

# COM/365

DEAN'S REPORT 2021

Celebrating four  
decades of the  
Redstone Film Festival

Gary Sheffer lays  
out the PR lessons  
learned in 2020

Faculty and students  
capture the year  
in photos

## GOOD TROUBLE

ANDREA TAYLOR, A STUDENT ACTIVIST AT COM IN THE 1960s, IS NOW  
THE UNIVERSITY'S FIRST SENIOR DIVERSITY OFFICER

# COM by the NUMBERS

## DONORS

14

Endowed Graduate Scholarships

24

Endowed Undergraduate Scholarships

5

Endowed Professorships

1,221

Donors

\$2,016,240

Total Donations

## FACULTY

83

Full-Time Faculty

103

Part-Time Faculty

186

Total Faculty

19

Professors

32

Associate Professors

15

Assistant Professors

14

Master and Senior Lecturers

118

Lecturers and Instructors

## STUDENTS

### Undergraduate Degrees:

- BS in Advertising
- BS in Film and Television
- BS in Journalism
- BS in Media Science
- BS in Public Relations

Total Undergraduate Students:

1,950

## Total Graduate Students:

523

- Emerging Media Studies: **70** (including 14 PhD students)
- Journalism: **72**
- Film and Television: **79**
- Mass Communication, Advertising and Public Relations: **302**



NEW HORIZONS

The world changed in 2020—and COM changed with it. The ultimate disrupter, the pandemic took a tremendous toll on our wellbeing, on our global economies—and on our campus experience. It also served to propel the college forward in many ways.

COVID forced BU to go remote in March. We had just a couple of days to outfit all of the faculty with any needed technology, while they revamped their courses on the fly. Then, faculty and staff worked intensely over the usually quieter summer months to prepare for fall—and the return of students to campus. BU added new tech to the classrooms, provided training for instructors, developed campus health and safety protocols, and adopted the student-centered *Learn from Anywhere* approach for instruction.

At COM, the pandemic also served as a crucible that forged adaptation through innovation, as you'll read in several stories in this issue. Turn to page 12, "2020 Visions," to see how COM photographers captured the year in pictures—streets first emptied by the pandemic and then filled with the Black Lives Matter protests that followed in the wake of the tragic murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. These injustices further fueled our determination to expand COM's existing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts. Under the leadership of Michelle Sullivan (see sidebar on page 24), professor of the practice and our new associate dean of DEI, our DEI committee has updated its goals, welcomed student representatives, conducted a student survey, renewed its focus on recruitment and more. Andrea Taylor ('68), BU's first senior diversity officer and a former member of COM's Dean's Advisory Board, has been a steady source of counsel; you can read about her in "Making BU a Better Place," starting on page 22. To help ensure COM keeps on the right path, I also have formed a new COM DEI Alumni Council. There's so much to be done. I am grateful to all for their support.

Erik Jacobs

Companies are also being reshaped by the crises of 2020, embracing mission-driven purpose and social responsibility. In "Communicating in a Crisis—and After It," on page 26, we learn from Gary Sheffer, the Sandra R. Frazier Professor of Public Relations, how PR needs to be "a conscience of the company."

**AT COM, THE PANDEMIC . . . SERVED AS A CRUCIBLE THAT FORGED ADAPTATION THROUGH INNOVATION.**

As companies wrestled with the impacts of the pandemic, student internships and study abroad experiences vanished. At COM, we wanted to help students continue to get these important learning opportunities. That's how COMLab, the college's first student-led multimedia agency, was born. The program launched in May, with more than 100 students taking part over the summer. "Learning by Doing," on page 18, tells their story. To continue bringing new insights to campus during the pandemic, we also broadened the *COMtalk* digital magazine into a virtual event series featuring our talented alumni; read more about it in "Growing COM's Profile," on page 4.

Even as we're navigating rough seas, it's important to keep an eye on the horizon. So, while faculty and staff juggled the challenges of 2020, we also made the time to complete a new strategic plan, which you can find on page 10. Underpinning our ambitions is COM's essential mission: to build understanding through communication education, practice and discovery. Good communication is vital to the success of any human endeavor. Or—as I like to say—everything is better with COM.

Best,

*Mariette DiChristina*

MARIETTE DICHRISTINA ('86)  
Dean



**Dean**  
Mariette DiChristina ('86)

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with professors and classmates.

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## COVER STORY: MAKING BU A BETTER PLACE

Andrea L. Taylor ('68) was a student activist during the civil rights movement. Amid another moment of national racial reckoning, she returns as the University's first senior diversity officer.

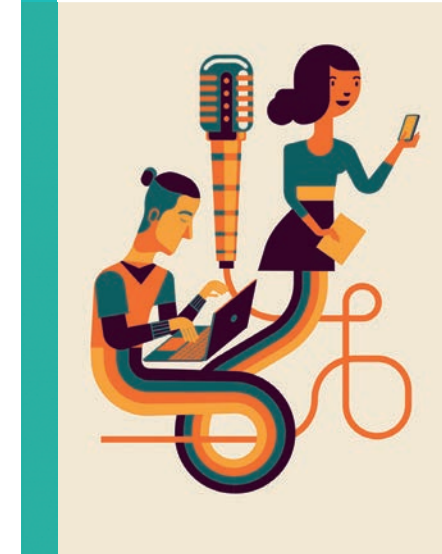
## 2020 VISIONS

When COVID-19 shut down BU and the city around it, and when police killings of Black Americans filled the streets with thousands of protesters calling for racial justice, COM photographers were there.



## LEARNING BY DOING

**18** After the pandemic wiped out most internship opportunities, COM students spent the summer building their own multimedia agency.



## COMMUNICATING IN A CRISIS —AND AFTER IT

**26** Gary Sheffer, the Sandra R. Frazier Professor of Public Relations, talks about corporate communication lessons learned in 2020.



## COM THIS YEAR

**4** In a year of uncertainty, COM thrived, innovating in the classroom and out, planning for the future and celebrating 50 years of independent student journalism.



## TERRIER HEADLINES

**34** From the Oscars to the NBA, politics to the pages of new books, COM alums continue to tell unique stories.



## SHOWTIME

**30** For four decades, the Redstone Film Festival has celebrated COM filmmakers and helped them launch their careers.



## THANKS TO ALL OF YOU

**38** Meet some of the people who contributed to COM's success last year—and see what the students are most thankful for.







## GROWING COM'S PROFILE

COMtalks virtual speaker series takes advice, lessons and thought leadership to global audience

BY ANDREW THURSTON

**How does HBO make binge-worthy programs? What can Black journalists do to avoid burnout? How do you find a job in a recession? What can communicators do to effect social change?**

Since April 2020, the COMtalks virtual speaker series has brought COM's expertise to a global audience, providing a forum for discussions on communication industry challenges and tips for tackling them.

While most of the events pull three or four professionals together to share their stories, lessons and advice, some have been more like fireside chats, such as a conversation between leading entertainment execs Bonnie Hammer (CGS'69, COM'71, Wheelock'75, Hon.'17) of NBCUniversal and Jay Roewe ('79) of HBO. Others have followed a TED Talks approach, with an expert—like Mitchell Zuckoff, the Sumner M. Redstone Professor in Narrative Studies—tackling one topic. The series streams live three Wednesdays each month, typically at 3 pm Eastern, and is archived at [bu.edu/com](http://bu.edu/com).

"We started it as a means for us all to keep engaged during the pandemic, but that's not enough—we had a vision behind it," says Dean Mariette

DiChristina ('86). Although the series came together quickly—launching just weeks after the first COVID-19 lockdowns—it had been in the works since DiChristina joined COM in 2019. "How are we handling the world of today and tomorrow as a communication community? Every single one of the events addresses that challenge. What are we doing at the leading edge?"

Most presenters in the first round of sessions had a COM connection, but the college plans to increasingly engage speakers from across BU and beyond: a business professor on branding research or an epidemiologist on health communications.

"We'd love for these to become not only a resource for students, faculty, staff, parents and alumni, but also a thought leadership piece in the industry," says Kirsten Durocher (CGS'03, COM'05), assistant dean for development and alumni relations. "This series is not just keeping us on the map, but growing our profile."

Even when the world fully opens again—when people cram back into lecture halls and onto international flights—Durocher expects the virtual series will remain a prominent and regular fixture. "I do see them also

being live events," she says, "but we're not going to be able to reach the number of people in person that we could with a virtual webinar."

Durocher says that expanded reach helps the college fulfill a core education mission—taking COM's knowledge to wider audiences. Another benefit to the virtual series: more alums can become involved in the college, regardless of their location or work schedule. Some have watched a session and then volunteered for a future event or found another way to share their time and expertise, whether mentoring students, speaking in classes or offering career advice.

"We have long had a burning desire to help connect alums to students; not just LinkedIn connections, but actual mentoring connections," says DiChristina, who's enjoyed seeing audience members propose collaborative projects in comments and questions. "These virtual events have people meeting each other."

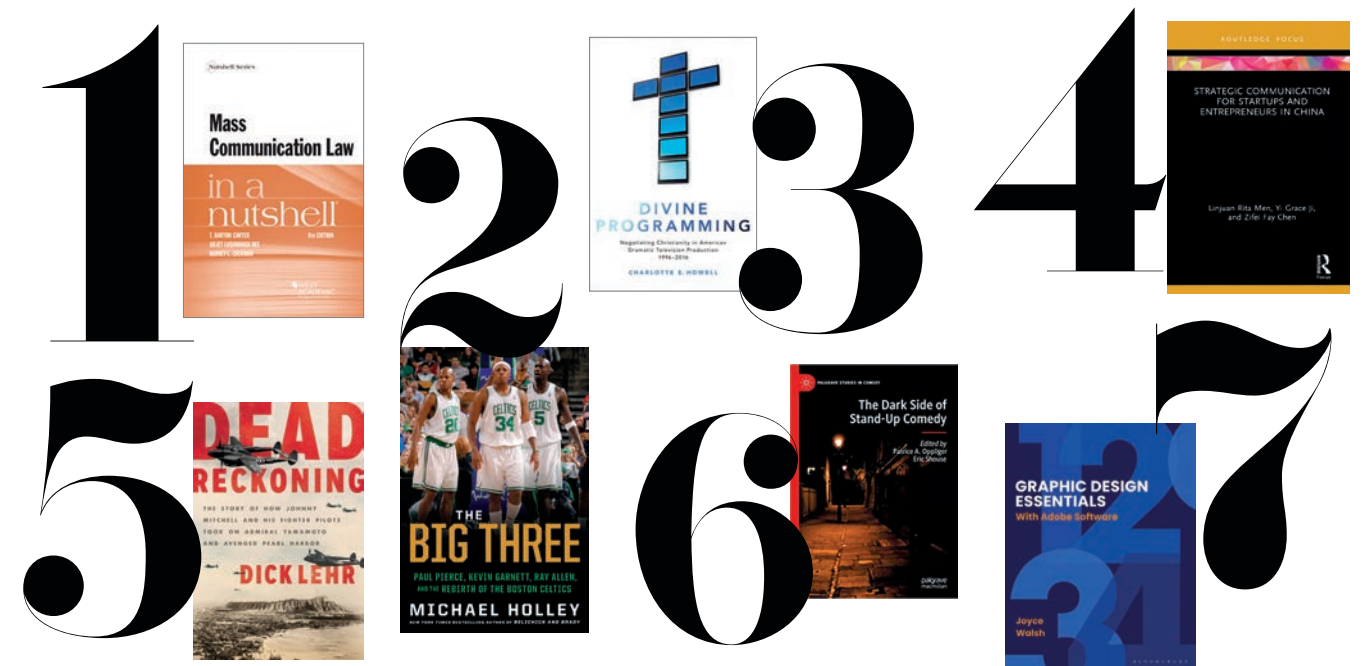
Durocher hopes the series becomes a point of pride for alums—something for them to share with colleagues.

"I want them to feel excited about what BU's doing and to raise their hand, too," she says. "I want people to be loud and proud about being COM." /

## THE FACULTY BOOKSHELF

New titles covering comedy studies, WWII and Christian TV exhibit COM's range

1. **T. Barton Carter** et al., *Mass Communication Law in a Nutshell*, 8th ed. (West Academic Publishing, 2020)
2. **Michael Holley**, *The Big Three: Paul Pierce, Kevin Garnett, Ray Allen, and the Rebirth of the Boston Celtics* (Hachette, 2020)
3. **Charlotte Howell**, *Divine Programming: Negotiating Christianity in American Dramatic Television Production, 1996–2016* (Oxford University Press, 2020)
4. **Yi Grace Ji** et al., *Strategic Communication for Startups and Entrepreneurs in China* (Routledge, 2020)
5. **Dick Lehr**, *Dead Reckoning: The Story of How Johnny Mitchell and His Fighter Pilots Took on Admiral Yamamoto and Averted Pearl Harbor* (HarperCollins, 2020)
6. **Patrice Oppliger** and Eric Shouse, eds., *The Dark Side of Stand-Up Comedy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)
7. **Joyce Walsh**, *Graphic Design Essentials with Adobe Software* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020)



## WELCOME TO COM

Meet the newest members of the faculty

**Yi Grace Ji**, assistant professor of mass communication, advertising and public relations. Ji studies strategic communications and has twice been named a Page Legacy Scholar by the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication. She coauthored the 2020 book *Strategic Communication for Startups and Entrepreneurs in China*.

**Adam Lapidus**, assistant professor, film and television. Lapidus, a screen-

writer and producer, has written episodes of *The Simpsons*, *Who's the Boss* and *Full House*. Recently, he worked on the Netflix series *Team Kaylie* and the Disney show *Bunk'd*.

**Sheila Sitomer**, professor of the practice, film and television. Sitomer spent two decades at ABC where she worked as an executive editor and executive producer for ABC News and served as executive producer for the award-winning daily programs *Inside Edition* and *Extra*.

**Rosalynn Vasquez**, assistant professor of public relations. In more than 15 years of industry experience, working for both corporate and nonprofit organizations, Vasquez developed an interest in corporate social advocacy,

especially related to climate change and issues of gender and diversity.

**Stephanie Worrell**, instructor of advertising and public relations. The founder of Red Sky Strategic Communications and a veteran PR, advertising, marketing and executive coaching consultant, Worrell has more than 25 years of industry experience. Most recently, she served as senior vice president in the global health sector for WE Communications.

**Marni Zelnick**, assistant professor of film and television. An experienced writer, director and producer, Zelnick teaches screenwriting. She wrote and directed the 2014 film *Druid Peak* and was a producer of the 2015 film *The Adderall Diaries*. —Marc Chalufour



## COM FELLOWS FUND INTRODUCED

Program supports student internships and forges relationships with premier media companies



As an intern with the GBH News Center for Investigative Reporting, Isabel Contreras (pictured above) was treated more like a staffer than a student. She collected and analyzed data for stories, and even cowrote an article with Jenifer B. McKim, a senior investigative reporter at GBH, Boston's local NPR station, and a clinical instructor of investigative journalism at COM, about prisoners being ruled eligible to claim stimulus money. The internship became possible when Contreras (CAS'21, COM'21) was chosen to be in the first cohort of students sponsored by the new COM Fellows Fund.

Fellowships, available to COM juniors and seniors, provide students with \$10,000 each to pursue positions that often pay little to nothing. The college is also developing partnerships with leading media and communication organizations, which will reserve internships for fellows.

The funding, Contreras says, offered “a layer of security in incredibly uncertain times.” Besides Contreras, the other inaugural fellows were Chloe Liu ('23), a multimedia journalism intern at Gray Television, and Jennifer Cuciti ('21), a television and podcast intern at America's Test Kitchen.

Patrick Nelson, director of COM Career Services, says that the COM Fellows Fund, which was established by an anonymous alum, will sponsor 10 fellowships in summer 2021.

—Mara Sassoon

## ALL OUT ON ELECTION NIGHT

Despite pandemic, students carried out ambitious coverage

There was nothing normal about the 2020 election. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in strict attendance limits at campaign events and states across the country tallied record early voting. But one thing didn't change: COM students continued to cover contests around the country.

In fact, their 2020 reporting was their most ambitious to date, says BUTV10 adviser Chris Cavalieri ('81), an assistant professor of television. It included three days of coverage, involving approximately 100 students



BUTV10 produced three nights of election coverage in 2020.

reporting on the lead-up to the election and Election Day itself across multiple platforms, including WTBU, COM's Statehouse Program, Boston University News Service (BUNS) and BUTV10.

“Despite the pandemic, students are going all out to provide the kind of thorough journalistic coverage that is critical to a functioning society,” says Dean Mariette DiChristina ('86). “We need that reliable reporting more than ever—and they are delivering.”

That's not to say the pandemic didn't present significant difficulties in coordinating the coverage. Besides the fact that some student reporters weren't physically in Boston for the semester, lockdown measures curbed access to sources. In 2016, BUTV10

had reporters stationed at both Hillary Clinton's and Donald Trump's national headquarters. In contrast, the farthest students traveled on Election Day 2020 was to polling places in Brookline and Copley Square.

At BUTV10, students produced three nights of election reporting. The station's coverage included appearances from BUTV10 alums now working at CBS, CNN and NBC, as well as notable guests like Boston Mayor Marty Walsh and attorney Alan Dershowitz. “Their achievement rate at securing these folks during a pandemic was impressive,” Cavalieri says.

For many students, election week coverage was the culmination of months of reporting. Students enrolled in the Statehouse Program, which funnels their reporting on Beacon Hill to local news outlets, were on the politics beat all semester. Their coverage included stories on staffing of polling places, the mechanics of early voting and social media's role in polarizing the election.

Their work appeared in local newspapers throughout the state, then on the BUNS website.

WTBU also produced months of coverage, with journalists working remotely from all over the country. WTBU news director Griffin Buch ('21) says there were clear advantages to working with a spread-out group. “I had two team members in Miami providing great swing-state coverage from the ground there and sending it back to Boston.”

“The students are undaunted, resourceful and creative beyond anything I could have imagined,” says Anne Donohue ('89), an associate professor of journalism and WTBU faculty adviser. —Alene Bouranova

## WITH HONORS

Advertising students and BUTV10 collect more awards

Advertising students had 10 projects honored by The One Club at its annual Young Ones Student Awards. COM collected one of the award show's signature gold pencils—Yue (Yvonne) Wang ('21) and Ruijie (Mia) Lin ('21) for “Open to Share,” a campaign for Lay's potato chips—as well as one silver pencil, two bronze pencils and six merit awards. Collectively, COM placed fourth overall in the international competition. Alex Chapman ('20) and Henry Kruell ('19) received a gold cube in The Young Ones ADC competition for their “The Beauty In Between” poster campaign for Amtrak; the Art Directors Club (ADC) awards were celebrating their 100th anniversary in 2020.

BUTV10 received four New England Emmy awards and one Telly Award. Their awards included first-place College/University Emmies for Newscast (*Primary Focus 2020*, produced by Naba Khan ('20), Sydney Hager ('20), Riley Villiers ('21); directed by Guy Jackson ('20)) and Sports—Live Event (Boston University Basketball, directed by Anna Gregoire ('20); associate producers Nicholas McCool (CAS'20, COM'20), Jacob Lintner (CAS'21, COM'21), Allie Rock ('21)); and honorable mentions for College/University Long Form—Non-fiction (*On That Point*, produced by McCool, Armand Manoukian (CAS'21, COM'21); directed by Villiers) and Magazine Program (*Amber*, produced by Jinghan Zhang ('19) and Sylvia Yang ('19)). The *Primary Focus* team also received a bronze Telly in the Television General—Student category.



Lauryn Allen photographed Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) greeting supporters during her presidential campaign.

COM photojournalists received six student awards given out in the Boston Press Photographers College Contest, including first place in the News category for Lauryn Allen ('22) and first place in the Portrait category for Paola Poventud Escoriaza ('21).

Noah Cavicchi ('21) received first prize in the Arthur W. Page Society's and Institute for Public Relations' annual Student Case Study Competition, for his project “Major League Soccer: Social Consciousness or Social Contentiousness.”

The New England Society of Professional Journalists awarded Andres Picon ('20) with its first-place scholarship. The award recognized his accomplishments as a former editor at the *Daily Free Press* and his role as a research assistant for the *Boston Globe's* Spotlight investigative team.

Director Derin Kiyak ('17; '20) and producer Songxin Xie ('20) received first prize for best film at COM's 40th Redstone Film Festival for *Off Beat*.

Jiaxi Wu ('22) received a \$100,000, two-year research fellowship from the American Heart Association's Tobacco Center for Regulatory Sciences to study how social media is used to promote flavored cigars.

As part of a fellowship from Columbia University, Se Jin Paik ('23) will study journalism ethics in the algorithm age.

PRLab was a finalist for Best Student Campaign for their PRoBono 2019 project, at *PRWeek's* 2020 Purpose Awards.

*His Last Game*, a short film written by Debbie Danielpour, an assistant professor of film, won the Jury Top Prize for Ancestral Drama at the Online New England Film Festival.

Michelle Johnson, associate professor of the practice, journalism, received an alumni award from Columbia Journalism School. Johnson, a former editor at the *Boston Globe*, helped that paper launch boston.com in the 1990s. At BU, Johnson oversees the BU News Service.

Patrice Opliger, assistant professor of communication, was elected president of the International Society of Humor Studies, which is dedicated to the advancement of humor research and publishes *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*.

Lei Guo, assistant professor of emerging media studies, and Chris Wells, associate professor of emerging media studies, were named founding members of BU's Faculty of Computing and Data Sciences. The new multidisciplinary unit will eventually be housed in BU's Center for Computing and Data Sciences, scheduled to open in 2022.

*PRWeek* honored COM with a second-place award in the Outstanding Education Program category at its annual awards ceremony, the college's

highest place ever in the competition.

Two COM publications received CASE (Council for Advancement and Support of Education) District I awards. *COMtalk* received gold for best web-based magazine while *COM/365* received gold in the annual report category. —M.C.





## FREEP TURNS 50

**BU's newspaper celebrates a half century of student journalism**

On May 6, 1970—two days after student protesters were shot by the Ohio National Guard at Kent State University—Charles Radin ('71) published the first edition of the *Daily Free Press*. That inaugural single-page issue reported on Boston University's decision to close dorms and cancel both final exams and Commencement in the face of campus protests across the country.

In May 2020, BU's independent student newspaper celebrated its 50th birthday amid another historic campus closure, this one due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In both cases, the student reporters and editors tackled challenging stories that had broad social impacts extending well beyond Comm Ave (to see some of the paper's 2020 coverage of Black Lives Matter protests, turn to page 12). In the 50 intervening years, the *FreeP*, as it's affectionately known, has covered countless triumphs and tragedies, navigated repeated financial hardships and sparred with BU's administration, establishing itself as one of the top college papers around—most recently winning the New England Newspaper & Press

Association's 2019 College Newspaper of the Year.

The paper's real legacy, though, is the many journalism careers it has launched, with alums going on to jobs at the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, NBC News and many other outlets. Two-time Pulitzer Prize winner Don Van Natta ('86) of ESPN remembers his four years at the *FreeP* fondly. "A big appeal of Boston University was the opportunity to work on a daily student newspaper," he says. "It was an intensive and very public way to learn on the job, getting the reps you need to become a professional reporter and editor. Our mistakes—and we made plenty—were on display every day for the entire campus community. And so we learned the hard way the importance of rigorous reporting, clear writing and meticulous fact-checking." —M.C.

## QUIET ON SET

**Student-run production company adjusts amid COVID-19**

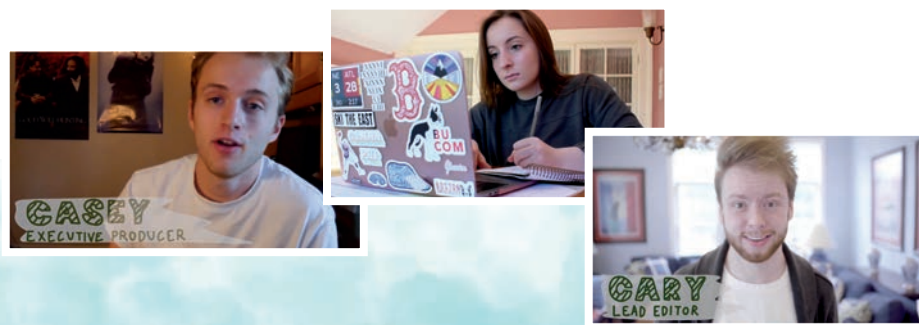
Garland Waller began 2020 with a fun idea for the final section of her television production class—the last she'd teach before retiring. Her students would produce a pilot for a reality fashion competition

show—with contestants designing wardrobes from thrift store finds—called *Thrift Off*. Then, with locations scouted and contestants cast, COVID-19 shut down filming and left the class without a project.

Waller, an assistant professor, has taught the class, which is called *Hot-house Productions* and puts students in charge of their own production company, for 20 years. Past clients have included Boston Children's Hospital, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in the Media and a range of nonprofits and schools. But with her final team of students scattered to their respective homes, Waller and her class had to come up with a new project from scratch: so they turned their cameras around to document their own predicament.

"It was kind of a wild ride," says Casey Spillane ('21), who had been the executive producer on *Thrift Off* before switching gears to produce *Still Students: A Semester in Quarantine*, a 15-minute documentary.

To spark some creativity, Spillane and director Hailey Hart-Thompson (CAS'21, COM'21) encouraged each member of the class to focus on a different topic, like how they felt about being in quarantine or how they coped with the major shift in their



Facing page: BU Photo (upper left); Courtesy of Still Students (lower right); This page: Cjdney Scott



Hannah Schweitzer (right) and Hailey McKee (left) led the student-run public health campaign *F\*ck It Won't Cut It*.

lives. But as the pandemic worsened, the production team faced another difficult question: With all of the suffering going on in the world, was their film too focused on their own privileged positions?

"It was about 'we don't get to have a senior year' and 'we don't get to see our friends,' while the death toll was rising every day," Spillane says. Some in the class wanted to add more context to the film, others felt they couldn't please everyone with the finished product. In the end, they wove news footage and audio throughout, providing a backdrop for their own story of a semester interrupted.

Waller was impressed with how her class responded to their situation. "They captured the sadness and the determination to keep going," she says. "They made something happen." —Rusty Gorelick

## GOING VIRAL

**Student-led campaign designed to shock—and inform—about COVID-19**

BU students who returned to campus in the fall were reminded in a not-very-subtle way about just what was expected of them when it came to masks, social distancing, testing and other precautions. "F\*ck It," a student-led public health campaign warned them, "Won't Cut It."

Through TikTok videos, Instagram

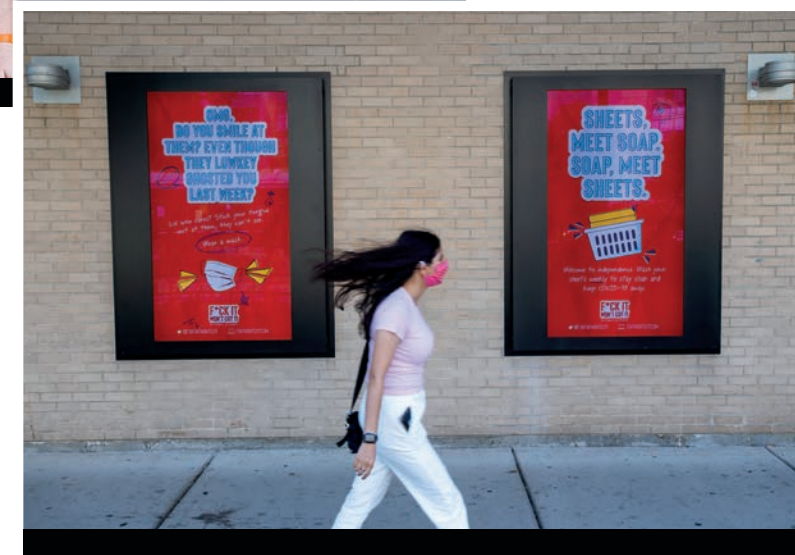
posts and infographics, *F\*ck It Won't Cut It* communicated an urgent reality: that if the entire student body didn't take COVID-19 preventive measures seriously,

campus life would cease to exist. It also aimed to dispel misconceptions, and answer questions, about responsible partying and dating that students might not have felt comfortable talking about with their parents or professors.

The project was a first-ever joint effort between students in AdLab and PRLab, and yes, the campaign title was meant to shock people, says Hannah Schweitzer ('21), president of AdLab. "If you bring home groceries, you might say, 'F\*ck it' to wiping them down, but... these small lapses could have dire effects."

Hailey McKee ('21), PRLab account director, says the campaign came at a crucial time. "Nationally, there is a space for young people to flip the narrative and show that they are smart and taking coronavirus precautions seriously," she says.

The team of eight students began working on the project in June, when University administrators asked them to create a viral campaign. They held



focus groups with campus student leaders, asking for their feedback, then pitched different iterations of their work to the offices of the dean of students, the president and the provost. "We know it's a bold approach, we know it's different, but they are showing they value student voices and creativity," McKee says.

Public health and PR experts have taken notice. In December the group spoke at a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention webinar for university administrators and health staff. And they're a finalist, alongside four professional campaigns, for Best in Community Relations at the annual *PRWeek Awards* in March.

Although the campaign took a lighthearted approach, McKee wants to reassure everyone that the students recognized that this is a serious issue. "We do not take this issue lightly, even if you see a fun graphic or funny tweet," she says. "It's a dialogue we need to have." —Amy Laskowski



# THE FUTURE OF COM

## College unveils a new strategic plan to position itself as a leader across communication fields

As the editor in chief at *Scientific American* and an executive of its publisher, Springer Nature, Mariette DiChristina led the development of several strategic plans. Her goal each time: listen, learn and emerge with a list of actionable items. “It’s the community that you serve that knows the answers, and the best leaders give that community a way to shape their ideas and move forward productively,” she says.

When she began her new job as dean of COM in August 2019, DiChristina (’86) wanted to apply the same approach to developing a strategic plan for the college. One year later, COM had an approved plan in place, with five strategic themes closely aligned with Boston University’s broader strategic plan, and a reimagined mission statement:

*We build understanding through communication education, practice and discovery.*

*We prepare students to adapt to change and share their voices in a transformational media world.*

*We generate knowledge through research and theory building.*

*We integrate professional and academic experiences across communication disciplines.*

*We nurture a culture rich in diversity, critical thinking and creative expression.*

*We champion communication grounded in authenticity, effectiveness and purpose.*

“The key to a better future is great communication,” DiChristina says. “And COM is uniquely and ideally positioned to help with that.”—M.C.



# 1

## Create a **VIBRANT ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE** by updating instruction and embracing innovation

We will: Update our curricula to embrace diverse perspectives as well as leading-edge media technologies • Enhance our writing programs, a cornerstone for communicators everywhere • Work with BU partners to offer new online and residential master’s programs and certificate programs • Work with BU’s innovation hubs to provide new research opportunities

# 2

## Enhance creation of **RESEARCH THAT MATTERS** by focusing on communication areas that will help society engage with challenges

We will: Address mediated societal challenges and enhance public engagement by identifying and explaining communication problems in research • Conduct collaborative research—within COM, between COM and other BU faculties, and between COM and outside scholars—to advance sound communication practices

# 3

## Engage communities globally by developing **COM THOUGHT LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES** and new learning opportunities

To help change the world for good, we will: Explore the possibility of developing a Center for Impact Communication • Develop purpose-driven initiatives that include advancing urban sustainability, elevating the voices of underrepresented groups in media and fostering media literacy • Develop platforms for thought leadership, including virtual and live events, innovative polling and new kinds of publications • Look for opportunities to grow COM’s global presence, including study abroad programs, relationships with other colleges and international research initiatives

# 4

## Cultivate a **COM culture that EMBRACES AND BENEFITS FROM DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION**

We will: Support challenged students—international and domestic—with coaching and mentoring • Improve our recruitment of a diverse faculty and staff and provide them with new kinds of training as needed • Ensure equity in our operational practices

# 5

## Develop **COM communities for faculty, staff, students and alumni that PROVIDE BIG OPPORTUNITIES** yet also feel approachable and small

We will: Develop programs to engage alumni networks for prospective students, current students and alumni • Enhance staff efficiency and retention by developing training, retreats and a culture of continuous improvement • Explore ways to enhance our internal communications and collaborations through an intranet or similar platform



# 2020 VISIONS

COVID-19 EMPTIED BOSTON'S  
STREETS. PROTESTS FOR  
RACIAL JUSTICE FILLED THEM.  
SEE HOW COM PHOTOGRAPHERS  
DOCUMENTED A TURBULENT YEAR.

Photography by  
LAURYN ALLEN, EDWARD BOCHES, CAITLIN FAULDS and ANGELA YANG

## TWO STORIES DOMINATED SPRING 2020.

In March, the coronavirus pandemic shut businesses and schools around the world—BU among them—leaving city streets empty as people isolated in their homes. Then, in the wake of a series of new police killings of Black Americans, including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, massive international protests demanding racial justice broke out. COM photographers documented it all.

Edward Boches ('76), professor of the practice, advertising, began taking black-and-white pictures of Boston's empty streets in mid-March, gradually compiling them in a project he calls "Somewhere Along the Curve." (The entire project can be viewed at [bochesphotography.com](http://bochesphotography.com).)

"It almost looks fake, it looks like a movie set," Boches says. "When we see these places with no people in them, we see them very, very differently. The photos work that way for me—I see the city that I live in, that I love and hang out in, in a very different way."

When Black Lives Matter protests were planned for Boston in early June, Angela Yang ('23) faced her first big decision as editor-in-chief of the *Daily Free Press*. The student-run paper historically hasn't been published during the summer. "This summer, we published almost every day," she says. Yang, along with other students from the paper and the BU News Service, a multimedia student journalism site, spent days documenting the protests. "Photojournalists have a really important job, just being there to observe," Yang says. "You get to see history unfold in front of you."

The work of Boches, Yang, Lauryn Allen ('21) of the *Daily Free Press* and Caitlin Faulds ('21) of BU News Service tells a dramatic story of Boston in 2020.—*Marc Chalufour and Joel Brown*





A pedestrian in full PPE (personal protective equipment) on Comm Ave. Photo by Edward Boches



Boston University's West Campus and Comm Ave are abandoned the week after students were sent home in March. Photo by Edward Boches



Medical workers protest in front of the Massachusetts Statehouse in downtown Boston in May. Photo by Lauryn Allen



A Boston police officer watches protesters march down Tremont Street. Photo by Caitlin Faulds





A hotel worker walks toward work down an empty Boston alley. Photo by Edward Boches



Caution tape keeps people away from a carousel on the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston. Photo by Edward Boches



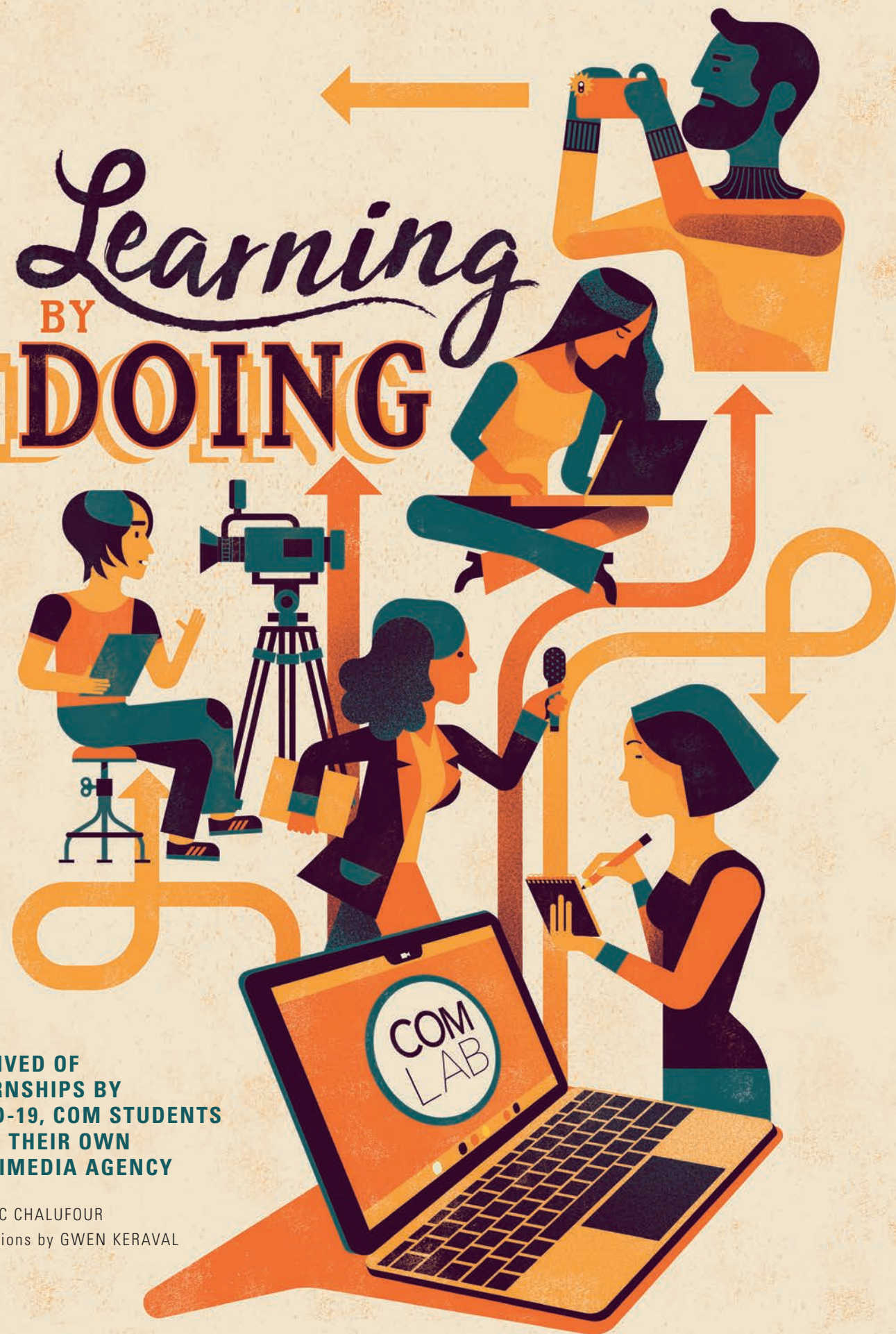
Protesters chant "I can't breathe" and "Who do you protect?" in front of a Boston police station in the Back Bay. Photo by Lauryn Allen



Following a march in honor of George Floyd, protesters lay down in front of a Boston police station in Jamaica Plain. Photo by Angela Yang



# Learning BY DOING



**DEPRIVED OF  
INTERNSHIPS BY  
COVID-19, COM STUDENTS  
BUILT THEIR OWN  
MULTIMEDIA AGENCY**

By MARC CHALUFOUR  
Illustrations by GWEN KERAVAL

## BY EARLY APRIL 2020, PATRICK CHATELAIN HAD SETTLED IN AT HIS PARENTS' HOME ON LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK, TO FINISH THE ACADEMIC YEAR ONLINE.

BU had switched to remote learning a few weeks earlier, in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, but Chatelain ('22) held out hope that he'd still be able to travel to Australia for a summer internship with the Sydney Film Festival. Tallulah Bark-Huss ('21) was also at home, in Chicago, wondering about her study abroad and internship program in London.

Across COM, students counting on summer internships for professional experience faced the uncertainty of what the coming months held. But as COVID-19 continued to spread, one program after another was cancelled and international travel shut down. COM staff and faculty saw a problem developing: many students needed those internships to fulfill graduation requirements.

"We asked ourselves: What can we do to help? What can we do to provide a remote work experience that would help students not just to survive, but to thrive?" says Dean Mariette DiChristina ('86). "We wanted to, whenever possible, find ways to turn today's challenges into learning opportunities."

By mid-May, the framework of a solution was ready: COMLab, a student-run multimedia startup. Peer-led and peer-mentored teams imagining and producing content of all forms, including advertising, public relations, film and journalism.

### **AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAD COME**

At the core of the COMLab concept was the idea that students wouldn't be working for outside clients but rather with COM as their client and audience—freeing them to get creative. "The biggest challenge was convincing the



**“COMMUNICATION MEDIA HAVE NEVER BEEN SO INTEGRATED. THE SKILLS OF BEING ABLE TO TELL GOOD STORIES USING MULTIPLE PLATFORMS CAN BE—AND ARE—APPLIED TO MULTIPLE CAREER OPTIONS.”**

MARIETTE DICHRISTINA



students that this was their media startup—to be what they wanted it to be,” says Dustin Supa, a senior associate dean and associate professor of public relations, who was the main architect of the program.

From that introductory meeting in May to a virtual launch party on July 23, when their website, bucomlab.com, went live, COMLab took shape. Students split into four divisions: enterprise communication, news and information, performance and entertainment (directed by Chatelain), and engagement and strategy (directed by Bark-Huss). They formed teams and developed project ideas. They built the website and designed a logo. Among their projects were podcasts, streaming shows, news stories and PR campaigns.

That first wave of projects was as varied as BU Thrive, a high school outreach program designed to connect BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) students in the Boston Public School system with students at BU, and an interactive online fiction game that plays out like a Choose Your Own Adventure novel. *COM as You Are*, an entertainment podcast, covered topics like sports in the Black Lives Matter era and transgender representation in media. And the students behind *Keep COM and Cook With Us* produced a cooking show, teaching viewers how to make seafood pasta and egg tofu with shrimp and noodles from their own kitchens.

“College students do amazing things when you take the constraints away from them,” Supa says. “People wanted to create things that had nothing to do with their majors. They went so far afield of their comfort zones, which I think is awesome.”

COMLab participants also met for a weekly class with Supa, DiChristina and members of the COM staff, and they were often joined by special guest speakers, including Nancy Dubuc ('91), CEO of Vice; Jay Roewe ('79), a senior vice president at HBO; and Steve Barrett, the US editor-in-chief of *PRWeek*. Bark-Huss was struck by something that Dubuc told the group. “She talked about how what we were doing in the summer was turning an obstacle into an advantage. We were all in this sucky situation and we could make the best out of it.”

All of that was made possible with funding from the college and donors, including Nathaniel Dalton (LAW'91), a member of the BU Board of Trustees.

#### LOOKING AHEAD

With students now back on the BU campus, what the future holds for the virtual media startup remains to be seen. COMLab's first cohort set a high bar for creativity, says Supa, and they will continue collaborating through the spring semester at least.

**“COLLEGE STUDENTS DO AMAZING THINGS WHEN YOU TAKE THE CONSTRAINTS AWAY FROM THEM. PEOPLE WANTED TO CREATE THINGS THAT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THEIR MAJORS. THEY WENT SO FAR AFIELD OF THEIR COMFORT ZONES, WHICH I THINK IS AWESOME.”**

DUSTIN SUPA



They also take pride in making something from nothing. Chatelain pushed aside the disappointment of missing out on a summer in Sydney, where he would've worked on movie scripts, and embraced the COMLab opportunity. “I've never been around for the launch of a new program,” he says. “How often can a person say, ‘I was part of a media startup?’”

Bark-Huss says the experience was even better than what she missed out on in London because of how valuable remote work skills quickly became. “It's such a different landscape now,” she says. “Now I have those skills and I translated that into cover letters and my résumé.” In September, she started a remote internship with a production company based in Los Angeles.

After its trial run, Supa hopes that COMLab continues to grow and, perhaps, eventually will turn into an interdisciplinary hub for collaboration between COM's student media organizations, AdLab, BU News Service, BUTV10, PRLab and WTBU—something he has long envisioned and that helped spark the idea for COMLab.

“We have all of these great independent media organizations within COM, which are really good training grounds for students to learn,” says Supa. “They have their own histories and they win awards—but there's nothing that brings them together to do it from a modern media business perspective.” COMLab, he hopes, can fill that gap.

“Communication media have never been so integrated. The skills of being able to tell good stories using multiple platforms can be—and are—applied to multiple career options,” says DiChristina. “COMLab, as a student-run, startup integrated media operation, has given students a chance to experiment and grow in ways that will give them a leg up after graduation.” /



# MAKING BU A BETTER PLACE



ALUM ANDREA TAYLOR COMES FULL CIRCLE,  
RETURNING TO HER ALMA MATER TO LEAD DIVERSITY,  
EQUITY AND INCLUSION EFFORTS

By MARA SASSOON  
Photos by DOUG LEVY

## ON APRIL 24, 1968,

A FEW WEEKS AFTER MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S ASSASSINATION, ANDREA L. TAYLOR AND MEMBERS OF UMOJA, BOSTON UNIVERSITY'S BLACK STUDENT UNION, OCCUPIED AN ADMINISTRATION BUILDING ON BAY STATE ROAD.

Hundreds of students joined, refusing to leave until their demands were met. Those demands, writes Kathleen Kilgore in the book *Transformations: A History of Boston University*, included extending the admissions deadline—which by then had passed—for Black students, creating a center to help Black students adjust to BU, and recruiting 100 more Black students by providing full financial aid. Arland Christ-Janer, BU's president at the time, agreed to honor each of those requests.

"It was quite an interesting time on campus," says Taylor ('68). "And in some ways, it's not very much different than today, where students also have expectations of their educational institutions and are not shy about making those requests known. It's very encouraging to see that young people at this moment in time in our history are taking action. This is what young people do. They are at the center of social change in their communities, and they have agency and are willing to take risks. They have a perspective that people sometimes underestimate and overlook."

But not Taylor. A civil rights veteran, former journalist and a voice for change, Taylor has never underestimated or overlooked students and anyone else calling for equity and social justice. In August 2020, against a backdrop of social unrest marked by protests against racism and police brutality against Black people, she was appointed the University's

first senior diversity officer. More than 50 years after she occupied the administration building as a young activist, Taylor has returned to her alma mater to lead efforts to strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives for students, alumni, faculty and staff. "It's not an easy task, and there will be some tough conversations, but I'm glad we've started down a path where there's no going back," she says. "These efforts are something that all of us in the BU community need to engage in to make the University a better place."

### A BUDDING ACTIVIST

Eight of Taylor's family members, including her parents, also graduated from BU. Her parents, Della Brown Taylor Hardman (CFA'45) and Francis Taylor, Sr. (CFA'56), had grown up in segregated West Virginia, where, at the time, people of color were barred from applying to local graduate schools. But they learned that northern graduate programs would allow them to apply and both wound up at BU.

Taylor's uncle, Willard Brown (LAW'35,'36), went on to become the first Black judge in West Virginia and was the president of the state's NAACP chapter from 1950 to 1966. "He was able to become a real advocate for civil rights in his community. He brought legal action to desegregate libraries, restaurants and other public accommodations," she says. When Taylor was 16, she accompanied him to the March on



## EXPANDING DEI INITIATIVES AT COM

In 2017, COM formed a committee composed of faculty, staff and students to improve its culture of equity and inclusion. The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee is a 19-member group currently led by Michelle Sullivan, associate dean of diversity, equity and inclusion. In the fall, it included an undergraduate student representative, Nyema Wilson ('21), and a graduate student representative, Olayinka Sarayi ('21).

Sullivan ('95), a professor of the practice, advertising, says the committee is focused on hosting events that cover diversity issues in the communication fields, inviting more diverse speakers to COM events, recruiting more diverse faculty and staff and revising the curriculum to incorporate more diverse and global points of view.

Lei Guo, an assistant professor of emerging media studies and a member of the committee, conducted a quantitative study during the spring and summer of 2020, surveying students about COM's DEI climate. The committee has been using results from that study to help shape its initiatives. For the 2020–2021 academic year, for instance, COM revamped the language it uses in its course syllabi to be more inclusive and supportive.

Alumni are also contributing to COM's DEI efforts. Cleveland O'Neal ('78), the founder and CEO of the production and distribution company Connection III Entertainment, established the Cleveland O'Neal III Scholarship Fund in 2015 to support Black students or underrepresented minority graduate students enrolled in COM's Media Ventures Program.

When Mark Walton ('76) received a letter from the college in 2018, he was struck by a quote from an African American alumna about how the college was diversifying. Walton, president of sales and marketing for Lilly Broadcasting's One Caribbean Television, decided to establish the Jonathan Walton Memorial Graduate Student Financial Aid Fund, named after his late son, who had attended BU. The fund provides an annual scholarship of \$2,500 to a graduate student from an underrepresented minority group. A stipulation of the scholarship is that recipients write about their experiences and observations concerning diversity, equity and inclusion at COM and in the communication industry in general and share those reflections with Sullivan. Walton hopes those observations will facilitate change.

Walton is also recruiting fellow alumni to join COM's efforts. A small group met with Sullivan and Andrea L. Taylor, the University's senior diversity officer (see full story), in the fall to discuss how to better forge connections between alumni and students of color. That meeting led to the formation of the COM DEI Alumni Council.

"I think that there's room to grow here," says Walton. "I think we can really focus our efforts on helping with faculty recruitment, connecting with students and shaping the curriculum. At the end of the day, every little bit we can do makes a difference, and when it's coordinated, then it can actually bring about some real substantive change." /

Washington, where King (GRS'55, Hon.'59) delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

"It was an amazing thing, to stand in solidarity with 250,000-plus other people from across the US who were protesting in a nonviolent, peaceful manner for equity, civil rights and social justice," Taylor says. "I was so inspired, and I carried that activism to BU."

The experience, she says, also inspired her career path. "In a way, it set the frame for the activities I've done and the work that I've done professionally, which have given me the opportunity to try to affect social change in various communities."

### FINDING PHILANTHROPY

Taylor, a journalism major, had skipped a job interview with the *Boston Globe* to participate in the occupation of the administration building her senior year. Tensions had come to a head in the wake of King's death, and Taylor, whose four years at BU coincided with the height of the civil rights movement, knew it was the choice she had to make.

The *Globe* let her reschedule her interview, and she landed her first job on the newspaper's city desk, where she covered the desegregation of Boston's schools. She later worked as a producer and on-air host for WGBH and then wrote for the *Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, Ohio. When she gave birth to her first child, she left the workforce to focus on her family.

While raising three children, Taylor was appointed to the board of the Cleveland Foundation, which funds charitable grants to support the local community. "I got to understand a great deal more about how philanthropy can really be used as a tool for social change." The experience paid off when, two decades after leaving the *Plain Dealer*, she was ready to find a job. "I was divorced and my children were grown," she says, "and I was looking for opportunities quite broadly."

Her work on the board led to a position with the Ford Foundation in New York City in 1988. She helped launch and manage the foundation's Media Fund, which supported projects that told the stories of people traditionally underrepresented in the media. One project she raised funds for was the award-winning *Eyes on the Prize*, a 14-part documentary series that premiered on PBS in 1987. "It was special because it told the story of the civil rights movement from the point of view of the people on the ground at the time, the ordinary people who organized, marched and fought for civil rights," she says.

In 2006, Taylor became director of citizenship and public affairs for Microsoft, where she helped develop an outreach and education program that provided underserved populations with technology skills to improve their job prospects. Taylor, who was named a BU Trustee in 2009 (she relinquished the position upon becoming senior diversity officer), left Microsoft in 2014 and the following year was tapped to serve as CEO of Alabama's Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, a museum and research center. It was one of many full-circle moments in her career—in Birmingham, she encountered many activists who had been featured in *Eyes on the Prize*.



The museum includes a multimedia exhibit featuring interviews with people involved in the civil rights movement in Birmingham. "Even though I haven't practiced traditional journalism in a while," Taylor says, "I carry those skills and have followed that impulse to tell stories, and to help highlight, through philanthropy and education, the voices of ordinary people who are often overlooked, but who make up a significant part of the change and innovation in various communities."

### BACK TO BAY STATE ROAD

Taylor's philanthropic work has carried over to BU. She has created the Andrea L. Taylor Family Scholarship Fund, which provides annual need-based scholarships to undergraduate students at COM and the College of Fine Arts. "I wanted to make a commitment as a real demonstration of support for what BU has meant to my family in terms of educational opportunity and access to education," she says.

Taylor also considered the opportunities she and her family members received at BU when she accepted the role of senior diversity officer. "I'm excited about this moment for BU, with this genuine interest and investment in focusing on diversity and inclusion," she says. "Ever since our founding, we have been open to students regardless of race and gender. We know that the more diverse the inputs, the

**"I'M EXCITED ABOUT THIS MOMENT FOR BU, WITH THIS GENUINE INTEREST AND INVESTMENT IN FOCUSING ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION. . . WE KNOW THAT THE MORE DIVERSE THE INPUTS, THE STRONGER AND MORE EFFECTIVE THE OUTCOMES WILL BE."**

—ANDREA TAYLOR

stronger and more effective the outcomes will be."

Taylor reports directly to President Robert A. Brown and is working with fellow University leaders, including Crystal Williams, vice president and associate provost for community and inclusion, and Ibram X. Kendi, the founding director of BU's Center for Antiracist Research and the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities.

One of Taylor's initial efforts as senior diversity officer was supporting the establishment and staffing of a Diversity & Inclusion Committee on the Board of Trustees. Taylor says that the aim is to make sure BU's DEI efforts are "elevated

to great importance and visible at the governance level." Taylor also chairs a new Antiracism Working Group (AWG), composed of more than a dozen faculty and staff members across the University. The AWG is evaluating University policies related to investment, procurement, hiring and communications. "It's thinking about how we present ourselves and how we interact with other organizations. It's much broader than simply hiring more diverse faculty and attracting more students that represent diverse perspectives," Taylor says. She also works with the individual schools and colleges on their efforts, including meeting with COM's own DEI Committee (see sidebar, page 24) to discuss initiatives such as bringing in more diverse speakers and revamping the curriculum to reflect more diverse points of view.

"BU has a large global footprint and so much potential to be a leader in DEI among our peer institutions," Taylor says. "I feel as though I've gone back to the future because here I am again, back on Bay State Road," where she lived in The Towers as a freshman, and where she occupied the administration building as a senior in 1968. "It's quite a privilege to have such a long arc of history with BU, and to be a part of a team here that is really leading into the future, in pursuit of excellence and diversity, for all members of the BU community." /





# COMMUNICATING IN A CRISIS—AND AFTER IT

BEING TIMID ON DIVERSITY WON'T CUT IT AND SPEAKING UP ON SOCIAL ISSUES MEANS ENGAGING WITH THEM: FORMER GE COMMUNICATIONS CHIEF GARY SHEFFER ON THE PR LESSONS FROM OUR TURBULENT TIME

By ANDREW THURSTON  
Photos by JANICE CHECCHIO

## PLENTY OF COMPANIES GOT THEIR MESSAGING VERY WRONG LAST YEAR:

**They sent out emails that ignored the coronavirus pandemic's realities, or tried to cash in on them. They were too slow to speak up on Black Lives Matter, or failed to back their big talk with concrete actions. Many were just the victims of bad timing that ended up looking like bad taste: beach party beer ads airing as lockdowns loomed.**

Gary Sheffer, the Sandra R. Frazier Professor of Public Relations, says the foundations for many communication missteps were laid long before the crises of 2020. For the most part, he says, the companies that flubbed their lines were the ones that had largely outsourced their communications or didn't have a strong, consistent corporate culture. They didn't realize that factors like where their products are made and how diverse their board is say more about them than any press release.

The companies that succeeded remembered one of the communication industry's most important maxims: "You can't go wrong with telling the truth," says Sheffer, formerly the chief communications officer at General Electric and a trustee of the Arthur W. Page Society. "Say what you mean and prove it with action."

That worked for the pharma industry: almost universally disliked before 2020, its "shared dedication to follow the science—given public doubts about the veracity of the vaccine process—was a smart move" and boosted its favorability ratings in the Gallup Poll, a regular survey of public opinion. Likewise for Marc Benioff, CEO of software company Salesforce, who Sheffer says gets that capitalism isn't just about profits, but improving society, too. Early in the pandemic, for instance, Salesforce developed an employee health tracking app to sell to its customers, but also shared a free COVID corporate response playbook and donated 50 million pieces of protective equipment. "In their treatment of their employees during COVID, in their realization that expectations are changing for their responsibility to society and for their willingness to speak up about it, I admire what they've done over the course of this year."

Sheffer spoke with *COM/365* about the impact of 2020 on the public relations business, how companies can speak authentically on social issues, and why there's no room for timidity when it comes to increasing industry diversity.



**“Public relations doesn’t really cover the job these days; the job is, in many ways, to be a conscience of the company. And to be the person that brings the outside world into a company and shows the inside world, the culture, to the world.”  
—Gary Sheffer**



**COM/365:** How has the PR industry been reshaped by the events of 2020? What kinds of agencies will emerge in the strongest position?

**Gary Sheffer:** The ability to turn on a dime is the lesson of 2020. And you can only do that if you know yourself. Companies that got into trouble in 2020 were the ones that didn’t know their own cultures, why they exist—what hole in the universe would exist if their company didn’t. Not knowing makes it all the more difficult to have a conversation that is more human—which these issues were in 2020—and less financial. It’s not navel-gazing. A basic understanding of yourself is really important. Companies have to have what one of my friends calls societal acumen, a broad view of the world and how it impacts their organization and how their organization can impact the world. You have crisis plans, but nobody had a plan for a pandemic that basically shut society down. Being agile, being nimble, requires people and consultants who can help you understand who you are, what your purpose is and what value you bring to society. Because big companies want to be more agile, agencies that are singularly focused on a specialty—financial communications, employee communications—are going to go away, or at least 2020 accelerates the change that they’re going to have to make.

**Will more companies bring more of their communications work in-house?**

The companies who largely outsourced their communication made a big mistake. Those who subsumed communications into a marketing organization—marketing is not communication, and communication is not marketing—diminished

its visibility within the organization and that’s a mistake. If I were a CEO these days, I would want to have my chief communications officer very close to me from a risk and a reputation standpoint, and for this engagement with society that employees and the public are demanding.

When I worked at GE back in the late ’90s, employees never would have said to the CEO, “You better stand up for this or that issue.” Now, employees are standing up and saying, “I don’t like what you’re doing here.” Public relations doesn’t really cover the job these days; the job is, in many ways, to be a conscience of the company. And to be the person that brings the outside world into a company and shows the inside world, the culture, to the world. Public relations is a 100-and-some-year-old phrase for what we do, but it’s not fully descriptive of how we operate at our highest value.

**How do communicators help companies speak authentically on COVID or social issues?**

There’s no one in the organization who has as wide a view of the enterprise and of society as the communicator does. The job of a communicator and a PR professional is really about risk assessments, both from a potential damage standpoint and an opportunity standpoint. And so that’s your job in a C-suite, to say, wait a minute, let’s look at our values, let’s look at our mission, let’s look at everything we do, who we do business with, where we make our products, how we make them, who we support politically—to look at that holistically, see the inconsistencies, and then to navigate and lead that discussion with other members of the C-suite.

**Did 2020 upend any entrenched tenets of public relations?**

The tenet that I want to bust down forever is this idea of a closed enterprise. In other words, you’re very selective about what you disclose to the world, that you only disclose positive things. I believe in radical transparency. If your culture is strong, what are you afraid of by opening up who you are, what you do, why you do it and how you do it to the world? Be unafraid of engaging with the world, meet with critics, know all of your stakeholders, understand them, listen to them—to discover, not to debate.

If you go back 50 years, Milton Friedman made his famous remark about the business of business being business; that’s also one that we need to throw out. Increasingly, society is looking to business to solve big problems. There’s a study just out by Weber Shandwick, a big PR firm, which says that expectations and trust in business are up during this period, because people have lost faith—my interpretation—in other institutions to solve big problems. We have so many social challenges that are worsened by our inability to communicate with each other about the basic

leaders, organizations are; you’ve got to find a catalyst, and in big companies the catalyst is often compensation.

**As well as diversifying their staff, what should companies be doing to make their communications—the images they use, the words they use—more diverse?**

It’s easy to highlight the mistakes, like when clothing retailer H&M put a young Black man in a sweatshirt that said “coolest monkey in the jungle.” I show that to my class and say, this is wrong and they apologized. But how does a product like that get to market and get on this company’s website? And that, to your point, is this understanding of how everything we do would affect people of color. And sensitizing the people who make those kinds of decisions to it.

I’m a 60-year-old white man; it’s awkward sometimes for me to talk about these things in class. And I probably learn more from my students by listening to how they perceive corporate language, how job descriptions are written, whether there are people of color on a leadership team. It is putting yourself in other people’s shoes, actually listening

**“If your culture is strong, what are you afraid of by opening up who you are, what you do, why you do it and how you do it to the world? Be unafraid of engaging with the world, meet with critics, know all of your stakeholders, understand them, listen to them—to discover, not to debate.” —Gary Sheffer**

facts of these issues, whether it’s COVID, climate change or economic inequities. I want to teach more about what a business is for: if you don’t understand that and how it’s changing, you can’t be an effective practitioner.

**The communications industry is overwhelmingly white. What should companies do to change that?**

It’s time to go from having a diversity officer to having a diverse company. First, companies should insist that the consultants they hire are diverse or can demonstrate a clear path to becoming more diverse. You want the best counsel in the world, and the best counsel will only come from those organizations that represent the people you serve. I was just looking at the Zen Group [a global PR agency] and they have their diversity numbers right on the homepage. That kind of transparency is important for the profession.

Moreover, we have to solve for retention. At GE, I ran a big team—at its peak, it was 500 people—and I didn’t have a problem recruiting diverse communicators; I had trouble retaining them. And it was because we didn’t make it a priority to understand that they were experiencing the company differently than maybe some of the rest of us. And I think companies have to base compensation on how diverse

to how they feel about the words and images and everything that represents an organization and factoring that into how you run the place. That’s what I try to teach in my classrooms: that everything a boss does, a company does, is a communication. It’s not just a press release.

**Are a lot of companies scared to wade in on social issues, and on issues around racism and diversity, because of the potential backlash if they get it wrong?**

Yes, companies are timid about it because they might get it wrong. The CEO of Wells Fargo recently said the reason we’re not diverse enough is there’s just not enough people—it’s a pipeline issue. He stepped in it and had to apologize. Other CEOs see things like that and they say, “Well, the best thing for me is to say nothing,” which is absolutely the wrong lesson from that situation. I think you acknowledge it’s awkward. You acknowledge that you have to do better and you’re going to dedicate yourself to understanding how you do better, that we’re on a journey. That kind of authenticity will build trust with external stakeholders, as well as your own people. As long as you can demonstrate you’re on a learning path and an action path to making changes, you’re going to do okay. /



# SHOWTIME

FOR FOUR DECADES, THE REDSTONE FILM FESTIVAL HAS SHOWCASED TOP STUDENT FILMS—AND LAUNCHED CAREERS

By MARC CHALUFOUR

## TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER COMPLETING HIS GRADUATE THESIS FILM, *TRAIN RIDE*, REL DOWDELL STILL REMEMBERS THE THRILL OF SCREENING IT FOR A PACKED AUDITORIUM AS PART OF THE ANNUAL REDSTONE FILM FESTIVAL.

“If you were in the festival, it gave you a certain level of cachet,” he says. “When I was one of the nominees, I told the whole school.” When the festival jury awarded him the top prize, Dowdell ('96) says it gave him the calling card he needed to make valuable connections in the film industry.

For the past four decades, the Redstone Film Festival has provided a platform for the top films made by COM film and television students. In an evening curated by faculty and judged by film experts, undergraduates and graduates get to share their work with peers, professors and friends. “It’s a celebration of that huge communal effort that goes into filmmaking,” says Charles Merzbacher, an associate professor and director of film production programs. “We really run students through

the wringer in producing these films and we want to honor that rigor.”

The festival has helped launch the careers of directors, producers, editors, writers and even Academy Award nominees. And it was all made possible by one of the most powerful figures in film and television.

### A TRANSFORMATIONAL GIFT

BU actually had at least two earlier film festivals. One was named for Maya Deren, an experimental filmmaker whose papers reside in BU’s Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, and another was the International Student Film Festival. They both attracted top talent—Marjorie Short ('77) won both festivals in 1977 with her film *Kudzu*, which also received an Academy Award nomination for best live action short film—but it was a gift from entertainment magnate Sumner M. Redstone that allowed the college to create a marquee event.

By the time Redstone (see page 33 for more on his life and career) arrived at BU to teach entertainment law in 1982, he had already dedicated decades to his family’s business, National Amusements, growing a chain of drive-in movie theaters into the Viacom conglomerate that would eventually include CBS and Paramount Pictures. In 2007, Redstone (Hon.'94) addressed an audience of BU alums at the Paramount studio in California, sharing with them the “singular objective” of his career. “I sought out the best stories, the best songs, the best programs,” he said. “It is this material that reaches and affects the hearts and minds of the people of this world.” Sponsoring a film festival was a natural fit.

With Redstone’s gift, festival organizers were able to gradually grow the event. They hired professional projectionists, recruited expert judges—including representatives from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the *Boston Globe*—and added cash prizes. They expanded into BU’s Tsai Performance Center and rented giant spotlights to scan the sky above Comm Ave on the night of the festival. They also invited BU alums in Hollywood to a Los Angeles screening; Redstone attended in 2006. For several years, a New York City screening was held as well.

“He’s a historical figure, associated with some of the foundational beginnings of the industry,” says Paul





Derin Kiyak ('17,'20) on the set of his film *Off Beat*, which won the 2020 Redstone Film Festival.

Schneider, chair of the department of film and television. “His support was transformational for the department. It put us on the map. It gave a forum to all of the work done by the students and it also really upped the game of the students.”

#### LAUNCHING PAD

Festivals have long played a valuable curatorial role for the film industry. Whether highlighting student productions or elevating independent features, festivals put films in front of discerning—and sometimes decision-making—audiences. In that way, the Redstone Film Festival is not just a forum for students to show their college films, but also a springboard for what will follow.

In 1995, Dowdell had high hopes for *Train Ride*. He’d sought out Emmy-winning actress Esther Rolle, known for the 1970s sitcoms *Maude* and *Good Times*, after a performance at the Huntington Theatre in Boston and convinced her to make a cameo appearance. He’d also cast a young BU student named Russell Hornsby (CFA’96)—most recently acclaimed for his work in *The Hate U Give*—in a lead role. “As a filmmaker, you can take the audience on your own journey as an artist, with the peaks and the valleys of your narrative,” Dowdell says. “When you make the film, there are certain points where you hope it works right—you’re looking for a laugh or a scare or a jump. To see those cues pay off is a rush.”

“Even a fabulously successful filmmaker only spends a tiny bit of his or her life seeing their work up there on a screen with an audience,” Merzbacher says. “It really drives home that film is a performing art in the same way that ballet or the theater is.”



The festival audience responded to Dowdell’s story of three college seniors who get in trouble on the eve of graduation and the Boston jury awarded him top prize. When *Train Ride* was shown again at the Los Angeles screening, George Lilly (CGS’54, COM’56) was among the alums and dignitaries in the audience. The movie made such an impres-

sion on the founder of SJL Broadcasting, which owns television and radio stations in the US and Caribbean, that he reached out to the young filmmaker with an offer to support his next project.

“I was impressed with the quality of Rel’s film, particularly in light of the small budget he had to work with,” Lilly says. “This is not the only time I’ve reached out to young people just getting started in the film, music or broadcast world, but Rel was the first.” With Lilly’s help, Dowdell was able to launch his next project—a feature-length version of *Train Ride* that was released in 2000. Dowdell also wrote and directed the 2012 feature *Changing the Game* and the 2017 documentary *Where’s Daddy?*, which Lilly helped produce.

Other alums of the Redstone Film Festival have gone on to make Hollywood blockbusters. Past winners include Nora Grossman (’05), producer of *The Imitation Game*; Richard Gladstein (CGS’81, COM’83), producer of *The Bourne Identity*, *The Hateful Eight* and *Cider House Rules*; Scott Rosenberg (’85), screenwriter of *Con Air* and *High Fidelity*; Jennifer Getzinger (’90), a director for the television show *Mad Men*; and Josh Safdie (’07), who along with his brother Benny (’08) directed and wrote the critically acclaimed *Uncut Gems*.

#### PUSHED TO THE WEB

A packed theater wasn’t an option for the 2020 festival. BU switched to remote learning in March and the movie industry all but ground to a halt as theaters shut their doors. But the festival carried on in virtual form, streaming the films and award presentations online.

Derin Kiyak (’17;’20) was disappointed not to be able to screen his film, *Off Beat*, for a live

**“[Redstone’s] support was transformational for the department. It put us on the map. It gave a forum to all of the work done by the students and it also really upped the game of the students.”**  
—Paul Schneider

Facing page: John Varkados (Kiyak); courtesy of Derin Kiyak (poster); This page: Lexi Pline (audience); Julie Chen (Redstone)

audience, but glad he got to share it at all given the circumstances. The jury selected his story of a pizza delivery man drawn into the world of competitive ballroom dancing as the winner. “The reason we make films is to share them with an audience, so more than winning the festival, the best part was getting positive feedback,” Kiyak says.

Since winning, he has continued showing the film at other festivals, picking up awards for editing, best student film and best student director. “Momentum can be a critical factor in a festival committee’s admission decision,” Kiyak says. “Previous screenings and awards can legitimize your film and make the difference between getting into really prestigious festivals and barely getting left out.”

Kiyak is early in a process followed by four decades of his Redstone Film Festival predecessors, establishing himself step by step in a challenging industry. A quarter century after his own win, Dowdell still credits his festival experience at COM with launching his career. “Hollywood is such a guarded industry that it’s hard to get past the gatekeepers,” he says. That victory, and the subsequent screening in Los Angeles, gave Dowdell the boost he needed to turn *Train Ride* into a feature. “It’s a beginning step in your journey—you have to really maximize it.” /

An audience watches the 2018 Redstone Film Festival. Due to the coronavirus, the 2020 festival moved online.



## SUMNER REDSTONE (1923–2020)

**To the world at large, Sumner Redstone (Hon.’94) was a self-made, Type A corporate titan. He was chairman emeritus of both CBS and of Viacom, the global mass media company whose networks include MTV, BET, Nickelodeon, Comedy Central and Paramount Pictures. Redstone was once referred to by CNBC as “the boss of everyone’s boss.”**

But to Boston University, the Boston native, who died August 11, 2020, at 97, was first and foremost the living legend who endowed the annual Redstone Film Festival and whose \$18 million gift in 2012 for the School of Law’s renovation and expansion resulted in the christening of the new law school addition with his name.

Redstone is credited with coining the phrase “Content is king,” a philosophy that “infuses two of COM’s signature programs,” says Thomas E. Fiedler (’71), dean emeritus—the Redstone Film Festival and the endowed Sumner M. Redstone Professor in Narrative Studies.

The inaugural Redstone Professor is best-selling author Mitchell Zuckoff, a former *Boston Globe* reporter and finalist for a Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting. “Sumner M. Redstone was a titan who wisely recognized that storytelling was at the heart of his business empire,” Zuckoff says. “By endowing the professorial chair I’m proud to occupy at BU, he ensured that his legacy would include nourishing and enriching generations of storytellers yet to come.”

“I feel a very close relationship with Boston University,” Redstone told *BU Today* in a 2012 interview. He recalled with fondness his three years on the BU LAW faculty, beginning in 1982. He taught the school’s first course in entertainment law.

Asked by CNBC in the 2012 interview what personal weaknesses he could not forgive in people, Redstone responded: patience. “If you’re patient, you’ll never go anywhere,” he said. “It takes impatience to drive you to succeed.” In the same interview, he was asked, “What is your dream?”

“Keep living forever,” said Redstone. “Keep working forever.” —BU Today staff



# TERRIER HEADLINES

Alumni awards, books and the passing of a BU legend

**T**wenty-five years after his life was tragically altered 11 seconds into his first shift for the Boston University hockey team, Travis Roy ('00, Hon.'16), who was left paralyzed from the neck down in that game, died on October 29, 2020. He was 45.

Roy's life after the game on October 20, 1995, was less about being defined by a single moment and more about his strong desire to lead a fulfilling and meaningful life by helping others who suffered similar injuries. His Travis Roy Foundation, established in 1996, has helped more than 2,100 quadriplegics and paraplegics, and awarded nearly \$5 million in grants toward spinal cord research, according to its website.

In 2015, Roy was celebrated in a gala at Agganis Arena by BU and the city of Boston, which declared October 20 "Travis Roy Day." For that 20th anniversary, Roy appeared on ESPN, and the Boston Bruins signed him to a one-day contract. Roy received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters at BU's 2016 Commencement.

"Twenty years ago tonight, I lived out my dream of playing Division I hockey," Roy said at the Agganis gala. "The 11 seconds at Walter Brown Arena playing for Boston University were the best 11 seconds of my life. My work on the

Travis Roy Foundation alongside my friends and family has helped me create a life that is very rich, very much worth living. I feel so loved."

As donations to the foundation arrived from around the country, Roy would often tell stories of those who gave, from the boy who sent him \$7.23 after busting open his piggy bank to the couple who forfeited a honeymoon to send him \$5,000 instead.

"We've lost someone who was so special to so many people, whether you knew him for decades or just met him recently," says Jack Parker (Questrom '68, Hon.'97), who coached BU men's hockey for 40 seasons. "The relationship my family and I had with Travis was unbelievably close. He looked up to me and I looked up to him."

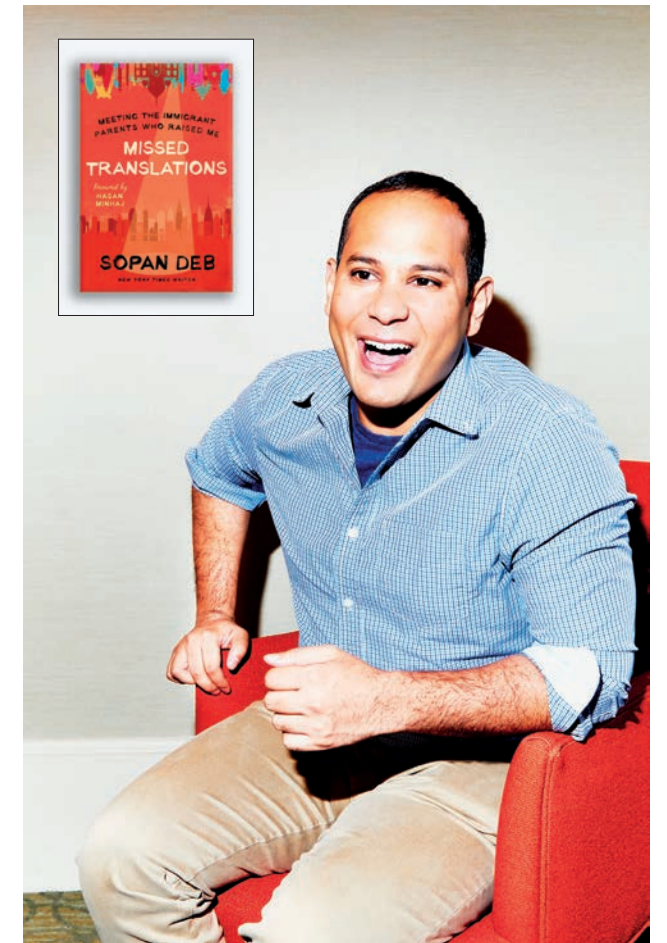
Parker says that after his injury, Roy missed hockey badly and did not think he would ever have anything to get that passionate about again. "But sure enough, he started his foundation and had a much bigger impact than he would have if he was a 20-year NHLer," Parker says. "You'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who could give so much while dealing with an unbelievable handicap. Courage, class, patience and grace. He was a gem." —Doug Most



**Bonnie Arnold ('78)**, producer of the *How to Train Your Dragon* film series, received an Academy Award nomination for animated feature film for the latest installment, *How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World*. She had previously been nominated for *How to Train Your Dragon 2*, in 2015. "The ultimate thing is to win an Oscar, but it's a pretty high honor in my business to be nominated," she said. "I'm completely thrilled."



**Steve Kornacki ('01)** had a busy presidential election week. The political reporter commanded MSNBC's "big board" for days, zooming in and out of battleground states, calculating different scenarios and reeling off the latest electoral returns. Kornacki went on air at 6 am on Election Day and didn't take a break until noon the next day. He was a mainstay on the network for the remainder of the week as results continued to filter in. Social media took notice, with both #TrackingKornacki and #ChartThrob going viral on Twitter.



**"I felt like I was finally at a point in my life where I had space in my heart to make room for my parents."**

As a culture and basketball writer, the *New York Times*' **Sopan Deb ('10)** has interviewed Donald Trump, Stephen Curry and the cast of *Arrested Development*. But for his first book, *Missed Translations: Meeting the Immigrant Parents Who Raised Me* (Dey Street Books, 2020) takes a deep dive into his fraught relationship with his parents, who had a miserable arranged marriage and divorced when Deb was in high school. "I felt like I was finally at a point in my life where I had space in my heart to make room for my parents," Deb says. "So I decided to reach back out to them, and I thought of documenting it in a book, because I really wanted to capture everything as I was experiencing it."

This page: Jackie Ricevanti; Racing page: Photo by Mike Pecci, illustration courtesy of DreamWorks Animation (Arnold); Courtesy of NBC (Kornacki); Amy Lombard (Deb); Richard Ligeines (Missed Translations)



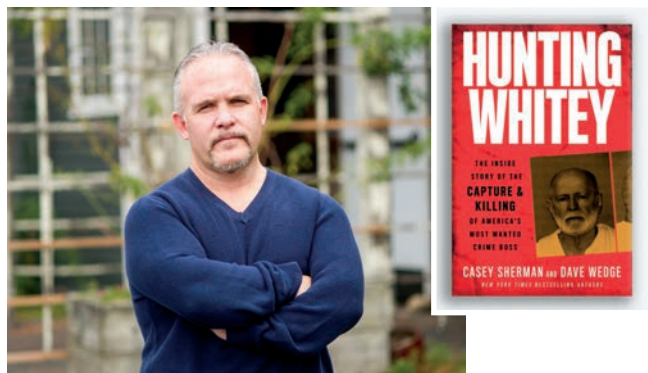


When the NBA took its final 2020 regular season and playoff games to “the bubble” in Orlando, Fla.—isolating 22 teams to keep them safe during the COVID-19 pandemic—one of the challenges was making the games, played in an empty arena, sound as real as possible. Enter **Carlton Myers ('94)**, vice president of live production and entertainment at NBA Entertainment, who led the production team in charge of simulated crowd sounds in the arena. “A lot of players draw energy from the crowd and from the environment,” Myers says. “Imagine you hit a big shot and nothing happens. It might not feel the same. We wanted to try to re-create that energy for them.”

*“A lot of players draw energy from the crowd and from the environment. Imagine you hit a big shot and nothing happens. It might not feel the same. We wanted to try to re-create that energy for them.”*

Courtesy of the NBA (Myers); Cjdney Scott (Sherman); Courtesy of HarperCollins (Hunting Whitey); Courtesy of Michael Grecco (Grecco); Courtesy of Abrams (Punk, Post Punk, New Wave)

Relying on a number of revealing sources, **Casey Sherman ('93)** and coauthor Dave Wedge published *Hunting Whitey: The Inside Story of the Capture & Killing of America's Most Wanted Crime Boss* (William Morrow, 2020). “We had exclusive access to 70 letters that Whitey wrote in his own hand, including his own description of his capture,” says Sherman, who has previously written books about Tom Brady and the Boston Marathon bombing. “We also received unprecedented access to the FBI’s investigation [and] we are the only journalists to have successfully corresponded with the suspected killer of Whitey Bulger.”



**Michael Grecco ('81)** has photographed Steven Spielberg (Hon.'09) for the cover of *Time* and Will Smith for *Sports Illustrated*. His latest book draws on much earlier work: photographs of the punk rock scene, which Grecco began documenting while attending BU. *Punk, Post Punk, New Wave: Onstage, Backstage, In Your Face, 1978–1991* (Abrams Books, 2020) features Grecco’s images of performers including Talking Heads, Elvis Costello and Joan Jett.



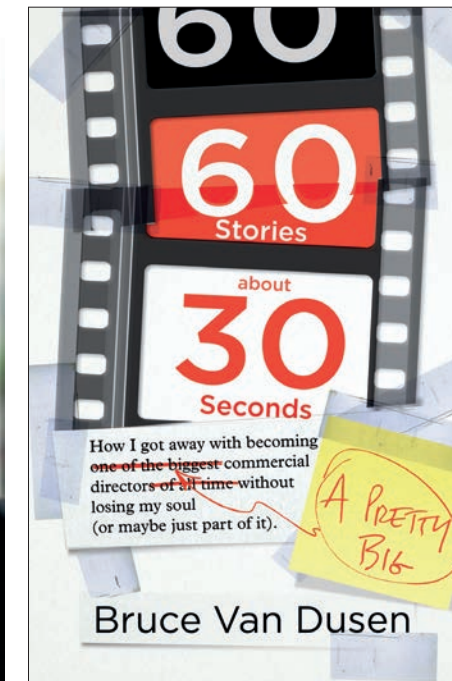
According to rankings compiled by The One Show, a prestigious international creative award program, **Vanessa de Beaumont ('17)** is among the top copywriters in the world. De Beaumont ranked #12 on The One Show’s 2020 list, based on her contributions to 14 award-winning entries produced while at MullenLowe U.S. and DAVID Miami, where she is now a senior copywriter. Those projects, five of which won iconic Gold Pencil awards, represented a range of work for Burger King.

Courtesy of Vanessa de Beaumont; AP Photo/Scott Bauer (Solmonese); Dyljan Kushel (Van Dusen); Courtesy of Post Hill Press (60 Stories About 30 Seconds)

**Joe Solmonese ('87)** served as the CEO of an unusual Democratic National Convention. Originally scheduled to be held in Milwaukee, Wisc., and to host thousands of people, the convention moved almost entirely online because of the coronavirus. Ceremonial acts, like the gaveling in and out of the convention, took place in Milwaukee as planned, but speakers were spread around the country—including presidential nominee Joe Biden, who delivered his acceptance speech from Wilmington, Del. “There are everyday Americans and elected officials and all sorts of people with important stories to tell. And they will tell them from where they live,” Solmonese said days before the virtual event began.



Solmonese (left) interviewed Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers (center) and Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes (right) in January 2020.



One of the ad industry’s most successful directors, **Bruce Van Dusen ('76)**, looks back at his 45-year career in a new memoir: *60 Stories About 30 Seconds: How I Got Away With Becoming a Pretty Big Commercial Director Without Losing My Soul (Or Maybe Just Part of It)* (Post Hill Press, 2020). Van Dusen estimates he directed more than 1,000 commercials, including spots for clients ranging from Ford to Minute Rice.

Reporting by Rich Barlow, Joel Brown, Marc Chalufour, Greg Glasgow, Amy Laskowski ('15), Megan Woolhouse



# THANKS TO ALL OF YOU

ANNA PHAM ('21)



I'm thankful for  
the people I've met  
and connections  
I've made at COM.

Joseph B. Castronovo (Questrom'78) and  
Elizabeth D. Castronovo (COM'81, CGS'79) ■■■  
Combined Jewish Philanthropies  
Heather A. Elder (COM'91)  
and John K. Elder ■■■  
Dwight R. Hilson (COM'81)  
and Mindy B. Hilson (Sargent'77/82) ■■■  
Paul H. Imbesi (COM'05) ■■■  
Donald M. Kaplan (MED'73)  
and Edna E. Kaplan (COM'88) ■■■  
Linda S. Kay (CGS'81, COM'83)  
and Jonathan B. Kay ■■■  
George D. Lilly (COM'56, CGS'54)  
and Denise L. Lilly ■■■  
Nancy Livingston (COM'69)  
and Fred M. Levin ■■■  
Colleen W. McCreary (COM'95)  
and Andrew McCreary ■■■  
Patriarch Family Foundation  
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Anonymous ■■■  
Carol Ann Bischoff (COM'82)  
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Claudia T. Brod (CGS'96, COM'98)  
and Steven Brod ■■■  
Bianca A. Carter (COM'73)  
and Philip W. Carter ■■■  
John Cunningham  
and Daphne Cunningham ■■■  
The Daphne Hoch Cunningham 2012 Charitable  
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and Carl J. Gerosa III ■■■  
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Larry M. Karp (Questrom'87) and  
Elizabeth Susman Karp (COM'89) ■■■  
Gary A. Kraut (CGS'64, COM'66)  
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Sidney J. Feltenstein Jr. (COM'62)  
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Kimberley J. Kaplan-Gross (COM'89)  
and Michael Gross ■■■  
Lillian S. Keefe (Questrom'89)  
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Margaret R. Kelliher ■■■  
Paul E. Kidwell (Sargent'78,  
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Tamra J. Mobley (COM'81)  
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Cleveland O'Neal III (COM'78)  
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Aaron I. Rasmussen (COM'06,  
CAS'06) ■■■  
Gregory G. Spiegel (CGS'94,  
COM'95) ■■■

Margaret A. Sullivan (COM'77)  
and Joseph Alvarado ■■■  
Andrea L. Taylor (COM'68) ■■■  
John K. Twyman, Jr. (Questrom'82)  
and Marion Twyman  
(COM'82) ■■■  
Alessandro F. Uzielli (CGS'87,  
COM'89) ■■■  
Karen A. Yuska (COM'88, MET'03)  
and Philip Yuska ■■■  
Benjamin M. Zises (SHA'08, CGS'05)  
and Ashley B. Grossman (CGS'08,  
COM'10) ■■■

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and Elizabeth S. Downey  
(COM'66) ■■■  
Bill M. Fine (COM'77) and  
Gail H. Fine ■■■  
Benjamin R. Flaim (CAS'00)  
and Katherine K. Flaim (COM'01) ■■■  
Gary R. Fleder (COM'85) ■■■  
The Fund for Investigative Journalism  
Amitava Guharoy  
and Srimanti Guharoy ■■■



REMY FROHMAN ('21)

The past year brought tragedy, trauma and unexpected challenges. It also brought triumphs of spirit and creativity. Stories about the latter—students and faculty adapting and overcoming in the face of those challenges—fill this magazine. So many of those efforts relied on you, the greater COM community, for your invaluable donations of time, expertise and funds.

We are thankful for all that you do for COM.

## \$1,000,000+

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
Hugo Shong (COM'87, GRS'92)  
and Luo Yan (CFA'90) ■■■  
National Philanthropic Trust

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- Loyalty Society Member
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## WHY I GIVE



Janice Cheechio

Janice Cheechio (top); Jackie Ricciardi (bottom)

For **Jane Carpenter ('97)**, what drew her to COM as a grad student continues to inspire her connection to the college more than twenty years later.

"COM is so rooted in the real world and offers the ability to gain hands-on experience," says Carpenter. She recalls studying with professors who also had jobs in the industry and who brought those experiences into the classroom. And she's watched COM develop since then, evolving with the PR industry.

Carpenter, now the head of global communications for online furniture and home goods retailer Wayfair, donates to COM because she considers the college's work to be vital. "Communication has never been more important than it is right now," she says. "We're in uncharted territory as a society, trying to reestablish where people get factual information."

In spring 2020, Carpenter also gave her time to one of COM's newest projects, participating in a virtual discussion about communication leadership challenges in the coronavirus era. "Being part of the conversation is super beneficial for me to understand the themes people are talking about and how different professionals are addressing them." (Read more about the virtual COMtalks series on page 4.)

"COM does a great job of staying on the forefront. It's a living laboratory for what's happening in the broader world," Carpenter says. "I support COM because they're empowering the next generation with the skills and the ability to deal with the ever-changing world that we're living in." —*Marc Chalufour*



EVAN BROWN ('23)



- J. R. Hipple (COM'88) and Candy Hipple
- Raymond Lowell Kotcher (COM'83) and Betsy K. Kotcher
- Kevin T. Lilly (Questrom'90,'97, COM'97) and Laura Lilly
- Dominick F. Miniaci (COM'69) and Meike Miniaci
- R & L Donner Trust
- Scott Rosenberg (COM'85)
- George M. Savage (ENG'81) and Nancy Krakora Savage (COM'80)
- Alan F. Strong (COM'58, DGE'55) and Prudence F. Strong
- David S. Torres (CGS'11, CAS'13, COM'13)
- Ann R. Trieger (COM'03) and Ted Kurland
- Mark G. Vitek (Wheelock'94,'02) and Julie A. Vitek (COM'91)
- Mark D. Walton (COM'76) and Christine H. Roth
- Sharon M. Wheeler (COM'90)
- Donald K. Wright

**\$1,000-\$2,499**

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- Robert H. Apter (COM'68) and Penny Apter
- Paul A. Bankson (COM'57) and Roberta C. Bankson
- Tamarah L. Belczyk (COM'02, LAW'02)
- Brett T. Brinker (COM'91) and Heather A. Slay

- Jeanne M. Broyhill (COM'73, CGS'71) and Joe M. Ventrone
- Elizabeth M. Butson (COM'60)
- Jane Carpenter (COM'97)
- Ya-Wei Chang (COM'96)
- Charities Aid Foundation Of America Crescendo Interactive, Inc.
- Barbara D. Critchlow (COM'80) and Jonathan F. Critchlow
- Robert Dallis (Wheelock'90,'02, CAS'86) and Bonnie E. Barber (COM'86)
- Christopher B. Daly
- Melissa A. Deaner (SHA'04, COM'04)
- Cynthia J. Demopoulos (COM'85)
- Marquetta E. Drakes (COM'93)
- Kirsten S. Durocher (COM'05, CGS'03)
- T. A. Fassburg (COM'69)
- Meghan Fay (CGS'97, COM'99)
- Robert A. Fishman (COM'69) and Margaret Fishman
- Joseph S. Formica (COM'60) and Helen J. Formica
- Ellen Grogan (COM'87)
- William D. Hall (COM'59, CGS'57) and Phyllis D. Hall
- Anthony A. Harrison (COM'81) and George Harrison
- Ellen N. Hoffman (COM'74) and Kenneth Loveday
- Osborn Howes (COM'52)
- Kathleen E. Imbesi (COM'96) and Anthony M. Imbesi
- Valerie F. Jacob (CGS'73, COM'75) and Charles R. Jacob III
- David C. Jacobson (CGS'89, COM'91)

## WHY I GIVE

As a teen, **Adam Abrahams ('03)** expected to spend his career sifting through dirt, but today he works at one of the top tech companies in the world. The aspiring archaeologist began his university studies at the College of Arts & Sciences before leaving antiquities behind to study advertising at COM. He eventually left advertising as well, but that education has served him well in the tech world, where he's a technical program manager at Google.

Abrahams works on speech recognition software that converts spoken words to text. When a program like Google Assistant transcribes your audible command, his team is behind that technology. It's a critical component in many 21st-century communication tools—and Abrahams wants to make sure COM students are prepared to enter similar tech fields.

"I really loved my experience," Abrahams says of his time at COM. Core skills, in particular networking and public speaking, have continued to serve him well, while the interactive design courses he took have helped him communicate with the programmers on his team. "Even though I don't have a computer science background, my engineers trust me because I've taken the time to understand their space," he says.

For anyone entering the job market today, technical expertise is more important than ever, he says. Analytics, coding and data science can play a role in just about any communication field and Abrahams wants to help COM stay at the cutting edge. "Technology costs money," he says. "Hopefully, I can give back and COM will be able to grow in those areas that have become much more of a necessity today." —M.C.



Janice Cherechio (top), Courtesy of Adam Abrahams (bottom)

Janice Cherechio

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