

# UB COMMUNITY

Department of Communication Newsletter, Volume I, Issue I - April 2015

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## A Note From The Department Chair...



Hello! I am writing to communicate to COM alums and family; for a Communication department, we don't communicate nearly enough to our key constituency. Hopefully the UB COMMunity will be a first step in reaching out to friends and partners. There is so much going on in the department and among our majors that we are intending to produce

two newsletters before semester's end to fully inform you of new programs, new research, and student accomplishments. For starters, we have a new Assistant Professor arriving this August from New Mexico. His name is Ivan Dylko and he is an expert in political communication and social media. Ivan earned his doctorate from the Ohio State University and represents an ideal addition to our growing faculty. As of this fall, we will have 19 full-time faculty members! That is considerably larger than the COM faculty has ever been (if my own research is accurate.) In fact, we were down to 7 full-time faculty as recently as 1999, making the current roster of 18 full-time faculty all the more impressive. The department boasts nearly 300 undergraduate majors on our Buffalo Campus and over 550 majors on our Singapore campus at The Singapore Institute of Management. We also have nearly 40 graduate students between the Master's and Doctoral programs. In our student spotlight section we

feature Zach Carr, one of our MA students who is also BA from our department. If you would like a tour of the department, our renovated lab and conference space or to meet any of our faculty, staff or graduate students, please feel free to email me ([thfeeley@buffalo.edu](mailto:thfeeley@buffalo.edu)) and I would be glad to set something up. Two exciting new projects on the horizon are the renovation of our department space and the pending redesign of our undergraduate and graduate curricula. We are confident our new space and degree programs will only strengthen our program reputation and its popularity among students locally, nationally and internationally.

The purpose of this first and future newsletters is to provide a snapshot of the flurry of activity and research going in Communication. We always welcome your feedback through email, telephone or through our Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/SUNYBuffaloCOM](http://www.facebook.com/SUNYBuffaloCOM)). Emily Malkowski and Samantha Greenwood (see email addresses at top) have produced a great first newsletter and are very much interested in your thoughts on how to make UB COMMunity better. Thanks again for reading and we are glad you are part of our COMMunity at The University at Buffalo.

Best,

Dr. Thomas Hugh Feeley  
Professor and Chair  
Department of Communication

## In This Issue:



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# Fast Facts:

Assistant Professor **Dr. Matthew Grizzard** was selected to be the "Faculty Honorary Coach" by UB's Athletic Department Faculty Honorary Coach Program for the men's



basketball game against Western Michigan. Dr. Grizzard was presented a game ball during halftime for his research article "Being Bad in a Video Game Can Make Us Morally Sensitive," which was selected as one of UB's 12 Amazing Discoveries of 2014.

Assistant Professor **Dr. Helen Wang** served as Theme Chair for the 2014 International Communication Association Convention in Seattle, WA.

Assistant Professor **Dr. Allison Shaw** was elected to the e-board of the Cognition and Communication Division of the National Communication Association, which puts her on track to become President & Chair of the division in 5 years.

Assistant Professor **Dr. Melanie Green** was invited to present her work on the science of the narrative at the Ethics Resource Council Fellows meeting, and was also featured for her work on interactive narratives in a special issue of The Journal of Communication entitled "Expanding the Boundaries of Entertainment Research."



Assistant Professor **Dr. Janet Yang** won Top Faculty Paper Award with the National Communication Association's Environmental Communication Division in 2014.

## Departmental Efforts to Facilitate Organ Donation

As Health Communication is a major area of study within UB's Department of Communication, several projects related to the promotion and facilitation of organ donation are currently underway within the department. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resource Services Administration's Division of Transplantation is currently funding two projects in particular – out of the eight federal grants that have been awarded to the department's faculty for organ donation research since 2003.



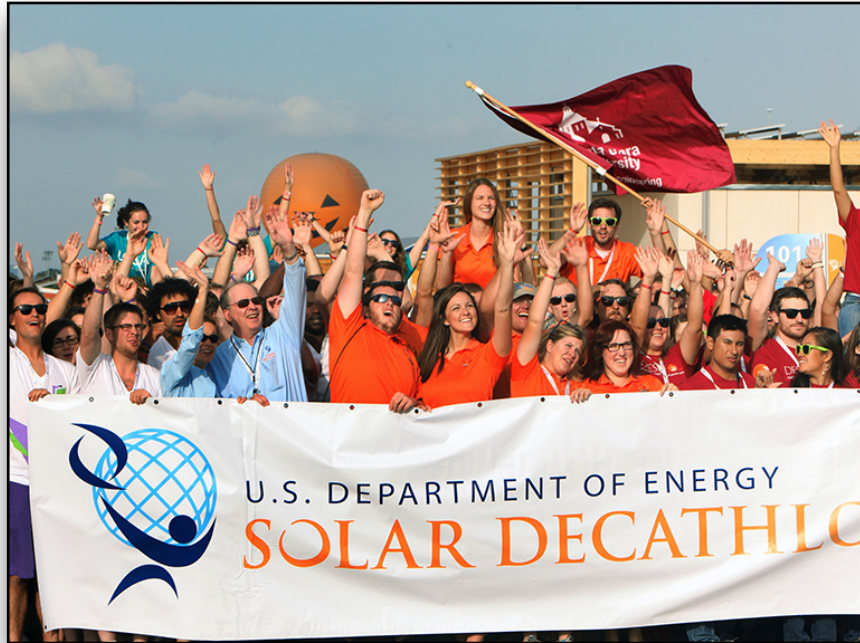
*Dr. Ashley Anker*

Research Assistant Professor Dr. Ashley Anker is currently the Principal Investigator for one of these projects – a three-year federal grant entitled "A Positive Deviance Approach to Improving Familial Consent Rates." The project aims to increase organ donation by improving the communication between potential donor families and Organ Procurement Coordinators (OPCs) – the individuals that request authorization. To do this, Dr. Anker and her colleagues, Dr. Thomas Feeley and Dr. Helen Wang, have identified "positively deviant" (PD) behaviors that, although uncommon in practice, have proved to be successful when utilized by an OPC. An example of a successful PD behavior is an OPC utilizing the power of silence with a family when attempting to gain compliance. The OPC should not be afraid to sit in silence with a family to give them time to reflect on the information. Along with the project team, Dr. Anker has developed an interactive educational training program to share these useful PD behaviors with OPCs, and will be implementing this program in 11 Organ Procurement Organizations throughout the U.S. and evaluating its effectiveness.

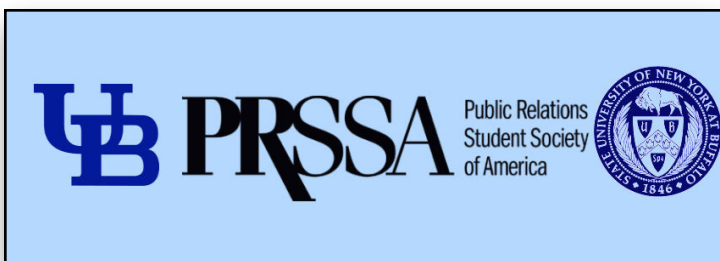
Similarly, Professor and Chair Dr. Thomas Feeley is taking on the role of Co-Principal Investigator with The New York Alliance for Donation Inc. for a recently awarded three-year grant that studies organ donation in a different light. This project seeks to uncover if using the voter registration form is an effective way to increase registration to become an organ donor. New York is the first state to utilize the voter registration form as a means to register, and data since 2009 indicate that registration rates since then have increased using voter registration. Surveys and interviews will take place to measure the perception of the new voter registration method, as opposed to the usual method in which people register at the DMV.

# COM Undergrads Manage Public Relations for Solar Decathlon Team GRoW Buffalo

For the first time, UB has been selected as one of twenty universities to compete in the national US Department of Energy Solar Decathlon. In this two-year competition, the teams from each school design, build, and maintain entirely solar-powered homes to promote sustainability and conservation in today's society. UB's team, GRoW Buffalo, includes students ranging from freshman to PhD level from 13 different departments within the School of Architecture and Planning, The School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, the School of Management, and the College of Arts and Sciences. The collegiate teams are judged on 10 components of their project, which not only includes the expected Architecture and Engineering categories, but also a Communications/Public Relations category, which is where UB's Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) comes in.



Led by undergraduate Communication majors Kristin Beaudoin (President) and Morgan Dolan (Vice-President), along with Business Administration major Jessie Rinaldo (Treasurer) and Communication major Alex Pukos (Secretary), UB's chapter of the national organization was just recently recognized by the Student Association as an official club. Currently, the club is teaming up with the GRoW Buffalo team to provide public relations and marketing for the project's Communications component.



"Our team is brought on to do different components involving PR, whether that be brief videos to use for marketing and community engagement, as well as reaching out on Facebook, Twitter, and different aspects like that. We're trying to get a lot of public awareness," Beaudoin elaborates.

An important aspect of the public relations for this project specifically is the outreach to the community for donations. The GRoW Buffalo team must actually construct their full sized home, which is 871 square feet in area, and then dismantle it entirely to transport it across the nation and rebuild it again in Irvine, California, where the competition takes place. The team not only seeks monetary support, but also material donations (wood, lumber, appliances, etc.) and volunteers to donate their time to the project.

"I think that where we come in is a really important part, not just to promote the GRoW House's existence, but we also have to make people aware so they donate to the cause. A lot of our struggles have been trying to figure out how to fund getting the house to California. We've been doing a lot of crowd funding for donations," Dolan explains.

This year's Solar Decathlon takes place on October 8th – 18th 2015 at Orange County Great Park in Irvine, California. To learn more or to make a donation to the project, visit [grow.buffalo.edu](http://grow.buffalo.edu).

## Faculty Spotlight

**Dr. Lance Rintamaki**

*Associate Professor*



Last semester, Dr. Rintamaki was selected as one of three UB faculty members to become an **Honors College Faculty Fellow**. This prestigious fellowship is awarded to three faculty members from departments within the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences who not only have extensive experience in teaching/mentoring undergraduate students, but who are also highly regarded and well-liked among students based on feedback from course evaluations.

Dr. Rintamaki was also awarded **The President Emeritus and Mrs. Meyerson Award for Distinguished Undergraduate Teaching and Mentoring** this year, which is the highest possible university honor for undergraduate mentoring. Dr. Rintamaki will be specifically recognized for his exceptional work during UB's Annual Celebration of Student Academic Excellence.

In addition, Dr. Rintamaki is the mastermind behind the new and widely popular undergraduate course - **Sexual Communication, (COM 492)** which was created in 2012. The course explores the science behind sex and relationships within many contexts, such as the presence of sexual content in the media/internet, and what influences it has on individuals' opinions and experiences.

## Recent Study Shows That a Computer System Detects Faked Emotions Better Than Humans



This past year, Dr. Mark Frank, along with researchers from the University of Toronto and the University of California, San Diego, conducted a joint study that was deemed one of UB's Most Interesting Discoveries of 2014 to test the accuracy level of computers and humans detecting faked vs. genuine facial expressions.

The study included 205 human subjects who were shown video clips of people

dipping their hands in ice cold water and reacting to the pain – some of the reactions were real, and some were faked. After viewing each video, the participants were then asked to assess whether they thought the facial expressions of pain in the video clips were genuine or faked. The researchers then conducted the same test on a computer program that they developed called the Computer Expression Recognition Toolbox (CERT) in order to see whether the computer system or the humans would be more accurate.

The researchers found that the computers did significantly better than the human subjects. "Human subjects could not discriminate real from faked expressions of pain more frequently than would be expected by chance," Frank explains. "Even after training, they were accurate only 55 percent of the time. The computer system, however, was accurate 85 percent of the time."

The researchers believe that this is

because the computer system can instantly detect non-genuine facial signals by quickly picking up on slight behaviors that humans either cannot or oftentimes do not catch. "Often these behaviors are subtle," Frank says. "They're often quick, less than half a second, and people often don't see them."

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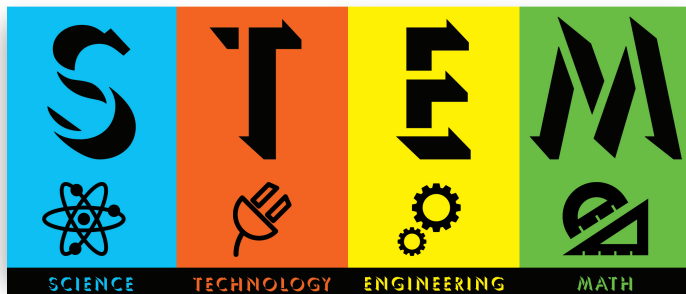
**"Even after training, they were only accurate 55% of the time. The computer system was accurate 85% of the time."**

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Interestingly, the study found that the most predictive feature of the fakers was the opening and closing pattern of the individuals' mouths. They tended to open too regularly and with too much of a pattern, instead of being a sporadic, genuine reaction to pain. The study in its entirety, "Automatic Decoding of Deceptive Pain Expressions," was published in *Current Biology* in 2014.

## Fighting for Women & Minorities in STEM careers

In collaboration with Dr. Mary Flanagan at Dartmouth University, Assistant Professor Dr. Melanie Green was recently awarded a three-year grant from the National Science Foundation for a project on women and minorities' under-representation in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) courses, majors, and careers in today's society.



The project aims to help end this imbalance by developing and implementing a digital interactive narrative program based on narrative theory for use by introductory-level STEM instructors and their students. This program will act as a platform for students to share their personal experiences with each other, and in turn, use them to raise awareness, reduce common biases that have an impact on students' educational experiences, and ultimately create an intervention with the end goal of improving the climate for women and minorities in STEM career fields.

## Graduate Student Spotlight: Zachary Carr

Zach is a second year Master's student whose current research is focused on gender effects in emotion recognition. His thesis examines males and females of various cultures and compares how they respond to familiar and unfamiliar stimuli by looking at their response times in recognition tasks of faces and emotions.



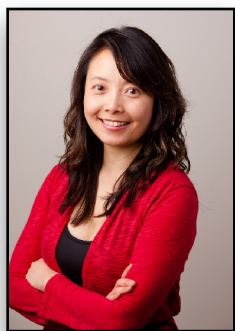
This past February, Zach, along with fellow Master's student Sarah Dietrich and his adviser Dr. Mark Frank, presented a project entitled "Strategies for Appearing Truthful by Liars and Truth Tellers" at The SPSP Nonverbal Pre-Conference in Long Beach, CA. In November 2014, Zach presented a paper that he worked as an author entitled "Does The Face Say It All? How Lies Create Inconsistencies Between the Face and Body Channels" at the 100th Annual National Communication Association Convention.

In addition to his work as a Communication graduate student, Zach is also widely involved on campus, as he has served as a Student Justice in the Student Wide Judiciary for two years, and is Treasurer of The Communication Graduate Student Association. Zach is also the Business Manager of UB's all male cappella group, The Buffalo Chips, and has traveled the East Coast singing with them.

# Communication and "The Good Life"

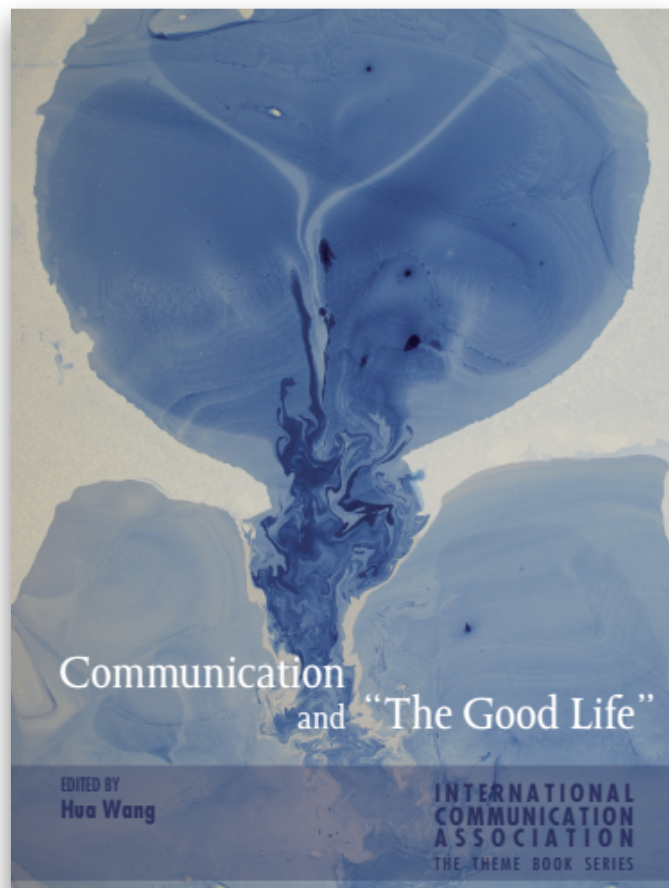
## *Dr. Helen Wang Serves as Editor for ICA Theme Book*

After serving as the 2014 International Communication Association annual conference theme chair, Dr. Helen Wang edited the ICA theme book on Communication and "The Good Life" that is set to be released at the upcoming conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The theme book revolves around the

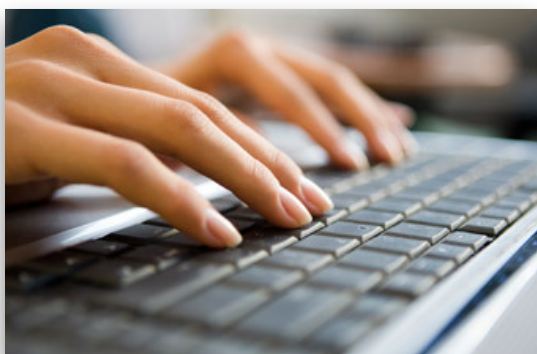


*Dr. Helen Wang*

fundamental question: What is a "good life," and how can it be achieved? In our highly mediatized society today, new technologies are both a strength and weakness in achieving our ideas of what a "good life" should be. The book explores the complexities of our society and the challenges we face with the rapidly changing times, and looks at what we can take away in our own personal attempts to achieve a "good life."



## New Modernized Undergraduate Curriculum



Undergraduate students in the department can expect a new curriculum in the near future at UB. The current program allows majors to explore subjects within the major that they are

interested in through the vast amount of internships, independent studies, courses, and research opportunities offered. This freedom students have within the major to create their own path is both a strength and a weakness of the field. Students can end up with experiences that are too vague, and employers are often flustered with Communication majors. According to Dr. Rintamaki, Director of Undergraduate Studies, the top complaint employers have regarding recent graduates is poor writing skills.

Designing the new curriculum has involved a very thorough process. Four separate studies were conducted to narrow down

exactly what was needed for recent graduates beginning their careers. The first study interviewed 330 current undergraduate students in the department about their experiences within the major. Another focused on the faculty of the department, and asked them things like what they would teach if they were under no constraints. Then, the team asked recent graduates what were some helpful skills that they took away from the program, and in contrast, what they wished the major would have prepared them for. Finally, the last study asked over 200 Communication professionals and employers what they were looking for in recent graduates and what would make applicants stand out from the rest.

The new curriculum's design will be based on the feedback from the four studies. New requirements will be involved, such as studying abroad, internships, or an independent study during students' time at UB, as employers have noted that they seek out students with unique experiences. In addition, new courses will continue to be added to help keep the curriculum modernized with changing times, which could include a class centered on social media use, for example. All encompassing, the department's aim is to cater the program to employers' needs and help recent graduates to stand out.

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