

MCS Year Three APR Review

April 2019

The last three years have been momentous ones for Media and Communication Studies (MCS). The department has truly flourished, thanks in large part to the generosity and talent of its faculty and staff, along with the support and guidance from the Dean's Office, under Scott Casper. I wonder if our external reviewers, Lisa Parks (now a MacArthur "Genius" Fellow) and Kent Ono would recognize the department they visited in 2015.

In that short time, we added three full-time faculty members, Dr. Elizabeth Patton, assistant professor, Bryce Peake, assistant professor, and Kristen Anchor, lecturer. We lost Peake to a highly paying job in a related non-academic industry last summer and were quickly approved to conduct a national search to replace him, which led to the successful hiring of Tracy Tinga, a graduate student at Temple University who defends her dissertation next month and will join us in August. The changes mean a net increase in full-time faculty from five to eight and represents successful first steps in the action plan related to faculty outlined in the action plan agreed upon at the conclusion of the APR process in 2015.

New Faculty

Dr. Elizabeth Patton, received her Ph.D. at New York University and worked at JHU before joining us in the fall of 2015. She brings to the department expertise in methods and media history, much-needed assets. She led the development of a new methods course, MCS 399, which has now become a required core course and which, it is hoped, will lead to stronger and more consistent research papers in the MCS research capstone course, MCS 499. She has also brought new ideas to our historically-based core course, MCS 222.

Kristen Anchor got her MFA in UMBC's Intermedia Digital Arts program before joining us as a full-time Lecturer in the Fall of 2017. Since that time, she has taught much-needed lab-based courses utilizing the Adobe Suite and other production-based software. She has also managed the physical and technical space of our new Mac Lab, (Fine Arts 418). Her work in film and multidisciplinary public art performance, including work with John Waters, have bolstered the department's applied communication and digital arts profile in ways that have enriched the creative ferment of the faculty and benefitted the broad interdisciplinary education of our students.

Tracy Tinga joins us in August of this year and brings with her much-needed strengths in media and globalization, complementing the interests and work of Professors Adelman and Yang, but extending them to the continent of Africa, where much of Tinga's research is based. Her dissertation, "*From Afro-pessimism to Africa Rising, Anglo-American and Afro representation of the African Continent*", which she defends this month, promises to be the draft of important published work on the power of media discourses to shape global perceptions of a continent and a study of how activist media can intervene in that process. Her teaching expertise will help MCS to teach current courses on media theory, methods, and globalization and to offer new courses that bring the global south more fully into our students' understanding of global media flows.

As part of our plan of intentional and focused faculty growth, we have formalized and intensified our junior faculty mentoring plan. In addition to providing every new assistant professor with a research mentor, a faculty mentor, and an external eminent scholar mentor (as part of the UMBC initiative), we have also developed mentoring plans for the onboarding process for new faculty, beginning at the time of the signing of the contract of employment and extending into the beginning of the first semester of employment.

Faculty Scholarship

Our external reviewers will not find it surprising that the faculty they met in 2015 have made great strides in the last 3 years. In November of 2015, Fan Yang's book *Faked in China: Nation Branding, Counterfeit Culture, and Globalization*, was published by Indiana University Press. The publication has led to multiple invited talks all around the country and the world. In 2016, Rebecca Adelman won the prestigious 2015-16 Regents' Faculty Award for Excellence in Research. The following year, Donald Snyder won the equally prestigious Regents Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching. Adelman's second monograph, *Figuring Violence: Affective Investments in Perpetual War*, was published in 2018 by Fordham University Press, a volume that promises to cement Adelman's place among the key figures in the study of the visual culture of US militarism. In 2018, Jason Loviglio became co-editor of *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media*, published by Intellect (UK), and considered one of the premiere journals in the field of radio studies.

Professor of the Practice Bill Shewbridge has continued his leadership of Baltimore Traces, a multidisciplinary oral history video project that collects the stories of Baltimore's industrial past and post-industrial present. The project is one of the most important and successful examples of the university's commitment to deeper civic and community engagement with Baltimore. The work also provides MCS students with invaluable experience in field recording, video editing, historical research, and oral history methods. These films have been screened all over the state, nation, and beyond. Senior Lecturer Donald Snyder has become a campus leader in areas of faculty affairs and pedagogy. In 2017, he became chair of the Faculty Senate's Faculty Affairs committee, a campus leadership position of great import and impact. Just this year, he was named Deputy Director of the new Co-Lab program, which brings together interdisciplinary research and production teams of undergraduates to take on real-world problems and clients for a paid, credit-bearing summer project. Liz Patton has published an article in *Technology and Culture*, a premier journal in the field (coming out next year). And her book *Easy Living: Public Discourse and Representations of Work in the American Home* is scheduled to be published by Rutgers University Press in 2020, a year before she goes up for tenure.

In the last three years, MCS has hosted (or co-hosted) several renowned scholars for campus talks including television historians Mimi White of Northwestern and Lynne Spiegel of the University of Chicago. To mark our 10th anniversary, Jennifer Stoeber, a sound studies scholar from SUNY Binghamton, gave a 2018 keynote address on race, racism, and the politics of listening in America. We have also partnered with the Sound Studies Dresher group to welcome Jonathan Sterne from McGill and Carter Mathes from Rutgers University to present their work and to engage with related scholarship from campus faculty and staff. Our faculty are active in several research groups and activities across campus, including serving as advisors, committee members, and readers on Masters and Doctoral theses in LLC, Sociology and Anthropology, and Historical Studies.

Public-facing Scholarship/Community Engagement

The MCS faculty have done a great deal to make scholarly matters more broadly accessible to a wider reading and listening publics. Rebecca Adelman alone has written over a dozen public-facing blog posts

and editorials, including one for the Washington Post, in the last three years. Loviglio has written three pieces for Current, the newspaper for the public media industry in the United States. He is also active in Radio Preservation Task Force, an initiative of the Library of Congress that has raised the profile of radio history nationally and which has a particularly large footprint in the Baltimore/DC region. Shewbridge has shown his films in public gatherings all around Baltimore City and County. Anchor's work has been exhibited at public concert venues all over Baltimore and just last year, as part of a John Waters retrospective at the Baltimore Museum of Art. With MCS's participation in the new Public Humanities minor and the growing partnership between CAHSS and Wide Angle Youth Media, an educational non-profit on whose board Loviglio sits, and new initiatives in the Baltimore Traces initiative, we expect the next three years to see even deeper community engagement in MCS.

Faculty Service

MCS faculty have taken on leadership roles across the campus. Adelman is co-chair and founder of the CAHSS Women's Faculty Network, a group that has quickly become an important stakeholder in myriad campus issues regarding equity, campus climate, and Title IX concerns. She is also on a key subcommittee of the new Retriever Courage initiative, begun last year in response to campus concerns about Title IX compliance and campus safety and gender equity. Donald Snyder, in addition to chairing Faculty Affairs, and deputy directing Co-Lab, has been a leader in pedagogy committees, writing policy, sitting on award committees, and partnering with the Faculty Development Center on best practices in pedagogy and technology. Bill Shewbridge has longstanding partnerships with the New Media Studio, the television studio, DOIT, and LLC and serves as an important liaison to all of these units. Liz Patton is a member of the Black Faculty Committee and along with Adelman, the GWST coordinating committee. Fan Yang serves on the Global Studies and Asian Studies affiliate faculty committees. She is also a founding member and officer-at-large of the Asian and Asian American Faculty and Staff Council, and served for two years on the CHASS Inclusive Imperative Visiting Faculty Fellowship Program review committee.

Curriculum

In terms of curriculum, MCS has made significant changes. After a year-long period of analysis, discussion, and revision, the department launched a new curriculum, effective for students entering the major on or after June 1, 2018. The new curriculum does away with the "depth-of-field" requirement of an additional major, minor, or certificate. We have found that many students have chosen to pursue an additional major, minor, or certificate despite no longer being required to do so. We encourage this path in advising.

It added two required core classes, MCS 144, "Professional Communication and Development" and MCS 399, "Methods in Media and Communication Studies." MCS 144 provides students with the skills necessary to apply for jobs and internships and to communicate in a variety of professional contexts and across a variety of platforms and idioms. We have already seen positive results from students who have taken this course early in their college careers. MCS 399 provides an introduction to a variety of mostly qualitative methods common in scholarship in the field. The course has been designed to better prepare students for the independent research work required in the senior research capstone, MCS 499. The course also provides students with valuable insights and practice in research methods highly prized in 21st careers in media and communication. The course is currently being taught for only the second time and early results are very promising. Other changes to the curriculum include reducing the number of required electives from 6 to 4, keeping the total credit requirement at 37.

We also added the following electives, most of which were designed to address the APR's call, echoed by students, for more applied communication courses. MCS 366, "Podcasting," teaches the fundamentals of audio recording, editing, interviewing, and storytelling. MCS 388, "Modern Public Relations" uses real-world case studies and student project to immerse students in the work and ethics of the public relations field. MCS 405, "Video Ethnography," teaches the principles of documentary filmmaking and field recording. MCS 484, "Production Fellows," is a production-based course for advanced projects in film and video. We have also added sections of MCS 377, "Desktop Publishing and the Web," and MCS 395, Television Production I.

Space

Our physical space has changed dramatically as well. At the time of our APR visit, MCS was crammed into four offices on a walkway between two sections of Sherman Hall. In the Fall of 2015, we moved into renovated office space in the Fine Arts building, with 6 faculty offices, one full-time staff office, a chair's office, a shared seminar room, a Mac lab, and space for supplies and part-time faculty and staff. With the addition of Tracy Tinga, we have been obliged to take office space from our neighbors Gender and Women's and Sexuality Studies. They are facing an impending space crunch of their own and we find ourselves facing a predictable and regrettable situation where part-time adjunct faculty and staff, and perhaps eventually, full-time faculty will be housed in non-adjacent office space.

Enrollment.

Recently MCS experienced a dip in enrollments, from 303 total students in 2015-2016 to 269 and 267 the following Academic Years respectively. This dip is also reflected in our degrees awarded numbers. In 2015-2016, MCS awarded 101 degrees; the following year, that number was down to 78. In 2017-2018, the most recent year for which we have information, the number had rebounded a bit to 83, still down almost 20% from the 2015-2016, which was an all-time high for the program. The numbers have stabilized and I anticipate that in 2018-2019 will graduate between 80 and 90 students. We see this relatively flat enrollment as part of larger trends in the College and in humanities majors nation-wide. And in that context, our numbers seem quite healthy. The decline in enrollments should be considered within a wider trend in CAHSS and in humanities majors across the nation. That said, we have been proactive in addressing this situation, through collaborations with the Admissions Office and in the creation of popular applied communication electives which have been a constant feature of student demand. We have also begun the process of building articulation agreements with Maryland community colleges, to define clear pathways for transfer students to MCS and to timely graduation.

The demographic diversity in our enrollments continue more or less unchanged. Women and minorities are overrepresented in MCS compared to their numbers in the University. This diversity is matched in our faculty and staff. Our tenured/tenure track staff will be with the arrival of Tracy Tinga in August, 80% women; 60% people of color, and 40% Black/African-American and 40% immigrants. Our only full-time staff person is a woman of color and an immigrant.

Student Success

Advising

In 2017, in response to faculty concerns about the amount of time spent advising students, we initiated several improvements to our advising system, adding group advising sessions for students with fewer than 60 credits, creating a new advising form to expedite advising sessions and teach students to take accountability for their own progress through the major and their General Education requirements. We have also begun special advising sessions for graduating seniors and for student athletes. Finally, we have implemented Google Forms and Google Calendars to streamline student requests for permission-only courses and for advising appointments. The results have been a palpable sense of relief among faculty and fewer student advising snafus, as students are now more informed about their own academic trajectories.

We owe a good deal of our success in meeting the advising challenge to our full-time staff, first Abigail Granger and then Samirah Hassan. In 2017, Granger, completed her Master's thesis in Organization Psychology and won the Karen L. Wensch Award for outstanding performance for a non-exempt staff person.

Mentoring

As MCS has grown in faculty, and our advising process has become more efficient and less onerous, our capacity to mentor students in individual research projects has increased. The last several years have seen an increase in MCS winners of the Undergraduate Research Award and URCAD presenters. Just last semester, Donald Snyder shepherded 9 MCS students through the process of applying for and presenting at the Mid-Atlantic Popular and American Culture Association conference in Baltimore, MD. Students presented alongside graduate students and professors on research conducted in their capstone course.

After Graduation

MCS alumni/ae have made great strides in recent years on the job market and graduate programs. They are instructional designers, producers and writers in public and commercial radio and television in Maryland, California, and North Carolina. They are filmmakers and writers and actors in Hollywood and New York City. They are managing social media accounts for regional and national non-profits. They are educators in the public schools. And they work in public relations, advertising, marketing, and product development for small shops in Towson, national agencies in New York and Portland Oregon. They manage communications in government agencies in Annapolis, Capitol Hill, and in Baltimore. They are communication associates at research firms; consultants at national recruitment agencies; operation managers at Clear Channel Communications; admissions counselors at area universities; and graduate students in Masters programs in applied communications programs.

To provide a sense of the myriad creative ways our alumni/ae have applied their grounding in MCS to a range of endeavors, I offer three examples: Kacie Smith, '08, one of our first four MCS graduates, is a doctoral student at Cornell University's Psychology program and co-author of "Cryptic Emotions and the Emergence of a Metatheory of Mind in Popular Filmmaking" in *Cognitive Science*, a prestigious peer-reviewed journal. Ela Locke, '12 travels the world in her new position at Facebook, in product data operations. And Robbin Lee, '15 is deputy director of Baltimore Homecoming, a non-profit startup that brings together event-planning, tourism, civic engagement, and economic development. We have also noticed a virtuous cycle in which our alumni/ae are seeking out and hiring our current students for internships and even entry-level full-time jobs.

Alumni Relations

In 2017-2018, MCS celebrated our 10th anniversary, with two well-attended events. A scholarly campus-wide talk by Jennifer Stoeber, previously mentioned and very well-attended alumni panel. The panelists represented a cross section of the MCS alumni/ae body, from class of 2009 to class of 2017. They represented a diversity of professional fields and industries and spoke to a large crowd of fellow alumni/ae, current students, faculty, and staff and other members of the campus community.

In 2018, we launched our first newsletter aimed at alumni, current students and the broader campus community, it has also been useful resource for showing to prospective students and their families who are curious about the major. The alumni notes sections provides an impressive roster of the professional accomplishments of our alumni and helps to keep them connected to one another. Under Prof Anchor's guidance, the production of the newsletter provides a promising opportunity for real-world production experience for our majors. We hope these initiatives will help to forge stronger community ties among the alumni and between alumni and our current students. While we have not undertaken a concerted fund-raising effort among alumni/ae, we do see these efforts at strengthening our ties to them as an important pre-condition for such an effort.