

SLU COMM DEPT

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SLUComm

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**SLU
COMM
DEPT**



letter from THE CHAIR



DAN KOZLOWSKI

Welcome to our Spring 2023 Communication Department newsletter! We hope you enjoy it!

Inside you'll find spotlights of three awesome alums. We're proud of our students and what they accomplish, and we're grateful they chose our program to earn their master's degree. You can also read about Dr. Hillary Ash, Dr. Charnell Peters and Dr. Rudy Pett, three new awesome faculty members who joined us this year.

Our program continues to thrive. We strive to provide students opportunities for professional development as communication scholars and practitioners, drawing on SLU's Jesuit values. We attract students from a wide range of backgrounds and with a wide range of interests, and we encourage students in their time here to tailor the program in ways that fit their individual goals.

We always love to hear from our former students. Shoot us an email to let us know about your milestones and achievements!

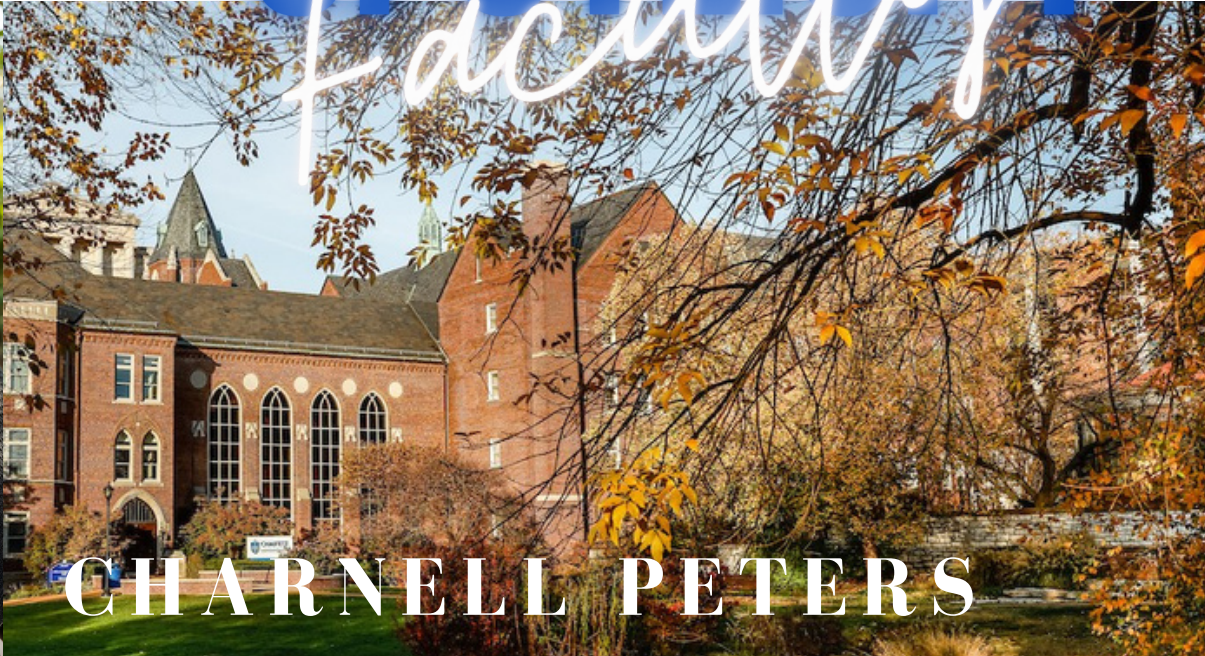
Take care and keep being awesome.

Dan





SPOTLIGHT *Faculty*



CHARNELL PETERS

Introducing Dr. Charnell Peters

“

*Give
yourself
permission
to change
your mind.
That's what
learning is
about.”*

Journey to SLU as a Communication Professor

As soon as I started taking communication classes, I was hooked! The discipline gave me tools to become an informed consumer of media, engage in healthier communication, and create purposeful messages in many forms. When I decided to go to graduate school, communication was the most interesting area, and eventually, I decided to stick with it. I would not have made it here without colleagues and the community who invested in me and supported me.

Why SLU?

The faculty here have a great reputation, and I've been inspired by a lot of their work. During my visit, I found SLU to be a welcoming place, so it was an easy choice. I'm also grateful to be back in the Midwest.

Outside of SLU

I'm an on-again-off-again writer who mainly works in poetry. I am also a sucker for a good coffee shop.

What advice do you have for graduate students studying Communication?

There's a lot of advice about time management, professional development, and career preparation out there. So, I'll keep it simple and say: don't be afraid to change. Don't be afraid to change research areas or study strategies or coping mechanisms or hobbies or aspirations or yourself. Give yourself permission to change your mind. That's what learning is about.



SPOTLIGHT *Faculty*



Introducing Dr. Hillary Ash

Journey to SLU as a Communication Professor

I got my MA degree in English from Kent State University in Ohio. I initially focused on literature, but because of the nature of the job market and where my interests were, I decided that rather than continue on to a Ph.D. in English literature, I would make the shift to rhetoric, as rhetoric is a very interdisciplinary field. Through mentoring, I decided to pursue a Ph.D. at the University of Pittsburgh, where I ended up in a Communication Department that focused on rhetoric. I got my degree in 2020 right as the pandemic hit. I spent some time there waiting out the pandemic and ended up applying to SLU. The new Oral and Visual Communication Core requirement really speaks to my own background and training as someone who studies rhetoric, has an interest in, and has published in visual rhetoric.

Why SLU?

I was drawn to SLU because it was a social justice-oriented university. SLU is involved in community outreach and I like the fact that service learning is such a huge component of a lot of classes. SLU not only preaches but actually gives back to the community which is incredibly important to me. We often think of the university as being an ivory tower; it takes from the community, but it doesn't always give back to the community. That did not seem to be the case for SLU when considering coming to SLU. The people at SLU live what is identified in their mission and I liked them a lot. While I am not a Catholic or particularly religious myself, a lot of my work has to do with social justice and health disparities, so it seemed like a really great fit for me across the board.

Outside of SLU

I'm a homebody. I have several animals: two dogs, and three cats. So, they keep me pretty busy. I like watching TV and am a bit of a TV buff. I also like sewing and quilting which is my sort of latest hobby; I'm kind of into the textile arts.

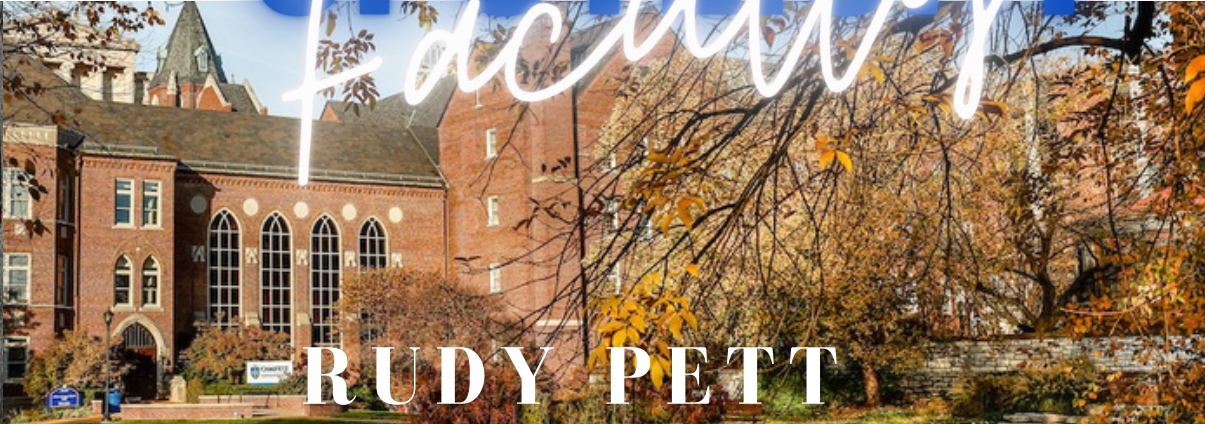
What advice do you have for graduate students studying Communication?

As you're thinking about advisors and committees, it is not only important to find someone who studies what it is that you do, but also to have someone mentor you who gets your writing style and whose approach to writing is accessible to you. One of the greatest things that ever happened to me in graduate school was having somebody sit down and teach her method of writing. Obviously, it didn't work for everyone, but it clicked for me and drastically changed and improved how I wrote. So I would advise graduate students to find that person for them because it's a huge asset. And yeah, never be afraid to ask for help.

“
*Find a
mentor who
gets your
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and whose
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SPOTLIGHT *Faculty*



RUDY PETT

Introducing Dr. Rudy Pett

Journey to SLU as a Communication Professor

That journey really started on my first day of class as a brand-new undergraduate student. The first class I ever walked into as a college student was an interpersonal communication class (and I think I signed up for that class just for scheduling reasons, honestly). But...I became fascinated by the aspects (and implications) of human communication introduced to me by that class. Fast forward 1-2 years and I found myself at a “crossroads” where I had to decide what major I wanted to pursue. I was stuck between majoring in education or majoring in communication. It was at that point that my faculty mentor explained to me the prospect of teaching...communication! The thought had never crossed my mind before then, but I felt so excited thinking about that prospect. I fell in love with that idea and the career goal of being a professor in Communication. So, this career was honestly a perfect combination of two things I came to love during my time as an undergraduate (teaching + communication). And I consider myself very fortunate to have this type of job that I love so much.

Why SLU?

I was really impressed by the CMM department, as well as its current faculty and leadership. I saw important, unique, and relatable values in SLU’s guiding mission, as well as how the work of the department/college actively feeds into that mission. The location of St. Louis was also appealing (along with SLU having a beautiful campus). I felt like SLU offered the support and opportunities to do what I most wanted to do in my career.

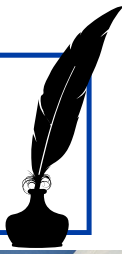
Outside of SLU

Outside of work, most of my life is centered around my family (my wife and I have two boys, who are 4 and 6 years old). Right now, we often find ourselves spending our time together exploring St. Louis, trying new restaurants, and settling into our new home/life/routine here in the STL area (which has been exciting and challenging at the same time).

What advice do you have for graduate students studying Communication?

FIRST, in your time as a graduate student, always maintain a clear sense of your purpose for pursuing your graduate degree(s). It is okay if that purpose changes over time, but without knowing why you’re doing what you’re doing, it is very easy for your graduate studies to lose meaning (and for you to lose motivation). SECOND, keep an eye on the practical implications of what you are teaching, researching, and studying. That is to say, keep asking yourself how and why might this “stuff” matter to people outside of your class, your graduate program, or SLU. How might this reading/research/knowledge be used to help improve people’s lives, relationships, and their organizations/communities?

“*Always maintain a clear sense of your purpose for pursuing your graduate degree(s).*”



SPOTLIGHT

Alumni



SHELBY (ZIMA) SIMPSON

Tell us a little bit about yourself!

I live in Oak Park, and I grew up near Chicago so I'm glad to be back home now. I am married and have a one-year-old puppy, so spending time with them is super important to me. I like to read historical fiction and other genres for fun. I go to a boxing gym nearby and I also like to cook.

Tell us about your career now.

I just graduated with a Master's in Nursing from Rush University in Chicago and passed my NCLEX, which is a nursing certification for Illinois. I also passed my Clinical Nurse Leader Exams. My career will be working as a primary RN for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. All my residents are independent adults; they are verbal and they go to work every day. In my work, I assess any new things that happen to them. For example, if they have any new medications that they are prescribed, provide all the patient education about why they are on that medication and how to take it. I coordinate with the doctors. For example, if a person has this skin issue, I connect them to this doctor. I'm sort of a go-between for them and other providers, but I'm the primary medical staff on site for these adults, so any acute things that happen, I'm the one to assess and diagnose.

How has your Communication Graduate degree been useful at your current job?

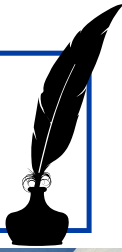
Communication and nursing go hand in hand. You can't be a good nurse without good communication and that's been so true throughout my program. In every course in some aspect, we discuss communication; for example, communication with people who are in a psyche unit or with new parents and the intricacies surrounding such interactions. The basic communication skills and processes that we talked about in some of the nursing courses seemed so elementary and second nature to me. However, for people who hadn't studied communication, it was sort of revolutionary to them.

What was your favorite part of the Communication Graduate program?

My favorite part was the relationships that I built with my cohort. Some of us still have group chats and we connect regularly. It was very important to build those friendships with your cohort because helped to get through the program and make lifelong friends. It is also cool to see where everyone has gone.

What advice would you give to current students in the program?

I would like to say two things. One, build relationships with your cohort and rely on them. If anybody knows how you are feeling, it's them. Use them as a support system, it's very important. Also, just breathe and relax. Especially in the first year, it seems daunting to have so many papers. Later, you'll have a thesis or the final project. Know you're going to be totally fine. Just know that you belong there, breathe and it'll be all good. I think that there is so much anxiety about the future but just focus on the things that you are going to do in the next week. Remind yourself, "I'm going to do them well, and I deserve to be here and it's all good."



SPOTLIGHT

Alumni

BRYAN ABENDSCHEIN

Tell us a little bit about yourself!

I'm a huge Saint Louis Blues hockey fan. I also like being outside in nature doing nature photography, gardening or just being outside. So living in Michigan's been really great because it's just such a beautiful outside state.

Tell us about your career now.

My current work is really divided between two big things: my teaching and my research.

At Western Michigan University, I am the Basic Course Director. In that role, I get to work with all our graduate teaching assistants. It's a lot of mentorships with master's students as they start teaching. They get excited about teaching, often for the very first time. So that's a big part of my role of teaching, not just the instruction element in the classroom, but also with the graduate teaching assistants. The other part of my job is research. I'm working with a group that's across different universities around the world called the Communication and Social Robotics Labs. We're interested in how communication and social robotics intersect. I'm working on sending robot cats into the homes of individuals who've had a brain injury and seeing how that robot might facilitate interaction within a family, how people might interact with that robot over time, and what sort of things the robot might do for the family. The other area that I'm looking at is how robots can help with patient interaction. I think there's something to be said about socially supportive contact that robots can offer and I want to learn a little bit more about that.

How has your Communication Graduate degree been useful at your current job?

I think that my Master's degree at SLU absolutely prepared me for my Ph.D. at the University of Illinois. I was less intimidated than some of my peers because I had been so well prepared at school and I had been exposed to different ideas, different methodologies, and different paradigms. In addition, I think the unique element of getting a Master's at Saint Louis University is that I think it helped to change my view of the world, which came from the Jesuit approach to education. Education is so powerful and can change people and communities. That really inspired me. I was also absolutely thrilled and super excited to go to SLU because I had a meeting with Dr. April Trees and I was like, "This person is whom I want to study with!"

What was your favorite part of the Communication Graduate program?

My favorite part of the program was the people. What an amazing group of folks is at SLU! I miss them. I really enjoyed working with the faculty and getting to know them. I look back on them as my mentors and the people I hold in high esteem and want to be like in research, teaching, and service. The other thing I think was really a high watermark for me was my cohort when I started. I still have very close friends. The department really helped to facilitate that with events where we would have the opportunity to hang out and get to know each other. The department was not cutthroat. It was very much collegial and that flowed from the faculty to the graduate students. So, my cohort was just awesome, and I have had friendships that have lasted years.

What advice would you give to current students in the program?

I think it's appropriate to write down your career goals in pencil because they're going to change and that's okay. You're going to find other things that are exciting to you, and you should feel free and encouraged to pursue those. The thing that you want to chase after, you should do that. Also, you might be trying to figure out how you're likely going to use things in your life that you're learning right now as a graduate student. You maybe think they're not important right now or they're not of interest to you, but do your best to soak up everything you can. And then finally, don't neglect or forget your relationships. It is easy to think it's just two years or I need to study for this exam, or I need to work on this paper and yes, you do. You need to do all of those things. But the relationships are going to be there after you're done with your Master's program and they're probably the most important thing even though the work-life balance is tough for a graduate student.



SPOTLIGHT

Alumni



ELMINA TASIC

Tell us a little bit about yourself!

I graduated from SLU Communication undergrad in December 2016 with a focus on Public Relations and Advertising. I also studied in the Communication Department at SLU for my MA. I graduated in May 2019. I grew up in Saint Louis, but I was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina. My family moved to Saint Louis in 1998. I moved with my parents and sister. We also have two female cats. I like spending time outdoors, going on a hike, and traveling. I try to go visit a new place each year. I also spend time with those I find dear, loved ones, family, friends, and people that I just love catching up with.

Tell us about your career now.

Currently, I am a Senior Analyst at the Federal Reserve Bank of Saint Louis. I work on an internal operations team and my role has a lot to do with HR. I coordinate the open positions that we have and am a direct liaison between the hiring manager and the local people in our HR office. I don't make any hiring decisions. I make sure all the listings are posted online and the positions are filled as soon as possible. I also continue to teach Public Speaking as an adjunct in the Communication Department at SLU. I also do facilitation of the outward mindset at the Arbinger Institute and co-lead one of the strategic tactics for diversity, equity, and inclusion and increasing dialogue on the topic for my area.

How has your Communication Graduate degree been useful at your current job?

Communication is applied every day in my role. I have a lot of virtual video meetings, so I practice a lot of non-verbal communication along with speaking. I can read the non-verbal communication of my colleagues and my clients and have more insight into what they are thinking on different topics or projects. I also occasionally work with some colleagues on developing their public speaking skills. As a part of my role, I do a lot of research when starting a new project. We did plenty of research in the graduate program, which comes in handy. A lot of my role has to do with relationship management, staying in touch with my colleagues and clients, and making sure we are all on the same page, which involves a lot of communication skills too.

What was your favorite part of the Communication Graduate program?

My favorite part was learning all the fun and cool things that I got to do in the program but also making connections with my cohort and the cohort before ours. Those connections are the ones I feel like you'll stay in touch with for the rest of your life whether you have come close or talked from time to time because you never know where your life takes you or will take you. Just being able to meet people that were different from me and able to work with them and think together was awesome. I also enjoyed working with faculties that had expertise in different areas because I grew a lot from them, and it opened my mind to different career paths that I could take.

What advice would you give to current students in the program?

I would tell them to work hard. I know it's a lot of hard work and you do a lot of writing and reading but ultimately it will pay off. There is a light at the end of the tunnel and don't be so focused on whether you want to do a project or thesis. It's okay if you change your mind during your second semester. I changed mine. I thought I was going to do an applied project and I ended up doing a thesis although I went into the program thinking there is no way I will do a thesis! Just be open-minded but also take it day by day. Don't feel you must have all the answers today on what you want to do after grad school. Don't forget to have fun and get to know each other.

KNOW SOMEONE WHO WOULD BE A GOOD MATCH FOR OUR MA PROGRAM?

Our MA program is designed to provide a high-quality graduate education for individuals interested in becoming communication professionals, scholars, leaders, and activists through advanced knowledge of research, theory and practice. Our flexible program provides students opportunities for professional development as communication scholars and practitioners, drawing on SLU's Jesuit values. We encourage students to explore the role of communication in creating a more just society through their work as communication specialists.

If you aim to enhance your expertise as a scholar or communication specialist in the spirit of social justice, integrity, and ethics, SLU's MA program in Communication is for you. Coursework options allow students to deepen their understanding of communication theory and research within a variety of areas, including:

- Organizational Communication
- Intercultural Communication
- Interpersonal Communication
- Rhetoric and Public Dialogue
- Media Studies
- Strategic Communication
- Health Communication
- Social Justice Communication

Did you know?

Our MA program in Communication has three options for degree completion.

- **Applied Project** - Students with a professional focus engage in an in-depth application of communication theory and research in a professional setting. Students design a project applying knowledge and skills developed during graduate study to produce a professional project on behalf of an organization or field of practice.
- **Comprehensive Exam** - Students synthesize knowledge from across their coursework, with a focus on their area of specialization. Students have additional coursework opportunities that culminate in an exam demonstrating their knowledge.
- **Thesis** - Students create new knowledge in their area of specialization. Informed by research and theory, students conduct a study examining an issue of importance to them in the field of Communication.

Tuition assistance is available!

We offer **graduate assistantships** that provide students with a monthly stipend, health insurance, and free tuition. We offer teaching, research and professional assistantships. For working professionals, employers sometimes offer tuition remission to employees interested in continuing their education. Ask your employer for details! For those who do not qualify for graduate assistantships or employer support, our Department offers a limited number of tuition hours covered by our **Access Scholarship** to support students who would not otherwise be able to cover the cost of tuition.

Visit our website at tinyurl.com/slucomm to learn more or contact Jennifer Ohs, Graduate Program Coordinator at jennifer.ohs@slu.edu.



AWESOME 1ST YEAR STUDENTS



Got Internships?

Saint Louis University students studying Communication are eager for real-world experience. We offer students course credit for interning with organizations in a wide range of industries that offer them hands-on experience. Internships may be any semester, including the summer, and students average 10-15 hours of work per week. Employers report that they benefit from our students' communication skills and ability to apply the knowledge they learn in class to their work. If you have internships to offer or would like more information, please contact Professor Keli Jackson at keli.jackson@slu.edu.

