title of National Champions in 2013. In 2016, my team at ISU became Missouri Valley Champions and advanced to the second round in the NCAA Tournament. During my time at ISU, I realized that I had a passion for intercultural communication. I have been a solo traveler since the age of 16, where I nannied in Okinawa, Japan. However, it wasn’t until I studied abroad in France through ISU’s partnership with CEA Study Abroad, that I felt a huge desire to learn about other cultures, and how they differ from my own. After my incredible experience studying abroad, I started interning for CEA and became an Insider. As an Insider, I use social media to outreach to prospective students who wish to study abroad. I am continuing this Insider position, though now I am training other Insiders. The biggest lesson that I have learned from traveling is that diversity is a necessary component of everyday life. The word different has been associated to negative feelings. I would like to change that. I believe that the media makes the outside world seem more dangerous than the one we live in. My hypothesis was confirmed this summer of 2017 when I traveled to the Middle East, more specifically, Lebanon. Overall, my biggest goal is to work in France after my studies, which is why I have been learning French. In the next year or so, I should be high intermediate in the language! My hobbies include spending time with my puppy, Kai, planning backpacking adventures, scuba diving, watching stand-up comedy, reinforcing my title of book nerd, and parkour. I look forward to working with you!

Cassandra Snelling  
(Fall 2017 Cohort)  
**Interest Areas:** Public Relations, Advertising, Business Communication  
**Biography:** My name is Cassandra and this is my first year at Illinois State University. I have lived in the Bloomington-Normal area all my life and I knew that ISU is where I wanted to be someday. I graduated from Bloomington High School and started college right away in 2012. I received my Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration in May 2017 and currently work at COUNTRY Financial. I have always had a passion for school and plan to use my degrees in the corporate world and when I start my own business one day. I want to have a career in marketing or advertising after completing my Master’s degree which is why I decided to peruse a Communications degree. I have two children and we are very involved in the community. We volunteer at the Humane Society and participate in many events in the local area. I want to be involved at ISU as much as I can this during my time and look forward to what this adventure will bring. In my spare time I like to read both fiction and nonfiction, roller skate, shop, and I am also very crafty.
Cassie McNeill
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Intercultural Communication, Social Media, Public Relations
**Biography:** Hi! I’m Cassie McNeill, I’m from New York City and have moved around my entire life. I graduated this May of 2017 with a public relations degree at Illinois State University. ISU is the only place that I have lived longer than two years, which means everything to me. ISU is truly my home and I am so thankful to be continuing my education career here, at home. Moving around my entire life I was always the new kid in town and consistently adapting to new environments. Needless to say, my communication skills and extrovert personality were always my go to when making new friends and getting acquainted into my new environment. I had to constantly rely on my ability to see the world in a different way. In terms, I had to embrace the uncomfortable feeling of being new to the environment and step out of my comfort zone by getting to know others from all walks of life. As a result, I became more cultured, understanding, empathetic and overall more adjusted to the reality of life, that we are all different. These past experiences sparked my interest of wanting to learn more about the way communication transcends across cultures and go to graduate school to study Communication. I am mesmerized by the power of conversation and the core of sharing/exchanging information across a wide platform of different lifestyles, cultures and social groups. So now that you know my backstory and why I am here, let’s get personal! I am a music fanatic as well as a complete nerd over YouTube, anything that has to do with cartoons and of course, video games. I like to think I am an old soul but I am also addicted to my laptop and iPhone. I believe every issue can be worked out through conversation and time. I think patience and acceptance are the key characteristics to growing as a person. I’m excited to begin this new chapter in my life and to meet my new cohort family!

Derek Drew
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Social Media, Instructional Communication
**Biography:** Greetings! My name is Derek Drew and I am from Aurora, Illinois. I will be entering into my first year as a graduate student here at Illinois State University in the Communication program. I matriculated from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville with my Bachelor degree in Spanish with a Pre-Law minor. I also am a volunteer assistant coach for the Track and Field Team at ISU. I love Track & Field and Basketball. Other hobbies include being in nature, meditation, and trying new things. I plan to use what I learn in the Communication program to be the best coach, teacher, and mentor possible to my athletes and peers.
Dawn Davis  
(Fall 2017 Cohort)  

**Interest Areas:** Health Communication, Leadership and Organizational Communication, Communicative aspects surrounding holistic healthcare and functional medicine, nutrition, health coaching, and awareness education  

**Biography:** Greetings students, faculty, and staff! First, I am excited to be part of the 2017 SoC Fall Cohort, having new opportunities to learn, grow, and collaborate, while pursuing a mid-life career change with a focus on health communication. In 2010, I forayed into the health sector after navigating the medical maize during my recovery from a personal health crisis. While living abroad in Italy, I took a Science of Food, Health, and Wellness course, igniting a passion and mission within me. I obtained my Holistic Health Coaching certification, and in 2012 began practicing nutritional and lifestyle coaching. Along the way, I worked as a circuit coach and instructed classes for Curves on Towanda, substitute taught at Parkside Junior High, and facilitated a wellness class for the Parkside staff. Most recently, I started an assistantship with ISU’s Health Promotion and Wellness in the role of Communication and Marketing focusing on prevention and the Seven program. I bring to the program a B.A. in Interior Architectural Design, from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, CA, with a comprehensive professional background in client services, including account/project/program management, coordination, team management, training, and sales. My client experience encompasses corporate, government, higher education, non-profit, and healthcare sectors, providing a diversified perspective. I successfully managed small to large scale multimillion dollar projects with clients such as: Oracle, Charles Schwab, Warner Brothers, Walt Disney Imagineering, Screen Actors Guild, Autodesk, National Defense Council, County of Ulster, and Vassar College. I worked within the non-profit sector administering a county-wide Family Development program with Cornell University, providing research and data demonstrating the program’s development and effectiveness. As a result, the program converted from a grant-based status to a New York state budget line. My personal future goals are to research health communication, creating health awareness and inspiration through the educational vehicles of writing and teaching. I strongly believe in the ripple effect where developing people’s awareness reaches out to others by natural extension. With this, I am ready to place my head, heart, and hands to work in the SoC graduate program. Aside from my professional endeavors, I enjoy spending time with my husband, daughter and friends, watching films, reading, hiking, biking, kayaking, walking, yoga, learning tennis, cooking and baking, entertaining, experiencing new adventures, and interweaving spirituality throughout my day, which keeps me grounded and grateful in the wake of life. I’m not sure to what degree these activities will be able to occur while my brain is growing in ways it never has before. However, I am sure a growing brain is a happy brain!
Ekaterina Rybakova
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Mass Media, Public Relations, SMM, Interpersonal Communication

**Biography:** Hello! My name is Ekaterina but you can call me Kate. Last year I graduated from Moscow State Linguistic University with my B.A. degree in journalism. During my undergraduate education I had several internships in various media outlets, so I gained a decent amount of experience in journalism. I have been working for a Russian TV channel for a long period of time and covered lots of cultural and socio-political issues in my reports. However, I realized that I really want to gain some more knowledge of international social, political and cultural processes. As the USA is one the world’s major decision makers, I believe that doing my Master’s here will help me to become a qualified media specialist. I really hope that my academic background will help me to succeed in the Communication program at ISU and I will be able to become a well-trained international specialist that can contribute to establishing cooperation across borders. Can’t wait to meet all of my professors and fellow students and begin my journey as a Redbird!

Emily Raschke
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Social Media Influence & Analytics, Public Relations

**Biography:** I graduated from Illinois State University with a B.S. in Public Relations in May 2017. During my time as an undergrad student I was able to explore my love for social media and analytics through work in the SMACC Lab at Illinois State. In my last year of undergrad I was heavily involved in the Theta Eta Chapter of Lambda Pi Eta Communication Honors Fraternity and am currently serving as the media and recruitment chair. Since graduation I have been using my love for social media to help community organizations near my hometown increase engagement and their online presence. I am so happy and grateful to be spending more time at Illinois State University and in the amazing cities of Bloomington and Normal. I am a coffee lover and nerd culture enthusiast. When I am not in Fell Hall, I enjoy classic sitcoms, cooking, and spending time with my two lovely nieces. I am excited to start working with everyone and can’t wait to bring my love of Communication to the incoming class!
Erica Efigenio  
(Fall 2017 Cohort)  
**Interest Areas:** Communication Education, Rhetoric, Mass Media, Mass Media Effects, Public Relations, Mental Health  
**Biography:** Born and raised in the temperate state of California, I am often questioned as to what possessed me to trade in my year round sunshine for ice storms. My facetious answer was, I did not know you could not wear a t-shirt well through November because frostbite is real. My serious response is, my passion for public speaking, after being on a collegiate speech team for two years, as well as the strong communication program at ISU made moving halfway across the country a worthwhile adventure. Obtaining my B.S. in Organizational and Leadership Communication at Illinois State University and having the opportunity to return to achieve my master's degree is a privilege I am exceedingly delighted about. Academically, I am interested in investigating the missing links in education that facilitate a student's transition from a high school or a junior college lifestyle to a university lifestyle and how that transition impacts them personally as well as scholastically. I aim to shed light on any improvements that can be made to ensure the success of new students, which could be registered in their personal and academic lives. Personally, I enjoy maintaining an active lifestyle, which includes rock climbing, yoga, cycling and kickboxing. In my free time I can be found writing, painting, drawing, taking photos, socializing with friends or sprawled out on the couch watching Doctor Who. I look forward to getting know everyone and the time I have in this program!

Franklin Kimmell  
(Fall 2017 Cohort)  
**Interest Areas:** Organizational Communication, Intercultural Communication, Political Communication  
**Biography:** I graduated from Illinois College in 2016, and while there I was a double major in Communication and Rhetorical and International Political Studies with a French minor. The highlight of my communication career, so far, was presenting research I conducted on employee participation in decision making processes at the 2016 Central States Communication Association Conference. While at Illinois College I was involved with many student organizations including The Coalition for Ethnic Awareness, OXFAM, Amnesty International, Rotaract, SAGE (Students for Sexual and Gender Equality), and Illinois College Feminists. I enjoyed organizing Illinois College’s annual International Day of Peace, Diversity Week, and Walk for Water. Apart from this I find that my admiration and sincere love for Chelsea Handler grows daily, I would love to talk with you about your favorite shows on Netflix, and I am always ready to go to Taco Bell.
**Gilbert Kipkoech**  
(Fall 2017 Cohort)  
**Interest Areas:** Public Relations, Corporate Communication, Instructional Communication  
**Biography:** Hello! My name is Gilbert Kipkoech from Kenya. I hold a Bachelor's degree in Communication with a focus in Public Relations from Moi University, Kenya. I graduated at the top of my class and I believe this is what earned me a place at ISU. Since then I have served with various organizations back in Kenya. Recently, I served with a leading Non-Governmental Organization called Act Change Transform (Act!). We endeavored to empower communities in Kenya to live productive lives of dignity. I personally appreciate diversity and this is what exactly Illinois State University offers. A great opportunity to interact and learn. Outside of class and work, Soccer and Athletics takes most of this time. Maybe because I come from a powerhouse in world Athletics!! I also enjoy watching series. I am excited as I join you to embark on our journey towards a Masters Degree even as I build my professional skills as a Graduate Teaching Assistant.

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**Hannah Trew**  
(Fall 2017 Cohort)  
**Interest Areas:** Intercultural Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Visual Communication, Documentary Production, LGBTQ Studies  
**Biography:** I graduated from Ohio University with a B.S. in Communication Studies and a minor in Digital Storytelling and Screenwriting. During my time at OU, I was able to explore my interests, meet some incredible people, and get involved with some amazing organizations. I worked for the City of Athens' news station and worked as an office assistant for the School of Communication Studies for 3 years. On the extracurricular front, I was the secretary of NCASC (National Communication Association Student Club), President of the F Word Performers, a performance art collective on campus, and Director of Campus Outreach for BobcaThon, OU's 12-hour dance marathon that raises money for the Ronald McDonald House in Columbus, OH. So, as you can tell, I love to stay active and involved. I was able to be a part of several research projects during my undergraduate career as well. I helped analyze the representation of the LGBT community in Film and Media, I joined a Photovoice project where we had participants take photos of the spaces and places they felt both comfortable and uncomfortable expressing their queer identity; and I helped analyze the representation of transgender individuals in magazines. I also, produced my first documentary, Unapologetically Spoken, about how poetry helps individuals express and explore the many facets of their identities. It was through these research projects, that I really found my love for Communication Studies and was what made me decide to continue my academic career at ISU. In my spare time, I enjoy traveling, photography, spending times with friends and family, cuddling with my two cats and writing poetry. I am a total movie buff, comic book nerd, and lover of a good cup of coffee. I am excited to work with and learn from all of you!
Isaac Ruiz
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
Interest Areas: Organizational Communication, Mass Communication, Film
Biography: Hey everybody! My name is Isaac and I was born and raised in Southern California! Needless to say, I can imagine this Illinois weather will be a little rough. I have had a fairly unique education thus far, being homeschooled from K-12 and never entering a public school until college! I did community college for 2 years at Mt. SAC then transferred to UC Berkeley where I got my degree in English. I fell in love with communication through joining Forensics in college and competing in all genres of performance. Through it, I learned just how vital communication studies is and knew I wanted to pursue it academically. I am particularly interested in Mass Media and Marketing, and I am also very interested in how film plays a role in communication. My aspiration is to become a full-time professor and Forensics coach, but I’m keeping my options wide open at this point! When I’m not doing school, I have many other interests. I’m a super film nerd: the kind that’s seen almost every Oscar-nominated movie at the end of the year and wastes way too much money going to the theater. I also love reading books (my not-so-guilty pleasure is YA fiction), lifting weights, playing strategy board games (hit me up if you like any), watching boxing and football, and drinking gratuitous amounts of coffee. I also eat way too much (Taco Bell is life), love clothes, and am always down for an adventure! Excited to meet and hang with all of you this year!

Jessa Hendrick
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
Interest Areas: Interpersonal Communication, Education, Communication Theory, Leadership Training & Development, Public Relations
Biography: Hello, everyone! My name is Jessa Hendricker. I was born and raised in Clinton, Illinois, and actually live there now. I did leave for my undergrad at Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, Illinois, where I received a B.S. in Communication Studies with a concentration in Corporate Communication and a minor in Theatre in May 2017. During my time at Olivet, I served as a Teaching Assistant for our basic public speaking course, our interpersonal communication class, and for our public relations writing class. I absolutely loved this role because I got to work with a fantastic mentor who taught me more than just how to teach. Besides being a teaching assistant, I managed a full course load each semester, working a job (or two or three), staying actively involved in Orpheus Choir, and working on any theatrical production I could be a part of! My time at Olivet truly shaped me into the communicator and person that I am today. I am the daughter of two teachers, so I guess the teaching bug bit me, too! Last year, I also taught preschool dance classes. It was so fun getting to pour into the lives of twenty young three- to six- year olds! I am so excited (and nervous) to serve as a Graduate Teaching Assistant this fall! I believe that a good classroom environment and an open platform for relationships is incredibly important to help impact a student’s education. If I’m not in class, teaching my own class, grading papers, or doing other jobs, you can find probably find me hanging out with friends at Fusion Brew (or other local coffee shops) or working on a production at Community Players Theatre. I firmly believe that everyone needs a creative outlet in their lives - mine just happens to be the theatre! I hope to eventually become a Communication and/or Theatre professor in order to share with my biggest passions with others. I am so very excited to see how students’ lives are impacted this year; I'm excited to meet all of you, too! When I was little, I said my “dream schools” were born Olivet and ISU because they were each one of my parent’s alma maters. How cool is it that my dreams actually came true! Go Redbirds!
Jessica Wozniak
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Public Relations, Intercultural Communication, Social Justice, Media Literacy

**Biography:** In 2011 I graduated from Illinois State University with a bachelor of arts in English, focusing in publishing studies. From 2011-2012 I served as Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in Montenegro, teaching oral and written communications to third- and fourth-year university students. Following that I moved to Bucharest, Romania, where I worked for four years as an English teacher in public, private and language schools, with students ages three to adult. Last summer I returned to the US and, shortly after, began working at a public relations agency just outside Chicago. I’ll be attending Illinois State as a part-time student this fall, while continuing to work full time. In my free time I especially enjoy riding horses.

Julia Gramont
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Social Media Marketing, Public Relations

**Biography:** I graduated from Illinois State University in the Spring of 2017 with a B.S. in Mass Media - Media Management, Promotion and Sales. After finishing my undergraduate program in three years, my educational journey did not seem complete. I decided that graduate school was a must and ISU was the place. As an undergraduate, I stayed busy with several involvements. I was the Vice President and Secretary of the Association for Women in Communication and a recruitment board chair member for St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital’s Up til Dawn event. During my senior year, I served as an Undergraduate Teaching Assistant for introductory and advanced radio classes. I worked part-time at TechZone doing technical support, selling technology and managing social media sites. Over the past couple years, I have been working with social media in various ways including coordinating for TechZone, the Office of Admissions at ISU and the ISU student radio station WZND. I was also on the Women’s Club Water Polo team for three years and served as the Vice President my final year. I will be the Graduate Assistant at the Alumni Center starting this fall where I will be planning events and managing projects. I will be spending every Sunday night watching The Walking Dead like I have been for the past 7 seasons. My other interests include Harry Potter, Chicago sports, country music, catching big fish and meeting new people!
Kameron Williams
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Intercultural Communication, Social Media Influence & Analytics, Broadcast, Higher Ed Communication

**Biography:** Hi there! My name is Kameron Williams and I graduated from Mississippi State University in May 2016 with my BA in Communication with emphases in Public Relations and Broadcast. I am a music lover from Grenada, Mississippi with a passion for performance, outreach, and intercultural studies. I originally attended Holmes Community College in Goodman, Mississippi before transferring to Mississippi State. While at Holmes, I was a Journalism major finding my footing while juggling being a cheerleader and active in every music program possible. Upon transferring to Mississippi State, I decided to focus on both Broadcast and Public Relations after realizing how to apply my passions for performance and community outreach. While at Mississippi State, I was an anchor for the university’s news program as well as interning for MSU’s Social Science Research Center's Media Collaborations Lab. I was also active within numerous LGBT and cultural organizations on campus. This involvement enabled me to travel to different schools within the state to discuss subjects such as gender expressions/norms and the racial divide. Ultimately, I look to snag a communication role within higher education while still freely expressing myself and my experiences through writing. My long-term goal is to be Director of Communication at an amazing University where I can be instrumental in improving the university’s outreach efforts, especially during the recruitment process. I tend to look occupied or busy, but I am extremely welcoming! I am not only willing to tell people about my experiences, but always looking to learn new things! If you want to get my attention and you have a minute, just ask me what I’ve been listening to and/or watching. I can’t wait to meet you all, make new friends, and jumpstart an amazing school year!

Kiah Wilson
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Public Relations, Organizational Communication, Social Media, Rhetorical Criticism

**Biography:** Hi! My name is Kiah Wilson and I graduated from Illinois State University in May of 2017 with a B.S. in Public Relations. I loved my experience at ISU so much that I decided to stick around to pursue a Master’s degree! I am originally from Moline, IL, a small town right on the Mississippi river, near the border of Iowa. During my time as an undergrad, I cheered for the ISU Competitive Cheerleading team for four years, served on the ISU Competitive Cheer executive board, interned at YWCA McLean County, interned at Heartland Community College, volunteered at WishBone Canine Rescue and worked as a sales associate at T.J. Maxx. I am extremely interested in Public Relations and learning more about the best ways to build lasting, mutually beneficial relationships internally and externally, as well as how the way we choose to communicate impacts those relationships. I also enjoy learning the best methods to reach different audiences as technology changes. After completing this graduate program, I hope to move to Chicago and work for a PR agency downtown. Outside of school I enjoy travelling, shopping, cooking, watching Netflix and spoiling my dog. I’m excited for this new chapter and look forward to meeting you all!
Krista Bilow
(Fall 2017 Cohort)

**Interest Areas:** Social Media Influence & Analytics, Public Relations, Marketing Communications, Branding Crisis Management

**Biography:** I graduated from Illinois State University with a B.S. in Public Relations in May 2017. The School of Communication at Illinois State made such an impact on me, I knew I wanted to further my education here. During my undergrad, I was extremely involved in PRSSA and served as president my junior year. Throughout my undergrad I had some great opportunities interning in the Bloomington-Normal community. My work with Special Olympics Illinois and COUNTRY Financial fueled my passion to give back to the community I live and work in. After my time with those incredible organizations, I started working for the ISU Career Center where I was able to pursue my passion for social media and analytics. When I’m not behind my desk, I am out enjoying nature, watching the Cubs (win), traveling to new cities with my boyfriend, and finding new music to jam out to! I can’t wait to see what is in store for me next as I continue to work with the ISU Career Center as the Marketing and Communication Graduate Assistant!

Laura Fox
(Fall 2017 Cohort)

**Interest Areas:** Crisis Communication, Social Media, Public Relations

**Biography:** Someone once quipped at me “is there anything you haven’t done?” Before I could chime in, my co-worker responded on my behalf – “yeah, pick a career.” I guess if I am being honest with myself, they are correct. My undergraduate degree is in theatre, which I enjoyed before I ended up working in labor relations, then education, then finance, and now as the Budget Manager and Social Media manager for the ISU Police. Throughout all of these jobs I have found a need to be able to communicate in crisis moments, and just as soon as I thought I had it mastered I watched at the way we communicate shift and change. The changing landscape of communication fascinates me, especially how it impacts our ability to communicate with each other during times of crisis. When not working I am chasing my 3 and 5-year-old kids around the backyard, volunteering as a first responder for the McLean County Emergency Management Agency, running, and spending whatever time I can in my garden amongst the flowers and crops. I am excited (and a bit terrified) to be jumping back into school and looking forward to learning from each of you.
Lavender Ntaoti
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Publication, ICT support, Research, Project Management, Community Development, Sports
**Biography:** Lavender Ntaoti is a passionate Maasai, Kenyan lady with strong christian values and standards. She hails from the Maasai community which is known to have a beautiful culture. She holds a honorary degree in Information Science, Publishing and media from Moi University. She believes she has the power get things done through hard work, efficiency, and Communication. She is a professional editor, trained in writing for publications.

Leslie Laursen
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Rhetoric, Interpersonal Communication
**Biography:** I am originally from a fairly small farm town in Wisconsin where I graduated from the University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh with my B.S. in Communication Studies. During my undergraduate years my interests particularly fell within rhetoric, argument/debate, political, and interpersonal communication. Outside of my required communication courses, I tried to take as many political science and history classes as my schedule would allow each semester. During my final year at UWO I worked on and submitted a rhetorical analysis to the university’s undergraduate research journal. This process helped to aid in sparking my interest to further my education and attend graduate school in hopes of one day becoming a professor at a university. If I’m not studying, you’ll most likely find me geeking out over some book I’ve recently read or want to read, ranting about various sports topics, cheering for any Pittsburgh team, or jamming out at a concert. I am stoked to be continuing my education at ISU and look forward to this new experience.
Logan Sean Spence
(Fall 2017 Cohort)

**Interest Areas:** Rhetoric in: Video Games, Animation, Social Movements, Popular Culture, online/YouTube communities, Disney and Pixar: Rhetorical Criticism, LGBTQ Studies, Feminist Rhetorical Critique, Intersectionality

**Biography:** My name is Logan Spence. I’m originally from Florida and graduated from Nova High School, where I competed for the nationally ranked Nova Titan Speech and Debate team for four years. After high school, I attended Marshall University, where I also competed for the nationally ranked Thundering Word Speech and Debate team. I graduated from Marshall University in 2017 with a Bachelor in Communications. Speech and Debate has been the dominate force of my academic career, so I decided to continue my contribution to the speech community by furthering my education here at ISU and pursuing my Masters while also coaching the Red Birds. While attending graduate school was already part of the master plan since my sophomore year at Marshall University, the need to remain a part of the speech community was catapulted when my coach at Marshall, Danny Ray, passed away unexpectedly at the end of my junior year. Ever since his heartbreaking passing, I have worn my Marshall University pin every single day and always will. Miss you Danny! Now, I should also state that video games are my focus/specialty in rhetorical studies. I started playing video games when I was 6 with a PlayStation 1 I received for Christmas. However, I didn’t truly fall in love with video games until I discovered Kingdom Hearts by complete accident. From then on, video games have become my main consumption of media. When I first went to Marshall University, I was a Game Design major. I wanted to make video games for a living, but programming just wasn’t for me. Then, I realized that I literally “talked” for competition and discovered that Communication was perfect for me. I now examine video games from a rhetorical perspective while also examining them through quantitative analysis. My desire is to further rhetorical theory on video games and the culture surrounding them. In addition, I will examine games as a text and study their design and how their designs communicate to others. Warning! I also engage in the evil force known as “video game feminism”, here to take video games away from the dreaded straight white man! Wait, I’m that! Curses! I have been caught! My hobbies are playing video games, watching movies (usually animation), expressing unpopular opinions on video games, reading about rhetorical theory, writing academic papers on video games and video game feminism, and simply talking about rhetoric with people. My career goal is to earn my Doctorate in Communications and become a professor. My life goal is to publish as many academic papers as possible on video game rhetoric and compile these into a book for the public to purchase. With that, academia is extremely important to me and I hope to continue this through my own courses as well as a Graduate Teaching Assistant for COM 110!
Maddison Jansen
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Political Rhetoric, Health Communication, Crisis Communication

**Biography:** Greetings! I’m Maddison Jansen of the bustling metropolis known as Lynnville, Iowa. When I finished high school in 2012, I went to the University of Northern Iowa and got my BA in public relations. I didn’t realize until my senior year of undergrad what I wanted to do, which was slightly inconvenient to say the least. That was when I started my undergraduate thesis project about the Ebola crisis of 2014 and learned more about health crisis management, preventative care, and remote health systems. I competed in collegiate speech at Northern Iowa, and I’m jazzed to work with ISU forensics during my time here as well. I took a gap year to work a joe job at a gun parts warehouse, save up some money, and upgrade my vehicle; this summer and last, I worked the Harvard Debate Council’s summer workshop. If I get my way, I’ll use my master’s in a job with Planned Parenthood on crisis response teams re: the HIV/AIDS emergency in Indiana and other rural Midwestern states. In my wildest dreams, I’d like to work for the World Health Organization or Doctors Without Borders providing healthcare to refugees and other displaced peoples. I wasn’t sure a master’s degree was in my future, because I have a problem with the neoliberal echo chamber that renders much of academia almost useless to the layperson. My thesis project included a paper as well as a service element where I collected used medicine bottles to donate to doctor’s offices in developing countries; I intend to incorporate service work like that into as much of my study as possible. In the meantime, I like to drink lots of coffee (my doctor uses the word “troublesome”), listen to current events podcasts, watch documentaries, and read presidential autobiographies. I love traveling, too; I did summer mini-semesters at the University of Stellenbosch in Cape Town, South Africa, and the American Studies Institute at the University of Rennes in France; speech gave me lots of opportunities to travel in the States, too, something for which I’m so grateful. I couldn’t be more excited to be a Redbird!

Madison Stoneman
(Fall 2017 Cohort)
**Interest Areas:** Intercultural Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Organizational Communication, Marketing Communication

**Biography:** Hi everyone! I graduated from Augustana College in May 2017 with a BA in Communication Studies and a minor in Graphic Design. During my time as an undergrad I played on the Varsity Woman's Lacrosse team making it to the sweet sixteen two years in a row! After an injury I had to stop playing but I continued to be a manager for the team and later on became a manager for the Augustana's Football team. My junior year I spent 5 and a half months in Hong Kong, an experience I will never forget. Being able to submerge yourself in other people’s cultures is something you cannot learn from a textbook. I have a great passion for traveling and seeing what else is out there besides the American values/traditions. I look forward to attend ISU and further my education!
Maureen Maquiddang  
(Fall 2017 Cohort)  
**Interest Areas:** Public Relations, International Studies, Documentary Production, Digital Media, Communication Theory  
**Biography:** I graduated with a degree of AB Major in Mass Communication at Far Eastern University in Manila, Philippines. I’m a practitioner for more than seven years now. I started my career as a researcher in a national broadcasting network – ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corporation. After a year and a half, I was promoted as a segment/episode producer. It felt like I was living the dream I had since I was a kid in front of the television. It led me to interesting, unique and far-flung places and meet people with stories that touched my life. One of the stories I will never forget was the story of students who are living on the top of the mountain, who must cross steep slopes and two rivers just to go to school every day. My crew and I were hardly catching our breathe while filming the story and we were so amazed by the kids smiling and excited to go to school despite the hurdles on the road. The experience made us feel grateful and content for everything we have. It is very moving to see people being happy with having little to almost nothing. These experiences led me to realize what I want to do next. After five years in television, I shifted to public relations. I worked for Philippine Business for Social Progress, a business-led non-profit organization and Alsons Power Group, a Mindanao-based independent power producer. From merely filming and presenting a story, my job now involves formulating and executing strategic communication plans that adhere to an organization’s goals. This career shift forced me to consider not only what I’m presenting, but how I present it to grasp the attention of as many people as possible. Like in television, the target audience is the most important consideration in crafting messages and telling stories about the organization’s business and corporate social responsibility. I believe media is the single most important institution to our global society. Media is the dialogue that cultivates democracy and furthers the progress of our very species. In an increasingly panicked, desperate, and misinformed world, principled media is needed more than ever to educate the public so they are equipped to respond to the modern world’s mounting challenges.

Nichole Hughes-Liss  
(Fall 2017 Cohort)  
**Interest Areas:** Political Communication, Intercultural Communication, Social Media, Rhetoric  
**Biography:** As an ISU alumnus, the choice to come back to Fell for my master’s was a no-brainer. I got my undergraduate degrees in Communication and Political Science. I almost dropped my Communication degree, actually, but after studying abroad, I became passionate about the intersection of communication and politics. So here I am, dedicating two more years of my life to research on the subject! Since I graduated, I have been working at Hobby Lobby, anxiously waiting for the Cardinals to return to their former glory and wishing Josiah Bartlet was back in office (along with my spirit animal, Toby Ziegler). I got married to my wonderful husband Sam, and we adopted two fur babies. In my free time, I enjoy watching Netflix and perusing the Twittersphere. Other hobbies include traveling, eating Mexican food, and listening to The West Wing Weekly podcast. My family is of the utmost importance to me, especially my hero, my twin sister, who inspired me to come back to ISU in search of a higher degree (she wrote that). When I graduate, I plan on working at a university or in local government. Essentially, when I grow up I want to be Leslie Knope because we both love waffles, feminism, and Joe Biden. I look forward to meeting you all!
Paige Phelps  
(Fall 2017 Cohort)  
**Interest Areas:** Leadership and Organizational Communication, Social Media  
**Biography:** My name is Paige Phelps and I graduated from Augustana College (Rock Island, IL) in May of 2017 with a BA in Communication Studies, minors in Music and Graphic Design, and a certificate in Nonprofit Leadership Development. I enjoyed my time as an undergrad more than I had ever imagined! While at Augie I was a member of the rowing team, a cellist in the symphony orchestra and had the opportunity to be the president of my local sorority, Chi Alpha Pi. I had originally chosen Augustana with the intention of majoring in Music Education. However, after some reevaluating, I found my home within the COMM Department. My goal after ISU is to serve in a collegiate setting in some capacity. I’ve grown very fond of the college environment, and I’d love to be able to inspire students the same way I have been inspired. Outside of the classroom you can find me hiking and running, playing the cello and ukulele, eating chipotle, and perfecting my Pinterest boards. I am looking forward to this new journey at ISU, and can’t wait to meet you all.

Pete Pucek  
(Fall 2017 Cohort)  
**Interest Areas:** Communication Education, Documentaries, Nonverbal Communication, Rhetorical Methods, Training & Development  
**Biography:** I received my bachelors degree in 2017, at 43-years of age. I spent over 15 years in the video industry; shooting, editing, producing and directing everything from commercials to music videos; and training videos to corporate events. I also spent over 20 years in the audio industry as a wedding DJ, emcee, event coordinator, recording producer/director and live sound operator. Returning to school as a non-traditional student showed me there are correct and incorrect ways to communicate a message in the classroom. Effectively communicating the correct message in an online classroom, is a challenge; and a task that inspires me. The opportunity to take my academic interests and turn them into educational tools to help the next generation of student; is not only an honor but a privilege. In my free time I enjoy the martial-arts, scenario paintball and video editing.
Prince Adu Gyamfi
(Fall 2017 Cohort)

**Interest Areas:** Public Relations, Organizational Communication, Health Communication

**Biography:** My name is Prince Adu Gyamfi from Ghana. I hail from a town called Adansi Dompoase in the Ashanti Region, but I was born and has lived my entire life in Kumasi, the second capital city of Ghana. I am a Christian and fellowship at the Church of Pentecost. I am very conscious about my actions, therefore, my life is guided by certain principles which include honesty, integrity, respect for all, courage, tolerance, punctuality, hard work, perseverance and excellence. I often use my leisure time to watch football matches, listen to good music and political discourse. I spent a lot of my time indoors to reflect on issues and how to become a better person every day. I hold a bachelor’s degree in Communication from Christian Service University College, Ghana. At undergraduate studies, I majored in Print Journalism to improve my writing and creative skills. My main career goals are to teach and research into the field of Communication as well as to provide both professional and leadership training for workers and students. At Illinois State University, my research interests are in Public Relations, Organizational and Health Communication. I would like to work with Dr. Lance Lippert and Dr. Pete M. Smudde because their research interests are aligned with mine. After my master’s program, I also plan to pursue a PhD program in Communication to further explore research areas such as Risk, Health and Environmental Communication.

Rachel Laing
(Fall 2017 Cohort)

**Interest Areas:** Public Relations, Social Media Influence & Analytics, Writing/Editing

**Biography:** I graduated from Manchester University with a B.S. in English Writing and minor in Business in December 2015. During my last few semesters I realized how much I enjoyed my PR classes and how well they worked with my major. After spending some time working in my hometown and searching for jobs, I decided it would be a worthwhile next step to get my Masters in Communications and see where it takes me! I’m interested in working in publishing, or doing media relations for museums, fashion brands, or nonprofits, especially for women’s rights (a pretty wide net, I know). While at MU I worked at our Writing Center, ended up co-directing our Literary Film Series, and was the co-editor of Spectrum, our literature and arts magazine. When I’m not busy I love to write, try new recipes, or hang out with a new book and some coffee. I’m excited to meet everyone and see what Illinois State has to offer!