

## Diversity Award Nomination: Academic Unit, Department of Communications.

The Department of Communications is the only UNA academic department with both a diversity plan posted on the department website and a department competency specifically addressing the awareness and importance of diversity. It is a perspective we have embraced as we have reshaped our offerings and educational expectations. The importance of recognizing diversity is contained in the syllabus of nearly every class. We don't have a perfect record in promoting diversity and inclusiveness. But, for the past five years, this has been a priority and will stay a priority. Since our efforts began in 2009, **we have hosted 10 major speaker presentations dealing with diversity, civility and First Amendment rights** as evening events—outside of regular class times, with an average student and community attendance of more than 100 persons for each event. As part of the department's efforts to realign its curriculum, in Spring 2011, the department adopted a diversity statement that established a diversity perspective and loosely created department diversity goals. Even before this diversity statement, during the 2009 – 2010 academic year, the department realigned its curriculum with the student learning outcomes of the Accrediting Council for Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC). This led us to examine classes, student assignments and educational goals. From our self-reflection and the accrediting council, we have established **12 COMpetencies** as learning outcomes for students of our program. Four of these *COMpetencies* ask that students take a broader view of the world—the U.S. world and the global world—and embrace a bigger view of people, places and human rights. We proudly display these objectives on our department's website and throughout our building. These efforts by the Department of Communications to recognize and promote diversity and diversity awareness on the UNA campus enhance retention of students by helping to create a more inclusive, safer environment for all students. We are also preparing these students for the modern world where they will live, work and conduct their affairs.

The department's educational goal is to help individuals and institutions serve the community through developing effective presentation and interaction, skills through critical thinking, and applied communication skills that lead to thoughtful decision-making about information content and methods of dissemination. A responsible communicator should be a champion of and for diverse groups in society. The challenge is to ensure that students' educational experiences make them aware of differences that exist in society—differences that reflect a diverse society and differences that exist due to financial, technological and cultural factors as well as personal characteristics and life situations. The Department of Communications has aggressively pursued efforts to positively influence not only students in the major but any student enrolled in a service course—such as public speaking, and indirectly, we hope to impact students who write for student media or go on to work in media careers. The department follows the diversity objectives outlined by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. The department chair is the recipient of a competitively selected Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) Journalism Leadership in Diversity Fellowship (JLID).

The department has maintained a successful record of employing **faculty and staff from diverse cultural backgrounds** and experiences. Our newest colleague, a U.S. born citizen, is of Egyptian ancestry and has spent the past five years teaching and researching in the Middle East. Communications faculty have lived and worked in or visited more than 40 countries, literally from A—Albania to Z—Zimbabwe. Among the faculty is a two-time Fulbright Teaching and Research award winner; his first Fulbright took place in Zambia, in Sub-Saharan Africa. His second Fulbright was in Montenegro, just a few years after the Balkan atrocities. The faculty reflects gender and cultural diversity, currently representing African-American, Asian, Caucasian, and Native American heritage. Women represent over 60 percent of the Department's full-time faculty and staff. Of our adjunct faculty for the 2013-2014 academic year, 5 of 8 offer gender diversity, two of whom are women of color. We seek to add diversity to our faculty when there are full-time openings or part-time openings. This spring we interviewed two faculty candidates who offered ethnic diversity.

Efforts to recognize and promote diversity and diversity awareness should naturally exist—but in practice they often do not. There is sometimes a lack of discussion or shared vision as to what diversity means and how awareness can be promoted. One measure of diversity is establishing and supporting fundamental freedoms for all people. We recognize the five freedoms identified in the First Amendment as fundamental societal freedoms. The department received a \$5,000 grant from the *One For All Foundation* for the 2010 – 2011 academic year and a second grant for the 2013-2014 academic year in support of First Amendment education. The UNA Board of Trustees passed a resolution and the Mayor and City Council of Florence issued a proclamation in 2011 in support of April as **First Amendment Awareness Month**. Our building presents the First Amendment in wall displays and classes emphasize the freedoms of the First Amendment, including our public speaking class.

We have a consistent record in promoting diversity. In 2010 we installed a permanent First Amendment display in our building. We've hosted other displays in the GUC. Our speakers have stressed the importance of civility, diversity in society, recognition of First Amendment rights and the responsibility of the press to insure transparency in society. A Liberty Tree has been planted as a permanent symbol of First Amendment rights. Our efforts have not stopped with the UNA campus. We have sponsored art workshops for students from Florence, Hibbett, Mars Hill, Muscle Shoals, Sheffield and Tusculumbia middle-schools. Students used their artistic creativity to represent the First Amendment freedoms. An art exhibit emerged; the exhibition took place in the Tennessee Valley Museum of Art, over a three-week period, and for three weeks on the UNA campus.

First Amendment awareness continued in the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 academic years with speakers, screenings and campus events. Hank Klibanoff, author of *The Race Beat*, came to campus as a distinguished lecturer in April 2012. With student reader volunteers from our concentration in theatre, the department co-sponsored a reading of the play "The Laramie Project" in April 2012 that focused on the death of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard and the subjects of homosexuality and individual freedom. For the 2012-2013 academic year, we received two First Amendment education grants from the Alabama Press Association Foundation to support these activities.

Projects funded by the 2013-2014 grant included a First Amendment Tree display at the Tennessee Valley Art Association in December. In April, we have scheduled Dr. Mohamad Elmasry who will speak about his personal experience of the Arab Spring while living in Cairo, Egypt, at that time. Other activities include screening the critically-acclaimed documentary film *Shadows of Liberty* which examines how mega-corporations influence news content, screenings of four other relevant films, and an "Eat Free or Live Free" lunch where participating students will be given a free lunch in exchange for giving up their First Amendment rights.

Each year that we have recognized the importance of the First Amendment, we have worked to reach the entire UNA campus community and our surrounding Shoals community. We recognize that it is not enough to hold insular importance of the First Amendment and the five distinct freedoms it guarantees. Beginning in Fall 2010, we added First Amendment instruction to all sections of our COM 201 Fundamentals of Speech course, which is a General Education course required of all UNA students. Students sometimes fear speaking in public but we remind them that the First Amendment guarantees freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom to assemble and freedom to petition government for redress of grievances. All students, in every class in the Department of Communications, receive a small card with the 45 words of the First Amendment. Faculty either require students to at least know the five freedoms—or, in most cases—require that the students know the 45 words of the amendment.

In 2009 – 2010, the department hosted its first **visiting international journalist**, supported by the Voice of America. We have hosted a journalist each academic year, with two journalists on campus for the 2012 – 2013 academic year. Four journalists have come from Serbia and one from Macedonia. We have helped the journalists "plug in" to our community where they have been enriching resources to our students and community members.

The department hosted **a group of Serbian students** who traveled to the U.S. for an introduction to U.S. media and student media. The U.S. Embassy in Belgrade, Serbia organized the program. Eight journalists and a representative from the Embassy visited the UNA campus for five days in Spring 2012. The event included discussions and social interactions with UNA students and faculty.

Because the United States protects our speech and press rights with the First Amendment, Americans often fail to recognize May 3, **World Press Freedom Day**. May 3, 2014, will be our fourth consecutive year to celebrate World Press Freedom Day.

We have worked hard to ensure that many **courses include a diversity focused** lecture, discussion or assignment. Examples:

- COM 201 Fundamentals of Speech addresses cultural and diversity issues in discussing audience analysis.
- COM 205 Communication in a Global Age, offered as a General Education course and required of all Communications majors, places U.S. Media in a global perspective.
- COM 220 Basic Reporting uses the book *The Race Beat* in all sections to help students understand civil rights and the struggles reporters faced when covering the story in the 1960s.
- COM 263 Media and Modern Mythology examines the role of mythology on a global scale.
- COM 306 Interpersonal Communication frequently discusses the cultural impact on communication.
- COM 314 Communication Theory and the Public Interest includes an extensive unit on socialization and stereotypes including racial, geographical, professional, gender, religious and sexual preference, how media content influences perceptions, attitudes and behaviors on a cultural level, and the role of digital technology in developing countries, in political change, and in self-actualization among peoples who had limited opportunities for information/education.
- COM 374 Public Relations Cases incorporates international and intercultural case studies.
- COM 386 Gender Communication (also offered as WS 386 in Women's Studies) focuses on helping students understand gender roles in the communication process. For some students, this means overcoming gender stereotypes.
- COM 400W Communication Law and Ethics examines free speech and diversity issues relative to defamation, broadcast regulation, and the role of television news media during the civil rights movement.
- COM 455 Media History includes a specific look at the Black Press and Hispanic Press, as well as the importance of the First Amendment in establishing media freedoms.
- COM 464 Global Media Systems examines the role of media around the world, including in authoritarian countries, where there is little or no press freedom.
- COM 470 Media Management and Diversity includes discussion of the importance of multiple audience groups who are served by media and the need to ensure that the newsroom reflects the composition of the community.

For the past three years, the department has recognized **Black History Month** with documentary screenings that highlight the importance of the First Amendment in protecting rights. In 2012, we screened “The Black Press: Soldiers without Swords” and in 2013, we screened “Freedom Riders.” This year’s celebration expanded as we presented a guest speaker on the role of Black radio in the Civil Rights movement in Birmingham in addition to two screenings of movies based on books by Ernest Gaines. At one of these screenings attendees were confronted with signs like those prevalent during the time of segregation designating “Black Only” or “White Only” facilities to emphasize the points being made in the movie. All of these events were open to the UNA campus and the Shoals community. We estimate that at least 30 people attended the events who were from outside our department and courses.

The department established **two scholarships in support of diversity**, a Minority Scholarship and the Bobbie Hurt Scholarship (for a female recipient), both were created in 2011.

The **Parker-Qualls Distinguished Lecturer in Communications** series has given us the opportunity to bring a number of notable visitors to the UNA campus to meet with classes and offer presentations open to the campus and the community at large. In April 2012, James Policinski, the director of the First Amendment Center in Nashville, TN, whose presentations stressed the importance of the First Amendment as a protection of civil liberties. In April 2013, Kenneth S. Boone, who spent 17 weeks in Bosnia between 2000-2003 working to help create an independent free press in that country, was the guest lecturer. In November 2013, we hosted H. Brandt Ayers, publisher of *The Anniston Star*, known for taking strong editorial stances against social injustices, most famously for its opposition to segregation during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Under Ayers' leadership, *The Anniston Star* has twice been recognized by *Time* magazine as one of the “best small newspapers in the United States.”

The department hosted Dr. Charles Davis, in Fall 2012, as a distinguished lecturer on the **Freedom of Information Act**. Dr. Davis noted that sunlight—transparency and openness in decision making and dealing with others—is a powerful disinfectant to potential abuse of power or abuse of rights.

Dr. Pat Sanders organized a **student field trip to the Freedom Forum/First Amendment Center** in Nashville, TN, in Spring 2012, leading student Amber Rosado to make a contact at the center and to later be selected as a Diversity Media Fellowship Recipient, where she initially interned for a media company in Pennsylvania and was ultimately hired in a full-time position by the firm. Amber also received our first Minority Student Scholarship.

Female students and students of color have been selected to serve as **student interns** at the annual conference of the **National Association of Television Program Executives annual conference** each year since 2009. It’s notable that UNA has an opportunity to place students in this internship position, instead of being edged out by larger schools.

Our student public relations RSO, Public Relations Individuals Dedicated to Excellence (PRIDE), began the **Cinderella Project** in 2011. Professor Lisa Darnell conceived the idea, and worked with PRIDE members and alums to coordinate the first event. A counselor or a teacher refers girls who might not attend their prom because they cannot afford a dress to the Cinderella Project. Cherry Tree Lane, a local dress shop, donated the majority of the dresses. The remainder of the dresses came from an agreement with Greek Life to allow community service hours/points for donating dresses and from individuals contacted by Cinderella Project committee members. In all cases, these high school students are economically disadvantaged. In many cases they reflect culturally diverse groups in our community. This positive interaction with a group of UNA students may serve to encourage these students to consider attending college, and enhance recruitment for UNA specifically.

Professor Jason Flynn, the faculty member in the **Film and Digital Media Production (F&DMP)** concentration has actively recruited students who work with video production projects for community groups that emphasize diversity or diverse points of view. Jason draws as many students into the projects as possible, not just to improve their production skills, but to allow the students to learn about the organizations and their projects. We estimate that more than 50 students have participated in these projects. In other cases, he has single-handedly completed projects for these groups when students were not available because of his personal commitment to promoting diverse points of view. Links to more than a dozen events that have been recorded and shared to tell the story of various groups and their projects are shown on the attached support page.

Two faculty, Dr. Beth Garfrerick and Dr. Pat Sanders led more than a dozen students on a **Study Abroad trip to China** in May 2013, where they studied a multidisciplinary introduction to culture, customs, public relations, and communications practices in China. Dr. Garfrerick and three of the Communications students who participated in the trip to China last year will be joined by two additional Communications students on another study abroad experience to China in May 2014.

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Supporting material submitted on a flash drive.