

CONVERSATIONS

A publication for College of Communication alumni



Animator Philo Barnhart and Professor Paul Booth at the seventh annual DePaul Pop Culture Conference, "A Celebration of Disney." See page 8.



Fall 2019

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THE ETHICAL PURSUIT OF

EXCELLENCE

The Center for Journalism Integrity and Excellence prepares students for the real world of journalism



Don Moseley, the co-director of the Center for Journalism Integrity and Excellence

“They come into class wanting to give voice to the voiceless. That’s pretty evident in all the story pitches they do.”

—Don Moseley

Everybody talks about the news, but nobody does anything about it.

While news may not be quite as universal as the weather, it certainly is on everyone’s minds—and not always in a flattering light.

In 2015, when talk of broadening the existing DePaul Documentary Project to become a center within the college’s journalism program first began, “fake news was not really a term in the lexicon,” says veteran journalist Carol Marin. Yet the college and former DePaul President and current Chancellor the Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, C.M., wanted to do something to fortify ethical journalism and burnish its reputation among an increasingly skeptical public.

Fr. Holtschneider said that he wanted students to know “that giving squabbling parties equal time is not the same as giving the public the truth.” With this principle in mind, the Center for Journalism Integrity and Excellence (CJIE) emerged the following year with Marin and longtime television news producer Don Moseley, who helmed the Documentary Project, as its co-directors. It has accomplished a lot in the span of only three academic years.

A THIRST FOR REPORTING

Twenty-four students per year rotate through CJIE’s two-quarter intensive course. Marin and Moseley interview candidates suggested by other faculty in the journalism program. “The students come to us pretty much as fully formed reporters, producers or writers,” Moseley explains. They answer some questions in writing and then are interviewed. “It’s through that interview

process that we accept them. The critical thing is that they have curiosity and dedication—they have to know that this is the job that they want,” he says.

Once they are accepted, students get classroom instruction in investigative journalism from Marin and Moseley. They have the opportunity to hear from and ask questions of accomplished guest lecturers, who have included news anchor Jane Pauley and syndicated columnist Clarence Page.

They also get hands-on experience. “We’ve brought them to NBC, where they have worked on gubernatorial forums, mayoral forums, election night,” Marin says. “Some of them want to do the work we do, but they don’t spend time watching it and sometimes they don’t necessarily read it. They still have a view of journalism that needs bringing into careful focus. Part of what we try to do is shoot them into the real world.”

An important part of their real-world exposure is developing news segments for the WTTW-TV public affairs program “Chicago Tonight.” “They have to come up with story pitches. Then they refine them and pick one story,” Marin, a regular contributor to “Chicago Tonight,” explains. “Then they start figuring out how to produce it. Who does what? Who do we interview? What are the issues? So they do it from conception, to research, to setting up the interviews, to shooting the interviews, doing all the B roll, writing and editing.” She adds, “With Don and me heavily fluttering around.”

AMPLIFIED IMPACT

CJIE’s mission includes honoring journalists whose work exemplifies integrity and excellence. In 2019, New York Times Executive Editor Dean Baquet received the Distinguished Journalist Award, and WGN-TV news anchor Lourdes Duarte (CMN ’99) was honored with the Distinguished Alumna Award. Previous recipients of the Distinguished Journalist Award are Lester Holt of “NBC Nightly News” and Jane Pauley of “CBS Sunday Morning.” Ben Welsh (CMN ’04), data desk editor for the Los Angeles Times, and Ann Pistone (CMN ’90), investigative producer for ABC7 Eyewitness News in Chicago, are past recipients of Distinguished Alumni awards.

Pointing to a wall of CJIE’s office, Marin says, “Over there in the red frame with the little statuette beside it is Ben Welsh’s first national award. Ben was our very first intern. He was the kid who was kind of always hungry, didn’t always make eye contact, but was eclectic and a great writer and thinker. He won his first Pulitzer just about three years ago.”

In 2018, the center launched its first Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Fellows program. The two-day program offers training and mentoring for early-career journalists who work at small news organizations (see page 8). With a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that says federal agencies can deny FOIA requests for confidential data about their contractors, such training is more important than ever.

New in 2019 is the Visiting CJIE Fellow. The inaugural fellow, Dan Sinker, was the director of OpenNews, which “connects a network of developers, designers, journalists and editors to collaborate on open technologies and processes within journalism.” Marin says, “He teaches not just the students, but he teaches us because he’s the kind of digital thinker who has the ability to look at (social media), what it really is doing and how it can be manipulated.”

MISSION-DRIVEN

Journalism has never been under the microscope more than it is right now. Thus, integrity in journalism has never been more important. “A huge component in virtually every class is they have to consider an ethical problem they might meet on the street. The kids love it the best,” Marin says.

“They go off, they graduate, they get a job, and Don and I—this has been true from

the beginning—we get ‘9-1-1’ calls: ‘Oh, my God, my news director wants me to do something that I don’t think I should do. What should I do? Am I going to lose my job?’ So we remain an ethical sounding board for them after they’re gone.”

Behind everything is DePaul’s Vincentian mission. “You see it in the selection of stories our students have done for ‘Chicago Tonight.’ You see that mission. The inequity of marijuana sentencing, what happens to medical DACA students. Giving voice to the voiceless,” Moseley observes.

“DePaul is more than just a school,” Marin says. “It’s the atmosphere of a mission and responsibility and great work. We couldn’t be happier.”

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—Carol Marin

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CJIE Co-director Carol Marin oversees students enrolled in the intensive investigative journalism course.

THE TALKING CURE: A CONVERSATION WITH ELISSA FOSTER

Professor Elissa Foster is passionate about improving communication in health care settings. She is the director of the college’s graduate programs in health communication and is active as a researcher and in working with health care professionals to improve the quality of their communication with patients, families and other practitioners. Here she shares her thoughts about problems, progress and careers in health communication.

How do you define health communication?

I take the broadest definition of health communication. It’s a discipline that harnesses all the insights that can be gained from communication, research and theory—from interpersonal communication all the way to culture and media—and applies them to solving problems in the health care context.

I’m talking about context pretty broadly, too. My personal area of expertise is in the clinical area, so clinical communication, which includes both the communication between clinical providers and their patients, and communication among professionals within the health care delivery context. To a certain extent, we are also looking at health care systems and how they work.

You have to understand how the organization and organizational systems affect clinical communication. There are legal constraints and systems constraints, and even just the practical aspects of charting and the like. So to have an understanding of the provider-patient communication, you also need to understand the context in which their communication happens.

What would you say constitute some of the challenges to providers in communicating with patients and families?

I think one of their main concerns is time, that there are significant time pressures on providers now and concerns about productivity and the number of patients that need to be seen.

It’s really not unlike other changes to communication in our culture. That doesn’t necessarily mean that you can’t establish effective relational communication. It just means it needs to be accomplished in a different way, and you need different communication tools and habits. I’ve seen many, many clinicians who have learned how to do all of it well.

I would also say continuity. It is very difficult now within practices for your patient to see you every time they come in, particularly for acute visits. But the answer there is that if you have a team that works together and communicates effectively, the patient can still have a sense of continuity and what we might call a patient-centered medical home.



“If you want to be satisfied and for quality care to happen, that conversation has to happen upfront.”

That’s a shift for patients who want to rely on one person. What do you know about patients, their communication needs and how they communicate?

I think we’ve put a lot of pressure on the practitioners to change the way that they practice in order to try to preserve this relationship, but patients don’t always have the understanding of the clinical environment that would help them to partner better with their providers. Doing all this research on WebMD before they come in is not always helpful to the doctor.

I think most patients are waiting for the physician to take charge, and if the physician gets it wrong, the patient feels like they didn’t get to tell their story or get all their concerns out. There’s this concept of agenda-setting. When a doctor comes in, patients need

to say, ‘Can we just take a minute to list my concerns, and then we can prioritize what needs to be done?’ If you want to be satisfied and for quality care to happen, that conversation has to happen upfront.

Who is your typical student?

I have two groups of students. At the undergraduate level, I teach a basic health communication class, and it is 50% health sciences students who are doing either public health or the bioscience track, so these are future practitioners. Then 50% are communication students who see health comm as an interesting elective. Usually they are surprised—they either just get a lot out of it personally and become more empowered patients and consumers or they decide that they want to do more study. We only have one health comm undergrad class, so they go into the MA program.

Those MA students tend to have an interest in health and promoting health. Often they have a dramatic health story in their background. They tend to go either into working directly with health care delivery organizations or into more of the public communications side, writing for patients or internal communications.

What needs to happen to make health care more effective?

Part of the struggle is that, particularly here in the United States, organizing health care as a business around a service delivery model just doesn’t work because the people who don’t have access to health care also don’t have access to health education or to communities where they can walk safely. They don’t have the time or the energy to prepare fresh food. All of these things stack up against certain groups within the population. We’re going to remain, as a country, spending more and getting less if we don’t start to think in terms of health promotion and interrupting cycles of poverty and violence.

Would you say that health communication is improving?

From the perspective of health care systems, there have been massive breakthroughs, particularly with respect to things like the patient portal so that patients have more direct access to a care provider and nurse triage, can schedule their own appointments, can see their own test results.

I also think that great effort is being placed on understanding how through things like biomonitoring devices or answering questions through technology, patients can become more engaged in their own health care, and how what patients are generating through their own health data can interface with the work of the clinician. That work is just starting, and there are a lot of technical and quality-of-data issues. But I think the right questions are being asked.

I’ve got two or three graduates who are working in the area of patient experience within a hospital or health care organization. They are looking at patient perceptions of quality and how to improve the system so that patients experience more quality.

Stakes are high, even for a parent who brings in a toddler who’s got an unexplained rash that might be completely benign. For that parent in that moment, the stakes are high, and so the communication has to be effective.

Captivated Audience

The Media Engagement Research Lab investigates the science of messaging

Since the 1970s, colored lapel ribbons have been used to raise awareness of everything from AIDS to epilepsy. Pink is now associated with breast cancer and has extended beyond ribbons to include anything pink, from T-shirts to tennis balls. Color branding for health and social issues is everywhere, so it must be working, right? Sydney Dillard, an associate professor of public relations and advertising, has used the Media Engagement Research Lab (ME Lab) resources to try to determine whether the use of pink in breast cancer ads really encourages at-risk women to get screened for the disease.

Communication tools have become much more sophisticated, but it's not always easy to gauge whether clicks, unique impressions, diversity casting in commercials and other strategies are having the effects communicators want. The ME Lab is designed to help organizations understand and refine their messaging using some of the most cutting-edge techniques available.

Nur Uysal, assistant professor of public relations and the lab's co-founder and co-director, says, "At the ME Lab, we are interested in understanding and designing systems that enhance media engagement in a variety of contextual environments. We generate innovative research that helps brands tell compelling stories and achieve their goals."

Juan Mundel, an assistant professor of advertising and lab co-founder and co-director, oversees the purchase of the technology needed to train students

in advertising research—technology that only a handful of universities across the country have. "I meet weekly with a group of 20 students to discuss, design and implement research projects that involve psychophysiologic and experimental measures—eye tracking, heart rate, skin conductance, facial expression—and also lead a weekly lab class on psychophysiology," Mundel says.

"We recently finished collecting eye-tracking data for a study investigating the role of models' bodies in affecting product healthfulness perceptions for fast-food advertising. We collected more than 120 hours of visual attention information," he continues. Over the summer, Mundel and an undergraduate research assistant in the lab, Claire Hope, presented a paper, "An Experimental Investigation on Multiple Brand Endorsements by Non-Celebrity Endorsers on Instagram," at the Global Fashion Management Conference in Paris, France. Another collaborator on the paper is Assistant Professor Tony Deng, who recently joined the advertising faculty.

The lab is available to any interested faculty or students, and Mundel and Uysal are hoping to build entrepreneurial partnerships with Chicago institutions. "We can collect data for clients at a fraction of the cost of market research companies," says Uysal. "Proceeds from these partnerships will allow us to pay student researchers for their work, which, in turn, helps students offset their education expenses."



"The lab is important because it provides a dynamic hub for research in the college. Students can develop a passion for research and gain valuable skills."

"I think the lab is important because it provides a dynamic hub for research in the college. Students can develop a passion for research and gain valuable skills," Uysal says. "The ME Lab will help the college to become a thought leader."

For more information about collaborating with the ME Lab, please write to melab@depaul.edu.

COMMUNICATING CLIMATE CHANGE

From frigid cold in the Midwestern U.S. to melting heat in Australia, extreme weather and climate change are making news around the world. Yet, the topic of climate change continues to be politicized, and journalists often struggle to cover it in a way that's accurate and evidence-based, according to Jill Hopke, an assistant professor of journalism in the College of Communication.



A founding member of the International Environmental Communication Association, Hopke researches how the news media and social media shape the public's understanding of climate change. Hopke recently published one of the first studies of climate visuals on social media with Luis Hestres of the University of Texas at San Antonio in the journal *Social Media + Society*.

Hopke discusses how journalists can boost the public's understanding of climate change.

Extreme weather events always make the news. How can journalists ensure they're reporting accurately on the connections between, say, a heat wave and climate change?

The news media clearly contributes to public understanding of climate change.

In some cases, they do so while trying to adhere to journalistic norms of objectivity and balance that continue to hinder evidence-based climate reporting. In other words, there is broad agreement among climate scientists that climate change is happening and that it's driven by burning fossil fuels, it would not be accurate to give equal space to the views of groups and individuals seeking to cast doubt on the prevailing scientific consensus.

Another area that requires a deeper understanding by the news media is climate attribution, which is a subfield of climate science. The goal is to explain the extent of climate risk associated with individual extreme weather events, like heat waves, as opposed to natural variability. Gaining a better understanding of the difference can help improve both reporting generally and public understanding of the issue overall.

How can journalists tell the difference between a weather event that happens normally and one that is influenced by climate change?

First, it is important to understand the difference between climate and weather. A good way to understand this distinction is the analogy that climate is what you keep in your closet and weather is what you wear on any given day.

Beyond that, there are exciting advancements in the field of climate attribution, such as work by the World Weather Attribution project, which is a

partnership of the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre and the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute. For example, researchers there found that for Hurricane Harvey in 2017, the record rainfall Houston experienced was made three times more likely because of climate change. Based on science like this, what we can increasingly say is the extent to which individual extreme weather events are or are not influenced by climate change. An analysis by the specialist news outlet Carbon Brief found in reviewing 20 years of peer-reviewed studies on 260 extreme weather events that in 68 percent of the cases, the extreme weather events were made more likely, or more severe, because of climate change.

Can you provide an example of how the news media might work climate change into their regular coverage of the weather or other local stories?

In Chicago, a story on public transit infrastructure during the January polar vortex included a quote about how transit systems need to prepare for an increase in extreme weather events in the future due to climate change. That's a climate adaption story. Journalists should work to expand reporting to look at climate issues related to areas such as public health, business, clean energy, public infrastructure, food systems, arts and culture, sports, religion and disaster preparedness.

AROUND THE COLLEGE



FOIA Fellows Program

The Center for Journalism Integrity and Excellence hosted its second Freedom of Information Act Fellows program Feb. 27–March 1, 2019. Sponsored by a grant from the Gannett Foundation, the program provided intensive training and mentoring for early-career journalists at small news organizations. Guest speakers included Marsha Bartel, investigative producer of WGN-TV Chicago; Sarah Karp, Dan Mihalopoulos and Dave McKinney, all from WBEZ-FM; Katie Drews, reporter with the Better Government Association; ProPublica reporter Mick Dumke; Adam Marshall, Knight litigation attorney for the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press; Chicago Sun-Times investigative reporter Tim Novak; and Sarah Pratt, public access counselor in the Illinois Attorney General’s office. Discussions included writing successful requests and how to handle denials.

Women Leaders in Communication Panel

On May 13, DePaul students attended the Women Leaders in Communication panel to hear some of Chicago’s most accomplished women in public relations and advertising talk about challenges and opportunities for women within the profession. The panelists included Teri Arvesu, vice president of content for Univision Communications; Tonise Paul, president and CEO of Energy BBDO; Karuna Rawal, formerly of Publicis Groupe; Nancy Ruscheinski, COO of Zeno Group; Stacy Sharpe, Allstate’s senior vice president of corporate relations; and Valerie Barker Waller, senior vice president and chief marketing officer of YMCA USA. Panelists shared valuable insights, ranging from Karuna Rawal’s candid assertion “you can have it all, just not at the same time” to Teri Arvesu’s powerful statement, “Our struggles are a gift, an opportunity to create triumph from tears.”



Disney Pop Culture Conference

On May 4, the seventh annual DePaul Pop Culture Conference was “A Celebration of Disney.” The academic keynote, “Spatially Poaching the Haunted Mansion: The Pleasures, Perils & Participatory Affordances of Disney Theme Park Fandom,” was delivered by Rebecca Williams, senior lecturer in communication, culture and media studies at the University of South Wales. The recipient of the 2019 Distinguished Contributions to Popular Culture Award was Philo Barnhart, a professional film animator with Silver Phoenix Entertainment Inc. whose many works include feature-length films such as “The Little Mermaid,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and “The Rescuers Down Under.” Panel discussions included “How a Disney Movie Becomes a Video Game,” “Disney, ‘Frankenweenie’ and the Gothic and “Race in Disney Musicals.” The charity supported by this year’s conference was the Huntington’s Disease Society of America.

LGBT Inclusive Workplace Presentation

On May 6, the college, in partnership with the Chicago Area Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, presented “Creating an Inclusive Workplace: Mastering Implicit Bias,” a seminar and networking event for chamber members and other interested individuals. In her three-hour presentation, Veronica S. Appleton, an adjunct professor at the college and assistant director of diversity and inclusion for We Are Unlimited, reviewed constructs and best practices for mitigating bias in the workplace.



2019 Commencement

On June 15, 568 undergraduate and graduate students of the college received their diplomas from DePaul President A. Gabriel Esteban, PhD, and Acting Dean Alexandra Murphy (above left and second from left). John F. McDonough, president and CEO of the Chicago Blackhawks (third from left), gave the commencement address to both communication and College of Education graduates. He said, “No one is ordained to have success. Embrace your imperfections and pursue what stirs your blood.” Above right is College of Education Dean Paul Zionts.

ACCOLADES

Outstanding Teaching Award Winners

Three faculty members were recognized for their outstanding instruction by the university and the college. The DePaul Quality of Instruction Council Excellence in Teaching Award was bestowed upon Professor Elissa Foster, graduate program director for health communication. College of Communication Excellence in Teaching awards went to Dan Bashara, adjunct faculty of media and cinema studies, and Stephanie Howell, term faculty of communication studies.



College Student Media Honors at SPJ Conference

Students took home numerous honors at the 2019 regional conference of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). 14 East magazine took first place in the independent online student publication category, and Managing Editor Cody Corral won first place in the online opinion and commentary category. “Good Day DePaul” had several first-place wins: Karyn Lacey and Daniele Lagukaite for all-around television newscast; Melody Mercado for television feature reporting; Paul Steeno, Agathe Muller and Jennifer Nazha for television sports reporting; and Rosbelis Quinones for television in-depth reporting. The DePaulia and several student journalists were also finalists in multiple categories. For full details visit bit.ly/CMNstudentawards.



2019 CJIE Awards

On April 25, Carol Marin and Don Moseley, co-directors of the Center for Journalism Integrity and Excellence, presented the Distinguished Journalist Award to Dean Baquet, executive editor of the New York Times, and the Distinguished Alumna Award to WGN-TV news anchor and investigative reporter Lourdes Duarte (CMN ’99). The center has presented these awards annually since its inception in the 2016–17 academic year.

Journalism Awards x 2

Journalism master’s degree candidate Wendy Rosen won first place in the photographer/writer category of the Illinois Women’s Press Association’s 2019 Mate E. Palmer Professional Communications Contest. She also placed second in the photographer and writer categories of the 2019 National Federation of Press Women contest for her article “Settle for More: Rohingya Refugees Find Home in Chicago,” which was published by StreetWise in 2018. The article is accessible at bit.ly/wendyrosen.

PRAD Students Reap Honors

Graduate students in the college’s PRAD program have, for a record sixth year in a row, won or placed in the annual Arthur W. Page Society and Institute for Public Relations Case Study Competition in Corporate Communications. PRAD graduate students Britt Aaron, Antoinette Iacullo, Hank Mendheim and Elise Zhang won first prize in the 2019 communication and journalism school category for their case entry, “When You Wish Upon a Star: Disney ABC Puts Corporate Values First in Cancelling ‘Roseanne.’”

Last spring, Michaeljon Green, Sloan Jones, Ariana Narang and Lydia Milligan won the virtual district competition of the National Student Advertising Competition sponsored by the American Advertising Federation. Industry experts deemed their written campaign and live presentation for fast-food chain Wienerschnitzel to be the best out of all the national student competitors.

In March, advertising student Lauren Russell and her team won a competition held by the One Club Chicago Creative Boot Camp for their advertising campaign for Wingstop Restaurants. The team created the campaign in less than three days and then presented their pitch to a panel of judges.



A GREAT START IN LIFE

College of Communication alumnus John Ybarra finds a solid foundation in communication



“At the time, communications spoke to me in terms of skill sets, not only what I would need as a lawyer, but what I would need for anything.”

for anything. To communicate reason and be persuasive are at the heart of communication then and now.”

Ybarra pursued his dream of law school and is now a shareholder in the Chicago office of Littler, a global labor and employment law firm, where he advises and represents clients in employment and labor relations, with particular emphasis on wage-and-hour and compensation disputes. He puts his communication skills to work in courtrooms across the country, litigating large class actions and managing teams of lawyers who defend employers in wage-and-hour, wrongful discharge and discrimination cases. He also trains managers on topics such as discrimination and sexual harassment prevention.

“The art of communications, mass media, all the types of things that are useful now, were useful for me to get into law school, for me to succeed in law school, and for me to be a lawyer,” he says.

Ybarra’s life trajectory exemplifies the American Dream and DePaul’s mission. “I came from a working-class background, Catholic. Neither of my parents graduated from high school. In fact, my father started off as a migrant farm worker in Texas and California,” Ybarra reflects. “He was drafted in the ‘50s and went off to Europe. He came back with his eyes open and did not

go back to the fields; instead, he got a craft and became a butcher.

“My mother came from rural Michigan and had gone as far as the 11th grade. When I started working my way through high school, they knew very, very little about universities, but they knew the Catholic university touchstones,” he recalls. “They were very pleased when I was accepted at DePaul and got a scholarship.”

Ybarra’s wife, Karen, did not attend DePaul (“she was a DePaul girlfriend”), but “she was impressed with the fact that I obviously enjoyed myself and that DePaul was very flexible for an urban student. I could work and go to class, and have everything Chicago offered all in one spot.” Thus, when Ybarra wanted to share his career good fortune with his alma mater, she wholeheartedly supported funding the Ybarra Family Scholarship for communication students. They both believe in “paying it forward” so that this generation gets the opportunities that Ybarra’s experiences at DePaul generated.

Ybarra credits his communication education with providing him with a solid foundation. “As a field, as a course of study, it provides you with a great start in life,” he says. “It’s very fulfilling in your personal life as well as your professional life.”

Before there was a College of Communication, there was a major in communication—a branch of learning John Ybarra (CMN ’84) had never heard of when he enrolled at DePaul in 1979.

“I didn’t even know what communications was as a field or a discipline. I think it was just coming into its own at that time,” says Ybarra. He started as a double major in English and history at what was then the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, but “I kept gravitating toward the prelaw program and communications classes.”

Eventually, he declared himself a communication major. “At the time, communications spoke to me in terms of skill sets, not only what I would need as a lawyer, but what I would need

Evolution of a journalist

“Growing up, journalism wasn’t something I looked toward as a potential career path. It was just something I saw on TV. Superman, he was a journalist. Spider-man, he was a photographer. I had no clue until I got into higher education,” says Jesus J. Montero (CMN ’17).

Montero, who has a bachelor’s degree in journalism and communication and media from DePaul and is pursuing a master’s degree at the College of Communication, has certainly taken to making journalism his life’s work. The first-generation college student said his Mexican parents didn’t have the educational background to offer career guidance. “There was no pressure for a specific path, but the pressure was school. They knew school would lead to something,” Montero asserts.

Montero was first exposed to journalism when he attended a meeting hosted by the Morton Collegian, the student newspaper of Morton College, the community college he attended. “That’s when the wheels started turning,” he recalls.

“When I ended my time at Morton College, I felt DePaul would provide a place where I could grow.” DePaul’s mission resonated with Montero because he attended a small Christian high school “where every week we were doing something that gave back to the community.”

“It was a bit intimidating at first. A lot of the students were, ‘I knew I wanted to be a journalist when I was eight years old’ and ‘I was Lois Lane as a Halloween character back when I was in fourth grade.’ In fourth grade, I was getting Ds and Fs,” Montero says. “But once I started the program, once I became involved, I started to feel like a part of that journalism community.”

Montero credits his professors with building his confidence: “I think it’s been proven time and time again that if a person feels like they’re being valued or their work means something—even if it’s a small class assignment—that vindication means a lot. It definitely meant a lot to me.”

Montero has gained validation in more ways than one. In 2018, he was one of three recipients of a scholarship from the Chicago



“The one thing I’d tell others is if you’re set on doing something, pursue it.”

Chapter of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ). NAHJ cited his dedication to the chapter and to perfecting his craft through freelance journalism and photography as factors in his selection.

After he earned his bachelor’s degree, Montero was advised by every professional with whom he talked to enter the workforce. “But I wanted to come back for grad school right away,” he says. “I felt I needed to keep growing, not just for myself, but also for my Latinx community.”

When he returned, he was awarded a 2019 Facebook Journalism Project Scholarship from National NAHJ. “It’s huge! To see some recognition for the hard work makes editing a story until 2 or 3 a.m. worth it,” Montero reflects.

Over the summer, Montero was an NBC Summer Fellow at “Dateline.” Does that experience mean he’ll be headed for a network news career? He’s not sure. “I’m leaning toward the newsroom, maybe a producer role or something that deals with investigating. I do also have a love for music journalism.”

Whatever he decides to do, Montero is thrilled with the possibilities. “I didn’t think college was possible. The one thing I’d tell others is if you’re set on doing something, pursue it.”

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CONVERSATIONS

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