

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA | COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION SCIENCES

# COMMUNICATOR

SPRING 2019

INSIDE» The Alabama Debate Society / Communicating Weather Emergencies / Capstone Agency

## Behind the Scenes

How a student-produced film  
is changing public perception

PAGE 10





## GAME ON

As host of ESPN's College GameDay, Rece Davis has to be impartial. But there is always a special place in his heart for Alabama, where he earned his degree and his start in the business.



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## DEAN'S NOTE



### Dear Alumni & Friends,

As I approach the five-year mark serving our College as Dean, I am proud of where we are in distinguishing ourselves in the changing landscape of communication and information. The College of Communication and Information Sciences has followed a strategic plan to become a premier program dedicated to promoting creativity, intellectual curiosity, integrity, diversity, collaboration and interpersonal adaptability, and our vision is becoming a reality.

Some highlights of the past five years include a merger between the departments of Journalism and Telecommunication and Film that considered the changing industry of news and creative media; a national championship by our Alabama Forensic Council; two best firm awards by our student-run integrated communications firm, Capstone Agency; a 140% increase in research grant submissions; the development of a student services center that includes professional academic advising and employer engagement; the approval of five concentrations in our doctoral program and the creation of three online degree programs.

Additionally, during the past five years we have recruited talented faculty, staff and students who help us to create a rich and vibrant community committed to advancing knowledge in communication, media and information. Our graduate programs are leading the way in growth

as the University seeks to increase graduate student enrollment. This growth contributes to transformative research that drives excellence in our graduate and undergraduate programs and informs our industries.

At C&IS, we are constantly challenging ourselves to be better. This challenge has led to changes in our curriculum, enhanced research facilities, strategic research partnerships and innovative educational experiences for our students. I am excited to share a few of these stories with you in this edition of *Communicator*. It is because of alumni and friends like you that our College is seen as a leader in our disciplines.

As we look to the next five years, you will be instrumental to our continued success. Thank you for your support of our vision and for joining us on this exciting journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark D. Nelson".

Mark D. Nelson, Ph.D.  
Dean and Professor

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*Communicator* is published by the Capstone Communication Society and The University of Alabama's College of Communication and Information Sciences. Its purpose is to keep alumni and supporters informed about the programs, services and activities of the College, as well as developments in the fields of communication and information.

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## POINTS OF PRIDE



The College of Communication and Information Sciences is among the top 10 largest and most comprehensive programs in the United States and consistently ranks among the best schools of our kind in the world. Our distinguished faculty are recognized nationally and internationally for their leadership in major communication organizations related to their fields of study. Our students excel in both major-specific and interdisciplinary student organizations. The extensive alumni network of C&IS is made up of some of the world's most influential industry leaders and professional communicators who do the extraordinary across the full communication and information spectrum.

### WHO'S TEACHING?

**150 FACULTY MEMBERS**

**FIVE PULITZER PRIZE**

winners among C&IS faculty



### WHO'S LEARNING?

**3,000+ STUDENTS**



**POST-GRADUATION PLANS FOR THE CLASS OF 2018**

**86% DIRECTLY TO WORK**

**12% GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL <2% TRAVEL/MILITARY/OTHER**

### AWARDS & RANKINGS

Advertising named **TOP 10 PROGRAM** by College Magazine

Alabama Public Radio has won **3 NATIONAL EDWARD R. MURROW AWARDS** and a **ROBERT F. KENNEDY JOURNALISM AWARD**

**TOP RANKED** for intern placement at The Television Academy in L.A.



**THE PUBLIC SPEAKING PROGRAM** is designated a Program of Distinction by the National Communication Association

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**CAPSTONE AGENCY WAS TWICE NAMED THE BEST STUDENT-RUN COMMUNICATIONS FIRM**

The MFA in Book Arts is **ONE OF FIVE** programs nationwide.

**TOP 5** public relations program by PR Week



### WHO'S CONNECTING?

**20,000+ ALUMNI**

represent **50 STATES & 34 COUNTRIES**

**4,300+ DONORS** contribute to scholarships and programs each year.

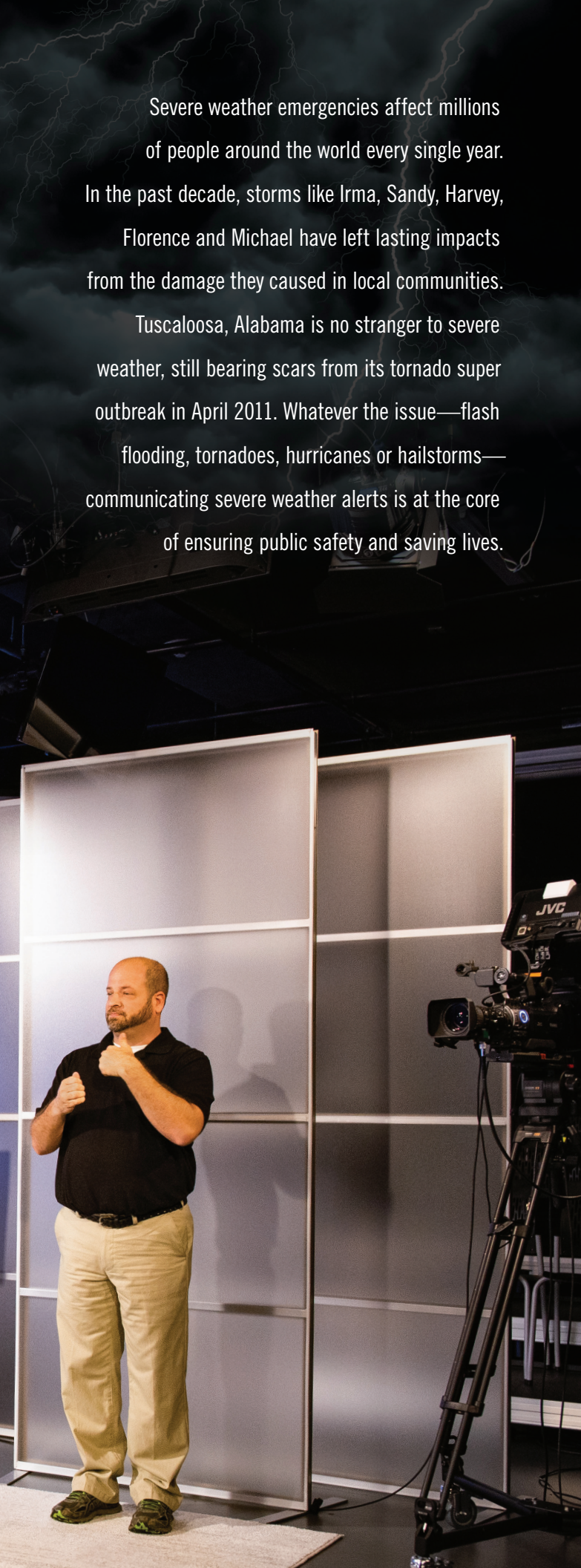


# WHEN MESSAGES MATTER MOST

Three C&IS Researchers Receive Grants to Discover New Ways to Communicate Weather Alerts







Severe weather emergencies affect millions of people around the world every single year. In the past decade, storms like Irma, Sandy, Harvey, Florence and Michael have left lasting impacts from the damage they caused in local communities. Tuscaloosa, Alabama is no stranger to severe weather, still bearing scars from its tornado super outbreak in April 2011. Whatever the issue—flash flooding, tornadoes, hurricanes or hailstorms—communicating severe weather alerts is at the core of ensuring public safety and saving lives.

## INVESTIGATING THE MESSAGE

Understanding how weather alerts work and the varying levels of impact they have on different populations provides a challenge for meteorologists and municipalities alike. What is the most effective medium for their given constituency? And how do they reach less-represented, vulnerable populations within their citizenry? These are the kinds of questions researchers are asking at the College of Communication and Information Sciences, and now they have secured the funding to find the answers.

Dr. Darrin Griffin of the Department of Communication Studies is one such researcher. In collaboration with The University of Alabama's Dr. Jason Senkbeil (College of Arts and Sciences) and Mississippi State University's Dr. Kathy Sherman-Morris (Department of Geosciences), Griffin's team received a grant of more than \$250,000 from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to conduct research on the accessibility and comprehension of tornado warnings among Deaf, Blind and Deaf-Blind populations in the southeastern United States.

“Ultimately, what makes Blind and Deaf populations different is their ability to receive messages,” said Griffin. “At the end of the day, our study is about effective messaging—determining what messaging is working and what isn't working, and improving that messaging.”

Because these populations receive messages differently, communicating severe weather forecasts presents a unique challenge. Visual charts and diagrams, as well as language commonly employed during broadcasts, do not translate effectively. Griffin's team wants to change that, making broadcasts more effective for all people.

Drs. Cory Armstrong and Chandra Clark (Department of Journalism and Creative Media) are tackling a similar issue. Funded by the Alabama-Mississippi Sea Grant Consortium, their research is investigating the effectiveness of different types of weather alerts and how those messages motivate citizens to action in rural and urban communities.

In both of these studies, it is the way messages are communicated that matters most. The difference between being in harm's way or being sheltered and secure may come down to the ability of forecasters and media representatives to understand how people receive messages and what makes them take action.

## IMPROVING THE MESSAGE

Determining how to communicate in ways that best inform particular audiences can be difficult. For each of these studies, the challenges begin with understanding how the audiences process the information and discovering how to change the message in ways that improve their comprehension.

“The first thing we want to know is how people receive severe weather notifications—are they watching television, are they talking to their friends or are they checking social media?” said Armstrong. “Then we want to try and determine what specific words and visuals motivate them to action and what steps they take to prepare for severe weather.”

Jason Senkbeil (left) and Darrin Griffin work with Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind Interpreter Gary Crook to prototype test their American Sign Language interpreting system.



Clark developed six different visual elements of weather broadcasts that were shown to cross-sections of the population in Biloxi and Pearlinton, Mississippi, and Mobile and Magnolia Springs, Alabama. From there, Armstrong asked the subjects to evaluate which models would most likely motivate them to seek shelter from a severe weather event, namely tornadoes and hurricanes. Now, Armstrong is analyzing this data to develop guides for broadcasters, media personnel and meteorologists about effective ways to reach rural populations during severe weather outbreaks.

**“If we can point out the key words and methods for how to announce severe weather then ultimately we can help save lives.”** — DR. CORY ARMSTRONG

For Griffin, the ultimate hope is to create a system that can utilize existing technology and provide live interpreting in American Sign Language (ASL). ASL is a complex language, grammatically different from English and not directly translatable in the way that many English-speaking people assume. During severe weather broadcasts, closed captioning can be unreliable and, even when it is reliable, still fails to appear in ASL users’ primary language. Added to that struggle, weather broadcasts often include scientific language common to English speakers, but less common to ASL users.

Griffin’s idea would help bridge this gap between English-speaking meteorologists and ASL users during severe weather events, saving lives by creating better access to urgent weather updates for Deaf populations. The idea came to Griffin after viewing a video of a hearing ASL interpreter who used Facebook Live to relay an ASL interpretation of an audio weather broadcast to followers.

“I thought, ‘We could actually design that. Why not have that in place for real?’” said Griffin. “At the end of the day, it will increase [NOAA’s] tools for communicating with a vulnerable population.”

The concept features a picture-in-picture broadcast that enables the Deaf population to view the broadcast alongside an ASL interpreter. However, the benefits for this study go far beyond building and testing this system. Researchers will conduct interviews with people in the Deaf community in the Southeast and use the information to offer valuable feedback to on-air meteorologists as to what language is most effective in communicating with a variety of audiences.

According to Griffin, the concept of universal design, or making the world more accessible to all kinds of people, benefits everyone. Hotels that place the thermostat in arm’s reach of the bedside do not sacrifice design aesthetics in the process, and make a big difference for people with limited mobility. All guests end up gaining an increased usability. In the context of Griffin’s research, universal design would mean keeping the video feed that can be understood by hearing audiences while at the same time dramatically increasing the accessibility of the message for Deaf audiences.

“Can we tighten up the bolts on the verbal message? That’s what we’re trying to do,” said Griffin. “We want to do universal design, to look at the Deaf, Blind and Deaf-Blind communities to increase effective messaging that benefits everyone whether or not English is their second language.”

## BEYOND THE MESSAGE

Saving lives and improving their quality are important parts of any scientific discipline. Whether the issue at hand is communicating effectively about severe weather to rural and vulnerable populations or any number of other life-changing advancements in communication, researchers at C&IS are a crucial element in the scientific process.

And the College is growing in its impact. In 2018, C&IS had 17 funded Research Grants Committee (RGC) proposals making it the top RGC-funded college at The University of Alabama. These numbers reflect the disciplines’ significant influence as well as the role communication plays as a part of the greater research culture on campus.

“If you follow the philosophy and logic of science, you can use the same paradigm in communication as you can in biology, physics and chemistry,” said Griffin. “If I’m working alongside meteorologists, computer scientists and geographers to find a way to tackle common problems and showing that my methods are just as sound as theirs, that’s a benefit to the scientific community from an interdisciplinary perspective.”

Right now, C&IS researchers have active relationships with their colleagues across campus in the College of Engineering, College of Social Work, College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Human Environmental Sciences. These relationships fuel creative, multi-disciplinary problem solving to improve lives in the community for generations to come.

The research culture is evolving at C&IS and at its core is a group of dedicated scientists who are asking big questions, tackling global issues and securing the funding to discover solutions.



Top: Griffin works with professionals in the C&IS digital media center to pull together the multiple camera feeds.

Bottom: Armstrong (right) and Clark (left) reviewed multiple models and selected six different weather alert methods to gauge public response and their motivation to act for each model.



## RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP & CREATIVE ACTIVITY

C&IS faculty are nationally recognized for their cutting-edge research initiatives and their best-selling books. In the past year, the College submitted for more grant funding than the previous year by 140%. These are examples of notable secured grants and published books in 2018.

**DR. JOSH PEDERSON: \$315,859**

from the National Science Foundation to examine communication and physiological responses in intimate partnerships.

**ELIZABETH BROCK: \$44,064**

**ROB BRISCOE: \$39,167**

from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to provide significant public service programming to its community, including documentaries, television programs and radio series and specials.

**DRS. CORY ARMSTRONG AND CHANDRA CLARK: \$10,000**

from the U.S. Department of Commerce to study how urban and rural areas identify risk perception through media messages of severe weather.

**SARAH BRYANT: \$6,000**

from UA's Office for Research and Economic Development to aid in the research and production of an artist book which will use the structural format of color matching systems to talk more broadly about the way we communicate, and the motives and/or biases that impact the use and effect of the color systems we rely on.

**DR. STEVEN HOLIDAY: \$6,000**

from UA's Office for Research and Economic Development to examine how the structure of advertisements that assist in achieving strategic persuasive commercial consumer outcomes with young children can be adopted to advance school readiness and early literacy outcomes.







## C&IS STORYTELLERS:

**Lars Anderson**

C&IS Instructor Lars Anderson is a *New York Times* bestselling author and accomplished sportswriter for *Sports Illustrated* and *Bleacher Report*.



# I'll never forget the moment that I received the most oh-so precious advice of my career—the moment, really, when everything changed for me.

I was a young reporter at *Sports Illustrated* (SI), less than a year removed from the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University in New York City. I was walking down the hallway of the 18th floor in the old Time & Life Building in midtown Manhattan, the SI headquarters. That's when I started talking to Alexander Wolff, an SI senior writer and a writing legend who is literally enshrined in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame for his work covering college hoops.

I asked Alex several questions about writing and reporting. Smiling, he waved me into an office and then the two of us talked for an hour—or, more accurately, I peppered Alex with questions and he answered every last one, revealing his inner-most reporting secrets.

I took notes that day—and I still read those yellowed pieces of paper at least once a year. “The key to writing is reporting, Lars,” Alex said. “I guarantee you one thing: If you use only 10 percent of your notebook on any story you're working on—no matter what the subject—it will be a special piece. The key is to report, report, report. And then when you are tired of reporting, do some more reporting. And if you ever feel like you are struggling with your writing, then it probably means you haven't done enough reporting. Quit writing at that point, pick up the phone, and do more reporting. That will solve writer's block faster than anything.”

I've now written nine books, probably more than 1,000 magazine stories, a Showtime documentary, and dozens and dozens of speeches, which I've delivered to audiences across the country. Through the millions of words I've penned and the thousands of people I've interviewed, I've never forgotten Alex's advice he offered on that winter afternoon in 1995 in the heart of New York City.

All writers need mentors, and I've tried to become just that for my students at Alabama. I've developed some of my own writing and reporting philosophies over the years, and I always open up my playbook to my students.

Here are five writing and reporting tips that have helped me immensely over the years—tips that I dig deep into with everyone who walks into my classroom at Alabama.

## 1. Read other writers with a critical eye.

This is essential to developing your own writing “voice.” Find writers you admire and think to yourself, “Why did they begin the story the way they did? Why did they end the piece this particular way?” Pay attention to the rhythm, the cadence, and the pacing of their sentence structure. This is what I did, and as you grow as a writer you can take bits and pieces from the style of other writers and eventually incorporate what you like most into your own style. The goal is to one day have readers recognize your own voice without ever looking at the byline.

## 2. Read your stories aloud.

Back when I was at *Sports Illustrated*, where I spent 20 years and eventually became a senior writer, I remember walking down the hallway in the Time & Life Building late on Sunday nights and hearing a writer reading his story aloud in his office. It was Jack McCallum, then a senior writer at SI and who has won more awards than to enumerate here, and he always wanted to know what his stories sounded like before he filed to his editor. You'll be surprised at how many mistakes you catch—and how much you can improve your writing—by simply voicing them to yourself. If you want poetry in your writing, this is the best way to instill it.

## 3. Be open to criticism.

Let's be honest: Many writers can be stubborn—even young ones. But when you are just beginning your career, feedback from people you trust is vital. Don't be afraid to give a draft of a piece to a colleague or a mentor and have them rip it to shreds. I always did this with my books and magazine stories. I never could get enough advice—even as painful to my pride as it could be at times. But to get better, you must be open and willing to really listen to what others have to say about your writing.

I still practice what I preach. I'm now 47 and am working on my tenth book. One of my colleagues at The University of Alabama is editing the manuscript. My only instruction to her: Be positively ruthless in your editing and tell me what I can do better.

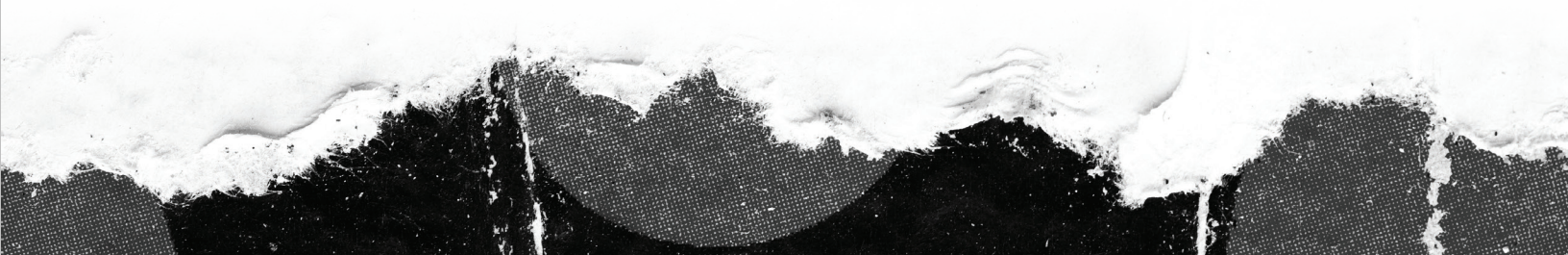
## 4. Empathy is a critical journalistic virtue.

Over the years I've written numerous stories that could be classified as “tragedy pieces,” ranging from my book “The Storm and The Tide” on the Tuscaloosa tornado in 2011 to a piece that was included in “The Best American Sportswriting 2018” on the death of Evan Murray, a high school quarterback in New Jersey who died after taking several hard hits in a game in 2015. In reporting these emotional narratives, I've always attempted to plant myself in the shoes of the people I'm interviewing, to talk to them with respect, sensitivity, and empathy. Along with possessing the ability to listen, I think displaying empathy at all times is essential to being a successful, respected reporter.

## 5. Know the value of your editor.

Too many reporters, in my view, have combative relationships with their editors. A good editor will do three things for you: Make your stories better; make you a better reporter and writer; and certainly will make your life easier if you can foster a good working relationship with him or her. Consider your editor a part of your extended family—and do everything in your power to make that a highly functional, honest, and back-and-forth partnership.

Yet none of these five tips is as important as the one that Alex Wolff shared with me all those years ago. “Report, report, report,” he said. If you do that, no matter your writing skill, I can virtually guarantee you one thing: You'll have a wonderful, enriching career.





# BEHIND *the* SCENES

How a Student-Produced Film  
is Changing Public Perception

Juvenile idiopathic arthritis is a debilitating disease affecting thousands of children across the country. Telecommunication and film student, Joshua Cohen, is using his film, "M I A" to raise awareness about JIA and cast a light on this invisible disease.

Cohen and his JCM 437 production crew with Lily Champion, lead actress in his student film, "M I A".











Filmmaking has an incredible ability to change the sentiments surrounding a topic. The picture, lighting and audio affect the senses, bringing audiences to a place they have not been and compelling them to consider perspectives and experiences that, to them, are foreign and unexplored. Senior telecommunication and film major from Atlanta, Georgia, Joshua Cohen, understands the power of film to move people and sway public thought. He wants to use his film, “M I A,” to change the world.

“M I A” tells the story of a young girl named Mia, who is navigating life with a painful and debilitating disease: juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA). As the film describes, juvenile arthritis is an umbrella term for a number of childhood diseases affecting the joints and musculoskeletal system. JIA specifically includes symptoms such as muscle and soft tissue tightening, bone erosion, joint misalignment and changes in growth patterns. To make matters worse, children suffering from JIA are often overlooked or marginalized. That’s why Cohen titled his film, “M I A,” as in “missing in action,” a play on the character’s name and her social standing.

As a story, “M I A” is deeply personal to Cohen. More than one member of his family has been diagnosed with diseases in the arthritis family. Although in retrospect Cohen’s mom has been battling a disease similar to Mia for most of her life, the disease became challenging and life altering about 15 years ago, forcing her to undergo numerous, regular chemotherapy treatments and surgeries. Cohen witnessed the disease attack his mother’s body first-hand, which served as personal motivation to tell Mia’s story and use it as a vehicle for awareness and change.

Left: Behind-the-scenes photos of the “M I A” production crew including C&IS students Wynter Childers, Joshua Cohen, Malcolm Driscoll, Lydia Eichler, Megan Farrell, Sam Gay, Tristan Hallman, Rhianna Israni, Wade Scanlan and Sam Sheriff.





"I really wanted to get the story out there because there's not enough awareness about this disease," said Cohen. "When I asked my film crew what they thought arthritis was, they thought it was when people had difficulty texting with their thumbs and having stiff joints. That's understandable, but it can also be life threatening and life altering."

In the film, Mia's physical limitations isolate her from her peers and force her to miss out on many of the activities other children can easily enjoy. Mia's story captures her good and bad days, her frustration with routine doctor visits and injections, the emotional toll shared by her family and, ultimately, her motivation to move beyond her diagnosis and present herself in her own way.

"The film shows what it's like to live with this disease from Mia's point of view," said Cohen. "It shows what Mia can and can't do. At the beginning, she lets this disease limit her, but by the end of the film, it doesn't define her anymore."

Because the disease is rare and hard to diagnose, increased awareness amplifies the importance of funding and research to treat and improve the quality of life for those who suffer from JIA. It would also help those who suffer to better understand their symptoms and seek appropriate help from a physician. These are just a few of the ways Cohen wants "M I A" to make a lasting impact.

### **MAKING "M I A"**

For students enrolled in JCM 437: Scene Directing, the script is the starting point. Students come to the class with a script ready to workshop and revise. The editing process exposes weaknesses while strengthening attributes in the plot, dialogue and character profiles.

"I knew Joshua had a really good story to tell," said Maya Champion, Cohen's instructor for JCM 437. "In this class, these films are usually the first films students produce, and they're meant to be stepping stones for a career."

For the writer, director and production team, JCM 437 provides students an opportunity to create stories in a variety of different roles as part of a film crew. When Cohen selected his crew, he found his director of photography in C&IS senior Rhianna Israni of Lakeville, Minn. While Cohen directed the actors and drew out their emotions in the scenes, Israni was lining up the shot, mapping out camera movements and adjusting the lighting.

"Every film you work on improves your skills," said Israni. "You learn a lot from getting new experiences. This was the first time I ever shot under water. It was a lot more difficult than I thought it would be, but it turned out really cool."

Before filming even one scene, the team ensured that they meticulously mapped out every second of filming down to the last minute. With every shot scheduled back to back, moving from location to location, the crew remarkably wrapped up filming for the entire project in just two days. To pull this off, the entire team had to know exactly where to be and what to do in every step of the production.

"With script writing and everything else, the process lasts a whole semester," said Cohen. "So, it's rare to get everything done in two days and not have any pick-up shots."

The student team was modeled after a professional production crew in the film industry. As director, Cohen tasked his peers with responsibilities in various categories: lighting, production design and sound, to name a few. Cohen and Israni worked tirelessly together, shoulder to shoulder, to produce one final video.

"We watched through all the shots and talked. It was a collaboration," said Israni. "He'd like some shots because of the acting, and I would make a case sometimes for a different shot because the camera had a smoother angle."





Cohen's production crew of C&S students worked tirelessly for two full days to wrap up the entire shoot. The team scheduled every shot down to the minute, utilizing some of the most cutting-edge technology to film on playgrounds, in swimming pools and medical exam rooms, to piece together a final cut.

As Cohen's instructor, Champion is proud of the way the film artistically tells Mia's story. But for Cohen, the project was much more, and his aspirations fly high beyond his final grade. In the end, he wants to have changed public perception.

### USING FILM TO RAISE AWARENESS

Twelve-year-old Lily Champion is like many kids her age. Her favorite animal is a shark, and she can't decide if she wants to be an actress, a marine biologist, a journalist or some variation of all three. Diagnosed with JIA at a young age, in many ways, Mia's story is Lily's story—sitting on the bench while her friends at school play during recess, feeling marginalized and ignored. She has lived the experiences Cohen's film captures, and her struggles equipped her to play it out on screen.

"When we first told Lily about the story, she wanted to be in it," said Cohen. "Then when we showed her the script, she read through it and said, 'Wow. I did all these things. I had these symptoms.'"

Films showcasing actors and actresses with disabilities are rare; rarer still are films whose actors and actresses portray their own disability on the screen. Casting Lily to play Mia and telling her story alongside the film gives JIA a young, relatable face, personalizing the experience in such a way that audiences feel Mia's struggles and are motivated to be agents of awareness and change themselves.

The awareness efforts for JIA are limited when compared to other, more widespread diseases. Cohen is using "M I A"

to rewrite the script on this disease. In a tangible sense, this dream of Cohen's is already a reality. His film already screened at Camp M.A.S.H. (Make Arthritis Stop Hurting), a camp run by Children's Hospital of Alabama. Now, Cohen wants to extend his reach even further by permitting physicians to screen the film in their offices and submitting the film to various film festivals across the country.

"Once you put it on the festival circuit, you can attract attention from people who want to develop it into a feature script," said Champion. "Then Josh can use his student film as a stepping stone to something bigger."

Bringing "M I A" to a larger audience would mean pivotal conversations are taking place about the perception of and treatment for JIA. "M I A" gives a voice to young people all over the country who exist in a daily struggle with a seemingly invisible disease. More than that, "M I A" gives them confidence that their disease does not have to define and rule over their circumstances.

From the first day of JCM 437, Cohen's dream has been to use his gifts as a director and filmmaker to make a difference in the lives of children like Mia. With the passion Cohen brings from his personal experiences and the hard work of the student film crew, "M I A" has unlimited potential to change the conversation, and for film students like Cohen, these educational experiences are invaluable.



# NO DEBATE ABOUT IT!

A STUDENT'S BIG IDEA MEETS A PROFESSOR'S PASSION





As a senior at Northridge High School in Tuscaloosa, now C&IS student, Will Henson, decided that his educational experience needed something more. College application deadlines loomed in the future, and he wanted to invest his time in something that would prepare him. Passionate about issues and bold in his defenses, he knew debate would be a transformational next step as a skill and experience. There was only one problem: Northridge High School, like many schools in the Tuscaloosa City School district, did not have a debate team. That didn't stop Will from pursuing the opportunity.

### HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Will gathered a few friends with similar interests and decided to reach out to The University of Alabama.

"I just went through the directory of the Communication Studies department. If anyone could help us, they'd be in there," said Henson. "Eventually someone put me in touch with Dr. Butler. Three or four emails later he was coming by the school for an interest session."

What Henson didn't know was that, at the same time he was looking to form a debate team, Dr. Sim Butler (communication studies) was developing ways to teach debate to UA students beyond traditional competition. To Butler, the idea of his students establishing community partnerships with local middle schools and high schools provides an educational experience while serving a great need across the state of Alabama. And so, the Alabama Debate Society began.

For the UA students involved, the Alabama Debate Society provides an educational experience unlike anything offered on campus. At its core, the group is a team of undergraduate and graduate students who are interested in debate as an activity. What makes it different from a traditional debate team is that, rather than accomplishing their learning outcomes through competition, they seek out nontraditional ways to work

on argumentation. First among those methods is coaching students in middle school and high school debate programs.

"It's experiential learning, based on the idea that our students have to master those skills in order to teach them properly," said Butler. "UA students get advanced argumentation experience by helping younger students understand argumentation—even if they are not the ones debating."

As an added bonus, the Alabama Debate Society teaches students how to engage their community, be an advocate for their community and become partners in community-based, participatory research. In other words, UA students master the skills they would learn on a traditional debate team while they are contributing to their community and helping to develop its younger students.

"Most of our off-campus partnerships with schools develop some sort of extracurricular," said Butler. "The one we do the most is debate, and we refer to these as our 'debate incubators.'"

Butler's model pairs qualified UA students with a local school to work on either developing or maintaining an existing debate program. C&IS commits to working several years with a program until it arrives at a level of self-sustainability. They also reach out to the debate community state-wide to

*Students from Bryant High School work with UA student, Sophia Warner (Birmingham), in one of the Alabama Debate Society's debate incubators.*





**“Having avenues to practice civil discourse and dialogue are missing from the way that we teach advocacy in a forensics education paradigm. We could use more dialogue.”**

**— Dr. Sim Butler**

assist programs who may be in peril from circumstances such as coaching changes.

“A lot of times programs are in between coaches or have a new coach who can’t yet sustain the program at the expected level,” said Butler. “They’ll reach out to us and ask us for help and we try to assist them with these transitions.”

### WHY DEBATE MATTERS

It’s been three years since Will Henson first reached out to Dr. Sim Butler about establishing a debate program at Northridge High School. Now Henson is a junior at UA and helps coach the debate incubators at both Northridge and Bryant High School in Tuscaloosa. He’s now seen the program he helped start years before come full circle.

“I feel a sense of personal responsibility for the team that I helped start at Northridge,” said Henson. “I want to see it continue and thrive, but I also understand that it’s really important because it gives students opportunities that they wouldn’t have otherwise.”

Being a part of a strong debate program equips students with skills that serve them well in college, as well as in the everyday relationships they have in their jobs, communities and homes. Henson understands that the skills learned in his debate experience such as critical analysis, research synthesis and public speaking all serve him well in the college classroom and beyond.

“Having avenues to practice civil discourse and dialogue are missing from the way that we teach advocacy in a forensics education paradigm,” said Butler. “We could use more dialogue. We could use more argumentation...using arguments for discovery.”

In the ideal world, that’s exactly how democracy is supposed to flourish: discovery through argumentation. By having the arguments go up against each other, you can determine where they are strong and where they are weak.

“While there are many co-curricular activities that build transformational skills among students, forensics and debate stand alone in providing an opportunity to develop a student’s ability to understand and articulate arguments

from a variety of perspectives,” said Dr. Mark Nelson, Dean, College of Communication and Information Sciences.

This is one of the key reasons Tuscaloosa City Schools Superintendent, Mike Daria, feels so strongly about reestablishing a thriving debate program in his district. In the national dialogue which occurred following the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in February 2018, Daria was impressed by the presence of student voices on issues surrounding the national gun control debate.

“You saw the skill they used to take a position and argue it articulately on a national stage with passion and research, and I looked at our students and thought, our students can do that,” said Daria. “Then I looked at what that school system offered, and they have a robust speech and debate program. Their program is established, supported and expected, and you can see the results of that.”

Daria plans for the Tuscaloosa City School System to provide experiences and exposure in speech and debate for every one of its students, from the elementary level all the way to up graduating seniors.

“We want every student who walks across that stage [at graduation] to have the set of skills, talents and abilities to be highly successful after high school,” said Daria. “Whether they are going to college or into a career, those skills will allow them to stand above others, where they can be highly successful. One of the big pieces of that is being a communicator.”

### THE FUTURE OF THE ALABAMA DEBATE SOCIETY

The support from the Tuscaloosa City School Board ensures a lasting relationship between its schools and the Alabama Debate Society. Now that they have the support of the administration, they are not just training students how to debate, they are training teachers to become coaches. This part of the process is essential for sustaining the program long after UA students and C&IS faculty transition to a new school.

“With the support of the schools we’ve got a major piece, but we’ve got to keep taking kids to competition,” said Henson. “We will continue to make a difference and increase the scope of that difference as we continue.”

The Alabama Debate Society is bringing debate back to The University of Alabama. It may not look like a traditional, competition debate team, but the UA students involved are learning advanced argumentation while making an impact in the community around them. C&IS alumni are taking pride in supporting these efforts. With the support of the school system, financial contributions from alumni and the time to develop these programs, Tuscaloosa’s middle school and high school students are headed toward a brighter, more successful future where student voices are articulated with passion and research.



*Bryant High School students compete in the Prattville Lion Classic. Two students made the quarterfinals, and two were named finalists.*

### HOW YOU CAN HELP:

The Alabama Debate Society may be just getting started, but with your support, the program can continue for years to come. Contact the College at [uaccis@ua.edu](mailto:uaccis@ua.edu) to find out how you can get involved.





# STEPPING OUT

*Industry Immersion Develops Professional Confidence in Undergraduate Students*

Anxious. Nervous. Excited. This is how Emma Adcock of Nashville felt two years ago when her parents dropped her off at the airport, bound for a Washington, D.C. Industry Immersion trip. Months before, she had been so nervous that she backed out of an interview entirely, removing herself from consideration for a similar trip to New York City. Yet somehow, she mustered up the courage for this trip and followed through. So, with her suitcase in her hand and her heart in her throat, she stepped onto the plane.

"It's a very daunting thing," Emma said. "I didn't feel like I was put together enough to be on the trip. I just didn't feel like I was enough."

As it has been for hundreds of C&IS students, stepping onto that plane would launch a pivotal transition for Emma to develop professional confidence and build essential, personal skills to help her excel in an industry setting. The Industry Immersion program at C&IS is a professional development opportunity for University of Alabama students to travel to leading job markets, explore various industry settings and engage with experienced alumni and industry professionals.

**SO, WITH HER SUITCASE IN HER HAND AND HER HEART IN HER THROAT, SHE STEPPED ONTO THE PLANE.**





# & STEPPING UP

The program places motivated undergraduates in the middle of board rooms in the heart of some of the country's most dynamic cities, swapping business cards with its top talent. Trips include tours of agencies and organizations, coaching in professional development and Q&A time with industry tycoons. Like Emma, not every student is ready to step right into a career in that environment—few students are. So, the Industry Immersion student leadership team prepares them by developing itineraries that introduce participants to company cultures, city life and a variety of roles.

"Once students are accepted for a trip, we work with them to make sure that they're ready," said Ellora Lalla, the director

of professional development on the Industry Immersion student leadership team. "We coach them on how to act in professional settings, ask strategic questions, tailor their resumes, professionalize their social media and craft their elevator pitches."

The result? Students march into well-known, global companies such as Disney, Ketchum, Edelman, Google and Time, Inc., with poise and determination. By the trip's end, students have a pile of business cards, traction for their career and a supercharged mission upon returning to campus. Some students have even landed jobs and internships on the spot.

*Above: Industry Immersion students experience the big-city vibe in markets such as New York City, San Francisco and Nashville, and visit with C&IS alumni such as Graham Flanagan at Business Insider (bottom right).*





Industry Immersion student leadership team president, Emma Adcock (left), works with Ellora Lalla (right) to build a trip itinerary.

*"I've gained so much from being involved in Industry Immersion. I have a newfound confidence going into meetings, my resume and elevator pitch are stronger, and I feel very capable asking critical questions and interacting with professionals."*

—EMMA ADCOCK

Industry Immersion trip participants network with leading professionals at Ketchum, a top public relations firm in New York City.



"After Industry Immersion trips, every student has a story," said Dr. Litsa Rivers, Director of Experiential Learning and Outreach at C&IS. "The stories aren't all the same, but they all include an element of self-discovery, either defining exactly what they want their career to be or learning that they should pursue a different path. Both are equally valuable."

These trips serve to complement the educational process. Students who are actively learning about the full spectrum of communication in their courses are transported beyond the university setting to witness the environment firsthand. The textbook skills and fundamentals take on a new and deeper meaning as they see it, feel it, reflect on it and experience it with their peers.

As a C&IS Board of Visitors member and longtime advocate and host of Industry Immersion, Lindsay Garrison believes in the value of this transformative student experience. As proof of her dedication, Garrison spearheaded a Board of Visitors endowment of \$100,000 to help create more opportunities for all C&IS students to participate through scholarships.

"The benefits of Industry Immersion go well beyond networking. They help students truly envision their careers in the rapidly evolving field of communication," said Garrison, senior vice president at Edelman. "Meeting with alumni in their work environment gives students invaluable context to what they're learning in the classroom."

For each trip, the eight members of the Industry Immersion student leadership team craft a unique experience for the participants, including a thorough orientation to the city and a detailed outline of the companies they visit. The participants who engage in the meetings, strive to make connections and follow up with them after the program tend to see opportunities open up in their search for internships and jobs. At the very least, their confidence and competence equip them to pursue those opportunities on their own.

Two years after that first plane ride, Emma now serves as the current president of the Industry Immersion student leadership team. She admits she still gets butterflies in her stomach as she steps into those high-profile meetings with industry superstars. But overall, her experience with Industry Immersion has been transformative.

"I've gained so much from being involved in Industry Immersion," Emma said. "I have a newfound confidence going into meetings, my resume and elevator pitch are stronger, and I feel very capable asking critical questions and interacting with professionals."

It's easy to see Industry Immersion participants walking the halls at some of the nation's most impressive companies and imagine what's next. Years from now, students like Emma Adcock will welcome a new generation of University of Alabama up-and-comers into their board rooms and be a part of the process that introduces these students to the kind of careers their future holds.





BE A  
CHAMPION

# CAPSTONE AGENCY

HOW UA'S STUDENT-RUN FIRM BECAME THE BEST IN THE COUNTRY

In 2008, Teri Henley was handed a thin, manila folder of old client leads and inherited a team of twelve undergraduate students. She was tasked with reinventing Alabama's student-run communications firm in a way that would provide students a platform to build their portfolios, interact with clients, deliver sustainable campaigns and gain insight into the communication industry. In just ten years, that firm, Capstone Agency, has grown to 115 members representing all five C&IS undergraduate majors and has twice been named the best student-run firm in the nation.





If you look around Teri Henley's office, her commitment to excellence is displayed clearly by the number of plaques, medals and awards that decorate the walls. She describes herself as "award driven," and it shows in how she uses awards to motivate her students. After all, at The University of Alabama, people like to win.

"The first national PRSSA conference I attended, I sat there through the awards banquet and Alabama didn't get anything," Henley said. "Like Scarlet O'Hara, I swore—as God is my witness—we would never go home empty handed again."

And she was right; the agency wouldn't go home empty handed for long. In 2011, competing against professionals on a national level, they won the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) Silver Anvil Award of Excellence for LessThanUThink, an anti-binge drinking campaign. A National Chapter Award for University Service would follow in 2012. Then, in both 2016 and 2018, PRSSA named Capstone Agency the Best Student-Run Firm in the country, an award which evaluates firms based on their agency operations, billable hours, client work, client revenue, professional development opportunities for members, agency culture and pro bono work. In the past

**Capstone Agency offers me an unmatched experience working with real clients in a functional agency environment.** —KATHLEEN MCMANUS

three years, Capstone Agency has also been awarded PRSSA's Best Campaign (2x), Best Tactic (2x), and served as PRSSA National's Agency of Record. National recognition at this scale and with this consistency makes Capstone Agency a model for other student-run firms to emulate, study and implement at their schools. In a matter of only six years, the agency went from empty-handed to best firm.

Without a doubt, Henley has been instrumental in the sustained success of Capstone Agency, but she would place herself far outside the spotlight; she says her job is to "sit back and watch the magic happen." According to Henley, the "secret sauce" of Capstone Agency has two main ingredients. First, agency members are constantly thinking about the next person to fill their shoes and are not "allowed" to graduate until they've replicated



themselves. The second ingredient is that Capstone Agency is truly led by students. The agency selects its own membership and leadership, produces its own client work and its members hold each other accountable. The students take ownership and set high goals.

"They totally run themselves," said Henley. "They mentor each other and look out for each other, because they don't want the agency falling apart after they graduate; they want it to keep growing and keep getting better."

The results speak for themselves. Last year alone, Capstone Agency completed work for eight clients across disciplines, securing local and national media coverage, managing more than \$65,000 in client budgets and logging more than 12,700 hours of work.

"The students in Capstone Agency are preparing themselves for their careers after graduation," said Dr. Joseph Phelps, Chair of the Department of Advertising and Public Relations. "We're talking about professional-caliber work and an experience that can't be duplicated elsewhere."

"Capstone Agency offers me an unmatched experience working with real clients in a functional agency environment. Contributing alongside driven, passionate students from different backgrounds challenges me to learn about all areas of the public relations field, and seeing campaigns from ideation to final evaluation enables me to build a breadth and depth of transferable skills," said Kathleen McManus, assistant firm director from Chicago.

At PRSSA's National Conference, it's now common to see other universities' public relations students approaching Capstone Agency team members, asking what their secret is and how they continue to produce results. Ten years ago, Henley saw untapped potential in what a firm at The University of Alabama could be and, in that, an opportunity to become something truly special. It's hard to imagine that only a decade ago, Capstone Agency was an unaffiliated group of about a dozen students who occasionally gathered to do pro-bono work for organizations on campus.

"I basically told them I wasn't interested in doing that," Henley said. "I asked them, 'What do you think of doing this instead? Because if you want to do something bigger, something strategic, you can be a whole lot more.'"

Henley may not be immortalized in bronze alongside names such as Stallings, Saban and Bryant, but her commitment to excellence, her vision for something more and her empowerment of student voices have a pluck and grit all of their own, ensuring that she will be ever remembered as one of Alabama's legendary leaders. And if she has her way, the student awards will keep on coming.

*Opposite (clockwise from top left):*

*(1) Capstone agency students take a break to stretch it out during CreateAthon, their 24-hour, pro bono marketing marathon;*

*(2) Teri Henley oversees production for one of Capstone Agency's client teams;*

*(3) Capstone Agency students brainstorm creative solutions during CreateAthon;*

*(4) Capstone Agency members preview client work for one of the agency's 10 clients.*

# RECOGNIZED AS THE BEST

## FIRM IN THE COUNTRY, CAPSTONE AGENCY SETS THE STANDARD ACROSS THE NATION.

### AGENCY OPERATIONS

**130+** **21** **5** **10**  
MEMBERS DIRECTORS DEPARTMENTS CLIENT TEAMS

**12,700+**  
2018 BILLABLE HOURS

### CLIENT WORK

EcoCAR Mobility Challenge  
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LessThanUThink

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PRSSA's Best Campaign (2x)  
Best Tactic (2x)  
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## 2018 GIFTS TO C&IS

Thank you to alumni and friends who supported the College of Communication & Information Sciences in 2018. Your generous contributions support scholarships and further our mission to develop global leaders who do the extraordinary across the full communication, media and information spectrum.

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## 2018 GIFTS TO C&IS (CONTINUED)



### SPOTLIGHT: JOHN GARDNER DONOR, C&IS BOARD OF VISITORS MEMBER

John Gardner serves as President of Luckie & Company, a marketing agency that uses science and creativity to specialize in the human experience. Gardner's career has been marked by anticipating, embracing and driving change in marketing and business development. Most recently, this has led to the transformation of Luckie into an agency focused on getting companies closer to their customers and finding the human in their brand. His passion for developing leaders has changed the lives of Luckie's people and has helped develop new leaders within C&IS. Gardner has contributed time, support and insight into various student competitions, awards and lectures housed by the College.

“As a firm with two C&IS Hall of Fame inductees (Ace and Bobby Luckie), our support for the College is in our blood, and as we realize the challenges of a changing communications environment, the commitment will only grow stronger in the future. The partnership between Luckie & Company and the College of Communication and Information Sciences has and will continue to be a major emphasis for our firm.” — JOHN GARDNER

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## 2018 GIFTS TO C&IS (CONTINUED)

**“I contribute in gratitude for the excellent library training I received at The University of Alabama. I hope to enable future school librarians to enter the profession fully prepared. School librarians open the world to K-12 students via access to books and research that will fuel students’ educational pursuits and inform them as they mature to actively engage as citizens in their respective communities.”** — ANNA ALLISON

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### SPOTLIGHT: ANNA DORSEY COOKE ALLISON DONOR

Anna Dorsey Cooke Allison received a bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary. After teaching English for five years, she received a master's degree from The University of Alabama School of Library and Information Studies in 1967. Throughout her career, Allison worked at four libraries, including serving as head librarian at Lane High School in Charlottesville, Virginia for six years and volunteering at the Harford Day School library in Bel Air, Maryland for nearly 30 years. Most recently, Allison gave a gift to the College of Communication and Information Sciences to create scholarship opportunities for students seeking a career as school librarians.



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