



THE SPOTLIGHT

MSU DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

• FALL 2024 - SPRING 2025 •



WHAT'S INSIDE:

4th annual Charles K. Atkin Distinguished Speaker Series

New hire: Ellen Reinhart

CAS Scholarship winners

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The Duck Campaign

MO'S MEGAPHONE:

By Department Chair,
Dr. Monique Turner

Dear Alumni, Students, Faculty, and Friends,

As I reflect on this past academic year, I'm struck by both the remarkable resilience of our community and the extraordinary achievements of our faculty, students, and staff. Despite a difficult and uncertain landscape—both nationally and within higher education—our department has continued to thrive in ways that make me incredibly proud to serve as Chair.

(Continued)



MO'S MEGAPHONE

(CONTINUED)

Let me begin with the good news, because there is so much of it. This year, our faculty secured major research grants, published cutting-edge work in top journals, and were recognized with national and international awards for their scholarship and service—we update our community on these achievements on social media, so please follow us! In August of 2024, we welcomed a new colleague, Dr. Ellen Reinhart, who is already enriching our intellectual community. We also welcomed a new Dean of CAS, Dr. Heidi Hennink-Kaminski, a native Michigander who departed UNC to lead us into the future. And we celebrated Dr. Dan Bergan's promotion to Full Professor. Several doctoral students successfully defended preliminary projects and dissertations, including Drs. Ruth Heo who joined a team of computational researchers at the National Institutes of Health, Sue Lim who will be joining the faculty at Purdue University as an Assistant Professor and Bobbie Rathjens who successfully landed a job at the Broad College of Business at MSU. You can also read about our fantastic undergraduates who earned scholarships due to their "awesomeness" in the classroom and beyond. Our classrooms, labs, and research centers remain vibrant spaces where big ideas flourish.

We also moved the National Social Norms Center, home of the iconic Duck Campaign, to the Department of Communication. Dr. Dennis Martell (Executive Director) and Andrew Poole (Director of Communication) joined our team in COMM and we are excited to have them in our COMMunity (#msusocialnorms).

And yet, we are not untouched by the broader challenges facing higher education today. Recent executive orders have had real and immediate impacts—on our research funding, on our budget stability, and on the well-being of our international students and scholars. We are navigating these headwinds with as much care, clarity, and compassion as possible. No doubt, during times like these we are reassured by the support of our alumni. These times demand not only academic excellence, but moral courage—and I see both on display every day in our department.



In the face of adversity, we draw strength from our strategic vision: to be a global leader in the advancement and quantitative study of the processes of human communication. Whether it's addressing misinformation, promoting public health, understanding how communication affects our morality, building strong interpersonal relationships or strengthening civic discourse, our work matters. This sense of purpose fuels us.

To our alumni: thank you for carrying the torch of Spartan communication into the world. Your impact reminds us why we do what we do. To our students: thank you for your energy, curiosity, and creativity—you are the heart of this department. And to our faculty and staff: thank you for showing what's possible when we remain committed to excellence and community, even in difficult times. We'll continue to face challenges in the months ahead. But if this year has taught me anything, it's that this department is not only strong, it is forward-looking, collaborative, and deeply rooted in values that endure.

With gratitude and hope,

Remember to follow us on:

Facebook: @Michigan State University
Communication Department

Instagram: @commdeptmsu

LinkedIn: @MSU Department of Communication

X: @CommDeptMSU

FOURTH ANNUAL CHARLES K. ATKIN DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER SERIES

On October 25, 2024, our department welcomed back ComArtSci alumni Brian Manata Ph.D. (class of 2015) and Chris Carpenter Ph.D. (class of 2010) to the fourth annual Charles K. Atkin Distinguished Speaker Series. We also had Professor Gary Bente join us to speak on his own research involving perception and nonverbal communication.



Chris Carpenter: 19 Years of Superdiffuser Research

Chris Carpenter was able to showcase his research on the power of individuals who are able to spread pro-social behavior influence. One of Carpenter's examples comes from the mass media of a billboard or social media post.

"You can only put up so many billboards to tell people to stop smoking or tell people smoking will kill you before they are like, 'Yeah, we know.' But, if you can get somebody they know to talk to them about all the ways they can quit smoking, and personally adapt their message to that person, that's probably going to be more effective, especially for those harder-to-change behaviors."

Carpenter's goal is to learn more about the superdiffuser model and how it can affect others. This includes finding more ways for superdiffusers to be applied beyond health communication.



FOURTH ANNUAL CHARLES K. ATKIN DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER SERIES

(CONTINUED)

Brian Manata: On the Problem of Cohesion in Groups

Brian Manata returned to us from Penn State University to discuss his research on group cohesion. Various teams and organizations are able to learn from his research as he explores how conflict and cohesion can make a team's performance stronger.

"People think of conflict and cohesion as different. That typically, if there's conflict, you lose cohesion in the group," Manata said. "Which is kind of interesting and a paradox, because you usually need conflict to do well. You need people that have different perspectives to do well."

Manata's goals are to continue investigating how different business and academia teams can create disagreements without destroying group cohesion.



Gary Bente: The Virtual Mirror - What Avatars Can Reveal About Social Perception and Nonverbal Communication

Professor Bente focuses his research on how AI avatars should be able to read human social cues and embodies conversational agents. Looking at how avatars are used to study the world of nonverbal communication, Bente wants to see through the challenge on how scholars can improve and develop these agents.

"How can we really improve embodied agents by our communication research? What kinds of means and methods do we have? What kinds of theories can be applied to make this better, to make this more believable?" he asked.

Professor Bente is interested in looking at the risks of building a research program around AI avatars and their nonverbal social communication.



A BIG WELCOME TO ELLEN REINHART!

INTERVIEW BY: EMILY DICKERSON



Bio:

Dr. Reinhart is a postdoctoral scholar in the Department of Communication at Michigan State University. She earned her M.A. and Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Stanford University and was a postdoctoral scholar at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business prior to joining MSU. Her research centers on how we value people and how people feel valued within the U.S. cultural context. One line of research focuses on the psychology of social contribution, analyzing what types of helping actions are perceived as contributions in society. Some of her other research has focused on how communication leveraging moral values impacts policy support and how experiencing harm from the COVID-19 pandemic shaped views of inequality and advocacy. Dr. Reinhart's work has been published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology and the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology and can be viewed on [Google Scholar](#).

What is your position?

I am a Postdoctoral Scholar / Research Specialist in the department. I primarily work on research with Dr. Monique Turner. I also teach COM 310: Intercultural Communication, which is all about how communication processes unfold across different cultural contexts.

What brought you to your new position?

My previous research explored the psychological experience of believing one contributes meaningfully to society. Now, I'm eager to understand how communication processes shape this feeling -- examining how our culture, institutions, and interpersonal interactions convey messages about what constitutes valuable contribution, and developing communication strategies to help people recognize their contributions and enhance well-being. The MSU Department of Communication's expertise in systematically analyzing and crafting effective messages made it the perfect intellectual environment for this next phase of my research.

...ELLEN REINHART

(CONTINUED)

What does your research focus on?

My research examines how people develop a sense that their lives and daily activities contribute meaningfully to society. I study both the consequences of feeling like a contributor (or not) and how institutions communicate what counts as meaningful contribution. In a recent study conducted before the 2024 Presidential Election, my collaborators and I found that people who believed they contributed meaningfully to their communities reported greater intentions to vote, engage in social activism, and seek election information. In another current project, I'm working with Research Assistants to analyze how colleges and universities communicate expectations about 'ideal' applicant contributions - whether they focus narrowly on traditional activities like volunteering and extracurriculars or more broadly include contributions like family caregiving or working to support household finances.

What are you excited to accomplish here at MSU?

I am excited to push my research forward by tackling these new questions in collaboration with the world-class faculty in this department. I also really enjoy working with the undergraduates here, both in the classroom and the excellent RAs I've worked with this semester. More broadly, I'm enthusiastic about continuing to learn about the field of Communication and how my training in cultural and social psychology can add to the scholarship in the department and field.

what are some of your favorite things? (Color, food, sport, hobby, etc.)

A few things I love: long runs with the Playmakers running group, experimenting with new recipes from the New York Times cooking app, exploring hiking trails around East Lansing, planning camping and backpacking adventures, and spending time with our trio of pets - Howie the cat, Frankie the kitten, and Rosie the puppy.



COMM SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

(CONTINUED)

Abigail Forth

Scholarship: Jeffrey C. Rachor College of CAS Sales Internship Scholarship

Bio: Abigail Forth is a junior Communication major, with a minor in Sales Leadership. She is a transfer student, with an additional background in the Marketing Major. Abigail is a hard-working student, passionate about the study of sales, striving to one day pursue a career in real estate, or medical device sales.



Cassandra Bosworth

Scholarship: Glenn and Thelma Buell College of Communication Arts and Sciences Endowed Memorial Scholarship

Bio: Cassandra Bosworth is a junior Communication major with a minor in Entrepreneurship and Innovations. Cassandra Bosworth transferred to MSU from LCC and plans to graduate in the spring of 2026 with her Bachelors. She then plans to further her education with a Master Degree in Agricultural Education. Her goal is to pursue a career in Agricultural Communication to bring awareness of the agriculture industry through communication.



Ashley Cooper

Scholarship: Glenn and Thelma Buell College of Communication Arts and Sciences Endowed Memorial Scholarship

Bio: Ashley Cooper is a junior Communication Leadership and Strategy major at Michigan State University. Ashley Cooper is a U.S. Navy veteran who is passionate about education and community service. After transitioning from the military, they earned an Associate's degree in Business Administration before transferring to MSU. They aspire to pursue an MBA from Broad College of Business and establish a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering marginalized youth through education and career preparation.



COMM SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

(CONTINUED)

Amy Cho

Scholarship: Glenn and Thelma Buell
College of Communication Arts and Sciences
Endowed Memorial Scholarship

Bio: Amy Cho is a junior Communication and Journalism major, with a minor in Broadcast Journalism. Amy hopes to pursue a career in the broadcast journalism world, and aims to become an on-air anchor/reporter. Amy is from Northern Virginia and in her free time, she enjoys hiking on trails in the Shenandoah National Park.



Siddhi Choubey

Scholarship: Glenn and Thelma Buell
College of Communication Arts and Sciences
Endowed Memorial Scholarship

Bio: Siddhi Choubey is a junior pursuing a double degree in Journalism and Communication with minors in Broadcast Journalism, Public Relations, and Business. She works as a Communication and Marketing Intern at NBCUniversal and serves as Director of Public Relations at ASMSU. Siddhi has contributed to the Detroit Free Press covering the presidential election, worked as a staff journalist for the university yearbook, interned at TheSocialTalks, and volunteered with Dr. Vernon Miller on communication research. This summer, she will be an Internal Communications Intern at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and is passionate about using media to inform and engage communities.



Mya Legel

Scholarship: College of Communication Arts
and Sciences Endowed Scholarship

Bio: Mya Legel is a graduate student in the Master's program in Communication at Michigan State University. Mya currently works as a student writer for the Business College, managing articles from pitch to publication. She is dedicated to making a positive impact on others throughout her career. Mya always seeks new opportunities to learn, grow, and connect with others in her academic and professional journey.



COMM SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

(CONTINUED)

Parker Beavens

Scholarship: Dr. David and Patricia Nix "Miss MSU" Barron Endowed Scholarship in the College of Communication Arts and Sciences

Bio: Parker Beavens is a Junior Communication major with a minor in Fiction Filmmaking. Parker is involved in many organizations across campus including Greek Life, sports broadcasting through Michigan State's BIG10 Student Intern Program and other creative media opportunities for Michigan State Athletics, and a student intern for the MSU Burgess Institute Marketing and Communications team. Parker is an out-of-state student from Minnesota and hopes to make the most of her time at State in contributing back and impacting as many people as she can.



Ava Dean

Scholarship: John G. Walsh Scholarship

Bio: Ava Dean is a freshman Communication major. Ava is a 3rd generation Spartan from Chicago, Illinois. She plans to graduate from Michigan State and further her education in a top graduate program.

Casmiera Thorman

Scholarship: Schultz Family Scholarship

Bio: Casmiera Thorman is a junior Communication major with a concentration in health and applying for a minor in public relations. She works as a pharmacy technician at Meijer and a research assistant studying how colleges value societal contributions in applicants in the communication department. Outside of work and school, she volunteers with Girl Scouts Heart of Michigan, supporting youth development and community engagement. Passionate about health communication and public affairs, Casmiera aspires to use her skills to bridge the gap between healthcare and the public, hoping to someday work for the CDC.



COMM SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

(CONTINUED)

Dakota Blakley

Scholarship: Scott Weiss Family Scholarship

Bio: Dakota Blakley is a Junior Mediated Communication Major and Business Minor. He is a member of the MSU Cheerleading team, PRSSA, and MSUMA. Dakota Works full-time as a Regional Collegiate Marketing Lead for CELSIUS. On the side, he instructs indoor cycling classes at IM West/East and at Crunch Fitness. Dakota is happiest at Michigan State, where he involves himself completely in his studies, spending time with friends, and cheering for MSU Football and Basketball games. Once graduated in May 2026, he plans to work full-time in Florida at CELSIUS, and further his career in Fitness Instructing.



Brooke Miller (CLaS)

Scholarship: Diana Thornhill-Copp and David A. Copp CAS Scholarship

Bio: Brooke Miller is a junior studying communication leadership & strategy with plans of becoming a CEO of a Fortune 500 company.



Ryan McNeill

Scholarship: Serendipity CAS Scholarship Fund

Bio: Ryan McNeill is a Senior earning a dual degree in Political Science and Communication. Ryan is invested in bringing a culture of unity and positivity wherever he goes. He plans to work in Congress upon his completion of his dual degrees from Michigan State University.



EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNICATION SCHOLARSHIP SPEAKER SERIES 2025

DR. MONICA CORNEJO



Title: Voices in Immigration Detention: The Communication Experiences of Formerly Detained Latino Migrant Men

Bio: Dr. Monica Cornejo (PhD, 2022, UC Santa Barbara) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at Cornell University. Dr. Cornejo's research uses multiple research methods (e.g., semi-structured interviews, cross-sectional & longitudinal surveys) to examine the structural barriers that lead to health and societal inequities among legally stigmatized migrants (e.g., undocumented youth; formerly detained migrants), how legally stigmatized migrants draw on communication identity management and advocacy strategies to challenge those inequities. Dr. Cornejo's research aims to understand how legally stigmatized migrants' strategies to obtain humanization in the USA alter their health and general well-being. Her research has been published in leading journals in the field of Communication, such as Journal of Communication, Health Communication, and Journal of Applied Communication Research.

Abstract: Cornejo's research provides an outlook on how migrant's live in inhumane living conditions within United State detention centers.

"When we think about the migration experiences, we often think of migrants coming from Latin America. However, the migration experience is broader than that," Cornejo said. "This speaker series is a great example of migration. We're coming here from different places to give a talk. I believe it's essential for all of us to recognize that migration is a fundamental human right. My overall aim is to cultivate that awareness among our academic and social circles while also expanding communication scholarship and, hopefully, making changes at a broader societal level."



EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNICATION SCHOLARSHIP SPEAKER SERIES 2025

(CONTINUED)

DR. IGNACIO FERNANDEZ CRUZ

Title: Evolving Expertise Toward an Understanding of Technomediated Expertise and the Future of Work



Bio: Ignacio Fernandez Cruz is an Assistant Professor of Communication in the School of Communication at Northwestern University. He leads the Org Futures Research Lab, where they examine how communication and emerging technologies, such as AI, shape organizational practices, workplace dynamics, and professional expertise. Dr. Cruz is currently working on projects that explore AI-driven hiring and selection practices, focusing on the design of communication technologies that emphasize fairness, accountability, and equity. His broader research investigates how digital technologies and platforms transform work arrangements and reshape personnel practices. Dr. Cruz has published in journals across management, information studies, and communication such as *Information and Organization*, *New Media & Society*, *Communication Theory*, *Computers in Human Behavior*, and *AI & Society*. He holds a PhD in Communication, specializing in Groups, Organizations, and Networks, from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California.

Abstract: Cruz's research focuses on how technology affects the relationship between employees and companies.



"We have known for decades that technology shapes the way we do work—in modern times think about the typewriter to the personal computer to mobile technology," Cruz added. "When we build technology, we just don't build it objectively. For example, I find that in many cases when someone applies for a job today, their resume gets evaluated by an algorithm to determine how likely they are to succeed in that role. Different qualities are important, but those factors don't just pop out of thin air. People around a table have to decide what factors are important. People have to decide what makes a "good candidate." If we're talking about employment, think about when someone applies for a job, you're impacting their livelihood. Technology wields power."

PROTECTING SPARTANS ONE DUCK AT A TIME

National Social Norms Center (NSNC) moves to the Department of Communication

Origins & Evolution

- **2003:** The **National Social Norms Resource Center** was founded at Northern Illinois University, funded by an AnheuserBusch Foundation grant.
- **Circa 2006–2007:** It became the **National Social Norms Institute (NSNI)** and relocated to the University of Virginia, where it operated for about a decade.
- **2016:** The institute was re-established at Michigan State University's as the **National Social Norms Center**, backed by a \$262,000 AnheuserBusch Foundation grant to expand its work using the social norms approach to promote harm reduction around alcohol use among college students.

MSU Roots & Campus Impact

- MSU had engaged in social norms-based alcohol campaigns since the late 1990s. Early efforts included comprehensive surveys and messaging to correct student misperceptions about peer drinking.
- One hallmark effort, the **Duck Campaign**, was born of the efforts of a group of Michigan State University Advertising students from a 2006 ADV 486 class under the guidance of now Professor Emeritus Bruce Vanden Bergh. The creators of the campaign included Christina Barlage, Laura Dennison, Susana Dominguez, Kelly Hannaka, Jenny O'Neill, Justin "Bugsy" Sailor, Micky Treutlein, and Julia Vu. Their goal was to create an ad campaign for their client (MSU Social Norms) that would challenge the misperceptions about alcohol use at MSU and promote the fact that most MSU students who choose to drink do so responsibly. Susana Dominguez was the original illustrator of the lovable duck characters.
- One study that highlighted MSU's longitudinal social norms work between ~2002 and ~2014, resulted in reported alcohol consumption among students dropping significantly—19% fewer drinks per occasion and 26% fewer instances of 6+ drinks.

Today's Center

- **Leadership:** Dr. Dennis Martell (Executive Director since 2016), Drs. Monique Turner and Maria Lapinski (co-Directors) and Andrew Poole (Director of Communication) all with long-standing MSU ties in health promotion, student life, and social norms strategy.
- **Scope:** Offers research, consultation, training, and evaluation resources—not only to MSU but nationwide—for interventions around alcohol, substance use, sexual assault prevention, sustainability, and more. socialnorms.org.
- **Recent milestones:** A September 2024 launch event at MSU celebrated the center's 20+ years of national impact and its strengths-based, data-driven approach to correcting misperceptions to drive community change.



STAY IN TOUCH!



Got some great stuff going on? Whether it be a new job, an award you've won, or just an accomplishment you're proud of, let us know! It could get shared in our next newsletter!

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COMM ALUMNI ARE
INCREDIBLE!



Keenan Covington Class of 2012

My most significant accomplishment during my time at Venture For America has been helping to envision the role of the marketing function at the organization. Furthermore, I led us through a rebrand process that wrapped in Q2 of last year and helped garner one of the largest Fellowship application pools in VA's history.

Jennifer Shebib Class of 1985

Worked 35 years in Detroit area Advertising Industry from the agency to sales

Kimo Ah Yun, PhD, 1996

Became the 25th President of Marquette University on April 29, 2025. Check out next year's issue for a full article!