Welcome to the 2018 C&IS Honors Day Ceremony!

Honors Day is a time-honored tradition on The University of Alabama campus and within the College of Communication and Information Sciences. As the academic year comes to an end, we recognize the accomplishments of our most outstanding students and alumni. Selected both within their academic units and college-wide, the individuals honored today have contributed excellence to the College and are distinctive representatives for our field.

Thank you for joining us as we publicly honor our students and alumni. Your support as we congratulate these exceptional individuals is invaluable.

MARK D. NELSON, PH.D.
DEAN, COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION SCIENCES
Breeanna Beckham Straessle, a two-time, summa cum laude graduate of The College of Communication and Information Sciences, earned her bachelor’s degree in public relations and her master’s in advertising and public relations.

After kicking off her career by building a boutique digital agency’s marketing division from the ground up, Straessle went on to serve as director of public relations for Vocus and director of corporate communications for Cision. In 2014 and 2015, she led the global strategy and execution of external and internal communications during the PR software giants’ merger and numerous subsequent acquisitions.

Today, she helps Cracker Barrel Old Country Store consistently secure the highest share of voice in the news among family dining chains as the brand’s corporate communications manager and primary spokesperson for the company, including its restaurant and retail operations, brand communications and corporate citizenship efforts.

A PR Week 40 Under 40 honoree and two-time judge of PRSA’s Silver Anvil Awards, Straessle has successfully pitched reporters and influencers on everything from global mergers and acquisitions to local biscuits and gravy.

Clayton Collins is a proud alumnus and supporter of the Crimson Tide and producer and director of multi-platform content — in that order.

After balancing both an undergraduate course load and the production of a weekly college football show for ESPN, he moved to New York to produce for MSNBC’s “Morning Joe.” His work included equal parts hard breaking news, political journalism and popular culture entertainment vignettes.

Since 2014, he has called NBC Sports his professional home, where he oversees and builds creative productions for its original programming and development group. In the past year, he has produced and directed feature shows, digital vignettes and social activations on the NFL, NHL, NASCAR, Golf Channel and Premiership Rugby.

Collins considers himself lucky to have a career aligned with his greatest passion, and he aims to keep up with the evolving media landscape by keeping storytelling first. In his spare time, he enjoys the great outdoors of New England with his wife Danielle and their labrador retriever, Dixie.
Irene “Renee” Blalock received her master’s in library service in 1981. Blalock spent her entire professional career at the largest public library in Alabama, the Birmingham Public Library, serving in the literature department and southern history department, as a branch head, collection department manager, regional coordinator, operational coordinator, associate director and finally director from 2009 to 2014.

In her many years of active service, Blalock became an indispensable part of the volunteer community in Birmingham and was involved in many community activities and affiliations. Examples of her professional leadership include president of the Jefferson County Library Cooperative, the Jefferson County Public Library Association, and The University of Alabama Library School Association. Further, she served on committees of the American Library Association and was on the board of the national Public Library Association.

Timothy Alan Lewis received his master’s in library service in 1982 and his law degree from The University of Alabama School of Law in 1984. Lewis has spent his professional career at the Library of the Supreme Court, first as reader services librarian, then associate director, and finally as director of the law library and state law librarian since 1992.

He is responsible for the management of the largest public law library in Alabama, advises and assists county law librarians with legal information needs, and provides leadership to the law library community in Alabama. Lewis has served as president of the Alabama Bench and Bar Historical Society, the Law Library Association of Alabama and is on the Board of Directors for the Alabama Center for Law and Civic Education.

Lewis has shared his experience by authoring numerous articles concerning legal information and has made more than two dozen presentations at seminars and other programs on this topic.
CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2018 AWARD WINNERS

2018 OUTSTANDING ALUMNI

OUTSTANDING ALUMNUS, ADVERTISING
CAMERON T. WATSON

Cameron T. Watson currently works as group creative director–North America for Red Fuse Communications where he is responsible for overseeing all shopper marketing and e-commerce across North America.

Beyond his work at Red Fuse, Watson has enjoyed a career spanning two decades in the creative field at various advertising agencies, in-house creative studios, digital and retail firms doing strategic work for some of the biggest brands in the world, including Coca-Cola, Crayola, The Empire State Building, Royal Caribbean and Tommy Hilfiger.

Originally from Decatur, Watson was a Crimson Tide cheerleader for two years and a member of AdFed and Ad Team. He worked on campus at University Relations and for three years at The Crimson White. After graduating with honors in 1996, he began his career in Atlanta, GA where he spent 13 years until relocating to New York City in 2010.

Watson has spoken on several panels about diversity and inclusion in the advertising field and mentors aspiring young minority designers to consider a career in the creative field. He encourages them to enhance their skill sets in coding and social media and utilize these techniques to position themselves for better career opportunities.

OUTSTANDING ALUMNA, COMMUNICATION STUDIES
ANGELA R. GILLIESPIE

As chief strategy officer of W2O Group, Angela R. Gilliespie leads one of America’s most ambitious and innovative healthcare communication and marketing agencies and is breaking industry-wide standards for integrating communication into the broadest strategic approaches to healthcare investment.

Gilliespie credits her time on campus in the Alabama Forensic Council and the Alabama Student Society of Communication Arts as well as the College’s educational excellence with preparing her to craft communication in a way that motivates, persuades and defines direction.

A strong advocate of work-life balance, Gilliespie is a 2010 graduate of Le Cordon Bleu culinary school, and founded Argentinian Vineyard along with the wine label, “La Pareja” in 2005.

Gilliespie is very proud of her formal and informal mentoring work, especially MedTech Women, a non-profit promoting women in medical technology careers, and the Healthcare Business Women’s Association, where she served as the San Francisco chapter president.
BETSY PLANK DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

MARIE ROBINSON

Marie Robinson first discovered her aptitude for logistics and distribution as a member of The University of Alabama’s Army ROTC program. Since graduating with her journalism degree in 1989, she has made history in the logistics field, launching Wal-Mart’s first e-commerce distribution center and serving as the first female vice president of logistics for the company. Robinson said it was her education at The University of Alabama that gave her the confidence and skillset to tell her story, effectively communicate with others and, ultimately, move ahead in her career.

Today, Robinson begins her days at Michael Kors by checking in with the company’s global operations—a division of the company that she is largely responsible for creating. When Michael Kors recruited her in 2014, she was tasked with introducing the discipline of operations to the company and building a global strategy team from the ground up. Now, as the company’s senior vice president of corporate strategy and chief operations officer, she is fully responsible for the company’s operations and distribution of goods, as well as their corporate strategy.

Robinson’s experience in logistics and operations, coupled with her understanding and appreciation of communication, makes her instrumental in the implementation of sustainable business practices at Michael Kors. With her leadership, one of today’s largest and most influential fashion design companies has solidified its standing as a thriving business organization and a key player in the global economy.

From 2012 to 2014, Robinson was senior vice president, chief logistics officer at ToysRUs, and from 2010 to 2012, Robinson was senior vice president, supply, logistics and customer experience at The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P). Prior to that, from 2006 to 2010, she was senior vice president, supply chain at Smart & Final Stores LLC. Robinson began her career as a United States Army Logistics Officer and held various logistics and operations positions at Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.
COLLEGE-WIDE AWARDS

BERT BANK DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD
JOSIAH “JO” ROBINS BONNER, JR.

For more than a decade, Josiah “Jo” Robins Bonner, Jr. represented Alabama’s First District in the U.S. House of Representatives. He was first elected to the 108th Congress in November 2002 and was successfully reelected to five additional terms. As a student at The University of Alabama, Bonner worked on Capitol Hill as an intern for Congressman Jack Edwards. After graduation, he returned to Washington as press secretary and later chief of staff to Congressman Sonny Callahan. He parlayed his almost-18-years experience as a staffer into a convincing win in a crowded Republican primary during the summer of 2002. Bonner never lost an election and ran unopposed in the November 2012 general election.

Bonner has devoted a significant amount of time to help turn around the sluggish economy of South Alabama, and he is credited with playing a major role in helping land several significant economic development projects, including the $5 billion ThyssenKrupp project to Alabama in 2007, as well as helping secure $5 billion in contracts in 2010 for Austal to build 20 new ships for the U.S. Navy. His crowning Congressional accomplishment came in 2012 when Airbus announced plans to build their first U.S. Final Assembly Line in Mobile. Over the years, Bonner developed friendships and strategic partnerships with the top corporate leaders at Airbus, one of the world’s largest aerospace and defense companies.

Bonner has received numerous awards including the Distinguished Public Service Award in 2013, the highest honor the U.S. Navy bestows on a civilian. In 2016, the Business Council of Alabama (BCA) created the “Congressman Jo Bonner Spirit of Leadership Award” and honored him as its first recipient. He serves on numerous boards around the state including the American Village Citizenship Trust, the Business Council of Alabama, the AlabamaGermany Partnership and is chairman of the Alabama School of Math and Science Foundation Board.

Bonner earned a B.A. degree in journalism from The University of Alabama in 1982. He is married to the former Janée Lambert, of Mobile, and they are the parents of a daughter, Lee, age 22, and a son, Robins, age 20.

BETSY PLANK DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
MARIE ROBINSON

Marie Robinson first discovered her aptitude for logistics and distribution as a member of The University of Alabama’s Army ROTC program. Since graduating with her journalism degree in 1989, she has made history in the logistics field, launching Wal-Mart’s first e-commerce distribution center and serving as the first female vice president of logistics for the company. Robinson said it was her education at The University of Alabama that gave her the confidence and skillset to tell her story, effectively communicate with others and, ultimately, move ahead in her career.

Today, Robinson begins her days at Michael Kors by checking in with the company’s global operations—a division of the company that she is largely responsible for creating. When Michael Kors recruited her in 2014, she was tasked with introducing the discipline of operations to the company and building a global strategy team from the ground up. Now, as the company’s senior vice president of corporate strategy and chief operations officer, she is fully responsible for the company’s operations and distribution of goods, as well as their corporate strategy.

Robinson’s experience in logistics and operations, coupled with her understanding and appreciation of communication, makes her instrumental in the implementation of sustainable business practices at Michael Kors. With her leadership, one of today’s largest and most influential fashion design companies has solidified its standing as a thriving business organization and a key player in the global economy.

From 2012 to 2014, Robinson was senior vice president, chief logistics officer at ToysRUs, and from 2010 to 2012, Robinson was senior vice president, supply, logistics and customer experience at The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P). Prior to that, from 2006 to 2010, she was senior vice president, supply chain at Smart & Final Stores LLC. Robinson began her career as a United States Army Logistics Officer and held various logistics and operations positions at Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.
CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2018 AWARD WINNERS

2018 OUTSTANDING ALUMNI

OUTSTANDING ALUMNUS, ADVERTISING
Cameron T. Watson

Cameron T. Watson currently works as group creative director—North America for Red Fuse Communications where he is responsible for overseeing all shopper marketing and e-commerce across North America.

Beyond his work at Red Fuse, Watson has enjoyed a career spanning two decades in the creative field at various advertising agencies, in-house creative studios, digital and retail firms doing strategic work for some of the biggest brands in the world, including Coca-Cola, Crayola, The Empire State Building, Royal Caribbean and Tommy Hilfiger.

Originally from Decatur, Watson was a Crimson Tide cheerleader for two years and a member of AdFed and Ad Team. He worked on campus at University Relations and for three years at The Crimson White. After graduating with honors in 1996, he began his career in Atlanta, GA where he spent 13 years until relocating to New York City in 2010.

Watson has spoken on several panels about diversity and inclusion in the advertising field and mentors aspiring young minority designers to consider a career in the creative field. He encourages them to enhance their skill sets in coding and social media and utilize these techniques to position themselves for better career opportunities.

OUTSTANDING ALUMNUS, COMMUNICATION STUDIES
Angela R. Gillespie

As chief strategy officer of W2O Group, Angela R. Gillespie leads one of America’s most ambitious and innovative healthcare communication and marketing agencies and is breaking industry-wide standards for integrating communication into the broadest strategic approaches to healthcare investment.

Gillespie credits her time on campus in the Alabama Forensic Council and the Alabama Student Society of Communication Arts as well as the College’s educational excellence with preparing her to craft communication in a way that motivates, persuades and defines direction.

A strong advocate of work-life balance, Gillespie is a 2010 graduate of Le Cordon Bleu culinary school, and founded Argentinian Vineyard along with the wine label, “La Pareja” in 2005.

Gillespie is very proud of her formal and informal mentoring work, especially MedTech Women, a non-profit promoting women in medical technology careers, and the Healthcare Business Women’s Association, where she served as the San Francisco chapter president.
OUTSTANDING ALUMNA, LIBRARY & INFORMATION STUDIES

IRENE “RENEE” BLALOCK

Irene “Renee” Blalock received her master’s in library service in 1981. Blalock spent her entire professional career at the largest public library in Alabama, the Birmingham Public Library, serving in the literature department and southern history department, as a branch head, collection department manager, regional coordinator, operational coordinator, associate director and finally director from 2009 to 2014.

In her many years of active service, Blalock became an indispensable part of the volunteer community in Birmingham and was involved in many community activities and affiliations. Examples of her professional leadership include president of the Jefferson County Library Cooperative, the Jefferson County Public Library Association, and The University of Alabama Library School Association. Further, she served on committees of the American Library Association and was on the board of the national Public Library Association.

OUTSTANDING ALUMNUS, LIBRARY & INFORMATION STUDIES

TIMOTHY ALAN LEWIS

Timothy Alan Lewis received his master’s in library service in 1982 and his law degree from The University of Alabama School of Law in 1984. Lewis has spent his professional career at the Library of the Supreme Court, first as reader services librarian, then associate director, and finally as director of the law library and state law librarian since 1992.

He is responsible for the management of the largest public law library in Alabama, advises and assists county law librarians with legal information needs, and provides leadership to the law library community in Alabama. Lewis has served as president of the Alabama Bench and Bar Historical Society, the Law Library Association of Alabama and is on the Board of Directors for the Alabama Center for Law and Civic Education.

Lewis has shared his experience by authoring numerous articles concerning legal information and has made more than two dozen presentations at seminars and other programs on this topic.
OUTSTANDING ALUMNA, PUBLIC RELATIONS
BREEANNA BECKHAM STRAESSLE

Breeanna Beckham Straessle, a two-time, summa cum laude graduate of The College of Communication and Information Sciences, earned her bachelor’s degree in public relations and her master’s in advertising and public relations.

After kicking off her career by building a boutique digital agency’s marketing division from the ground up, Straessle went on to serve as director of public relations for Vocus and director of corporate communications for Cision. In 2014 and 2015, she led the global strategy and execution of external and internal communications during the PR software giants’ merger and numerous subsequent acquisitions.

Today, she helps Cracker Barrel Old Country Store consistently secure the highest share of voice in the news among family dining chains as the brand’s corporate communications manager and primary spokesperson for the company, including its restaurant and retail operations, brand communications and corporate citizenship efforts.

A PR Week 40 Under 40 honoree and two-time judge of PRSA’s Silver Anvil Awards, Straessle has successfully pitched reporters and influencers on everything from global mergers and acquisitions to local biscuits and gravy.

OUTSTANDING ALUMNUS, JOURNALISM & CREATIVE MEDIA
CLAYTON COLLINS

Clayton Collins is a proud alumnus and supporter of the Crimson Tide and producer and director of multi-platform content — in that order.

After balancing both an undergraduate course load and the production of a weekly college football show for ESPN, he moved to New York to produce for MSNBC’s “Morning Joe.” His work included equal parts hard breaking news, political journalism and popular culture entertainment vignettes.

Since 2014, he has called NBC Sports his professional home, where he oversees and builds creative productions for its original programming and development group. In the past year, he has produced and directed feature shows, digital vignettes and social activations on the NFL, NHL, NASCAR, Golf Channel and Premiership Rugby.

Collins considers himself lucky to have a career aligned with his greatest passion, and he aims to keep up with the evolving media landscape by keeping storytelling first. In his spare time, he enjoys the great outdoors of New England with his wife Danielle and their labrador retriever, Dixie.