Welcome to the Fall/Winter 2015-16 FMS Newsletter!

In this issue you’ll find our usual blend of features about FMS classes, profiles of alums, and news about FMS events.

We have also continued the trend of asking our students to write articles, which gives them additional journalism experience and often helps them to make some interesting and useful contacts.

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Film and Media Studies Co-director Julie Dobrow (left) signs off on senior Jennifer Gewant’s FMS major declaration form at the start of the fall semester. Gewant became Tufts’ first official FMS major, with more than 25 students joining her to date.

Send us your news!

Changed jobs? Gone back to school? Moved?
We want to hear from you. Email us at fms@tufts.edu.

Do you know someone who might be interested in receiving this newsletter?
Feel free to pass it along.
Welcome to the first edition of the Film and Media Studies (FMS) Newsletter! Our FMS major, which we launched in the fall, has already garnered a lot of interest: inquiries from prospective students are pouring in and current students are enrolling in our classes at almost unprecedented rates. As the second semester of FMS begins we’re pleased to report that we’ve already signed up more than twenty new majors, including six seniors who have taken enough classes to be able to complete FMS as a second major. Despite being the newest major at Tufts we are not the smallest, and we are on a trajectory for tremendous growth.

As an integrated film and media studies major, all of our students take three core FMS courses, which impart a common vocabulary, an understanding of the preeminent theories in film and media studies, and knowledge about the history and structure of the media industries and their effects on audiences. Students then take seven or eight electives in areas of their own choice, such as film studies, filmmaking and media production, or communications and media studies. Of these, one must be a practice course as practical experience is essential to understanding media; one a theory-based course; one an upper-level course; and one a non-U.S. film or media course. In their senior year, students have the opportunity to do a one or two-semester capstone project, which can be a written thesis or a creative work. We are looking forward to reporting back in the spring on what our first six FMS majors have done as senior capstone projects!

As you’ll see in this edition of our newsletter, we’ve had a busy semester. In addition to launching the new major, we’ve introduced some new courses, including the new core course for all majors and minors (you can read a profile of “Art of the Moving Image” on page 5). We’ve sponsored a number of events and held a “kickoff” (see pages 3 and 4) for the new major. And our students have been involved in a great variety of internships, research projects, and film and media-related extra-curricular activities.

From all of us on the Hill to all of you, our very best wishes for a happy and healthy new year.

Julie Dobrow and Malcolm Turvey
The opening kickoff

By Ben Reyblat, A17

Midway through the inaugural semester for Film and Media Studies seemed like the perfect time to celebrate what the program had already accomplished—from new courses and affiliated faculty to having more than 20 students sign on to the major over the first six weeks of academic year. The October 30 event drew a multitude of Tufts students, faculty, alumni, and other members of the community, including remarks from Tufts President Tony Monaco, deans Nancy Bauer and Jim Glaser, and alum and WNET President Neal Shapiro, A80, one of program’s most ardent supporters as it flourished and grew under Communications and Media Studies (CMS). The event itself featured film screenings, media-related workshops with alumni, a keynote lecture, and a reception for all to enjoy.

See below for the highlights.

Media workshops with alumni

The kickoff began with workshops led by alums representing various walks of media. Jeff Strauss, A84, offered a humorous and insightful take on television writing/producing and explored his experience working on the hit television show, *Friends*, among others. Host of WCVB-TV’s Chronicle Anthony Everett, A83, and author/staff writer for The Boston Globe Magazine, Neil Swidey, A91, discussed the future of digital and multiplatform journalism. And Meredith Turits, A09, led a workshop on how to effectively leverage the power and influence of social media, tying it in with her experience as the former senior culture editor at the online magazine, *Bustle*. The media workshops were a hit, and offered Tufts students meaningful introductions into the fields of television, journalism, and digital media.

Jeff Strauss (pictured left, on right) discusses the finer points of television writing and producing with CMS senior Tal Smith, A16, during his kickoff workshop. Strauss has worked on numerous shows during his career, including *Dream On, Friends, Partners,* and *Reba.*

Neil Swidey (right) speaks to CMS Senior Nick Plosi, A16 about the ways in which technology is changing contemporary news coverage during a presentation about multiplatform journalism. Swidey has taught classes in a similar vein for CMS alongside fellow alum Anthony Everett.
Alumni film screenings
Next, the new FMS program showcased four short films from a pair of alumni filmmakers. The films shown were *Breathe, Relax* and *Rigamo* from Chelsea Grayson, A12; and *Miami Beach* and *Vino Tinto* from Carlos Gutierrez, A98. The directors gave some background information about their films during the session and students were given the opportunity to speak to the directors about their films and the filmmaking process after the screenings were finished.

Keynote lecture: “From *Firing Line* to *The O’Reilly Factor***”
MIT Professor of Film and Media, Heather Hendershot, provided the keynote lecture. Professor Hendershot spoke about the transition from William F. Buckley’s public affairs program *Firing Line* to its modern day equivalent, *The O’Reilly Factor*, offering political and historical context to illustrate how today’s shows could harken back to the intellectual combat of *Firing Line*.

The event concluded with a reception in the Coolidge Room of Ballou Hall, where students, faculty, alumni and other guests enjoyed refreshments and lively conversation.

Chelsea Grayson (left) screened a pair of distinctive and unique short films, *Breathe, Relax* (a musical montage built around a game of double Dutch) and *Rigamo* (a sci-fi/fantasy piece).

MIT Professor Heather Hendershot examined the history and evolution of political talk show coverage from *Firing Line* to *The O’Reilly Factor*. 
Moving images

By John Ciampa

There’s a lot of movement during Malcolm Turvey’s lectures.

Scenes and images flash across the screen, tracing the historical narrative of the moving image. Among them, benchmarks of cinema – films from Hitchcock, Kubrick and Scorsese – along with clips from television series past and present. There’s even some discussion of storytelling in video games.

This visual pastiche is all part of a new course, “Art of the Moving Image,” that he teaches each year. It’s the core requirement for the new major and minor in Film and Media Studies, and may very well serve as the program’s philosophical foundation, according to Turvey’s summary of it.

“The FMS program aims to impart, above all else, media literacy,” he says. “To be literate in a medium, you have to be able to perceive and understand the conventions and techniques of that medium. ‘Art of the Moving Image’ is a core course because it teaches students about the fundamental techniques of moving image media, such as editing and camera movement.”

Turvey, himself, is a figure in motion, exercising a syncopated cadence between steps and hand gestures as he conveys each thought to his students. Clearly, he finds the material exciting.

“Introductory courses are my favorite ones to teach,” he says. “Students are encountering much of the material for the very first time, and are often enthralled once their eyes are opened to the artistic possibilities of film and other media.

“The comment I love most on a student evaluation for my course is ‘I now see so much more in film than I did before.’ That’s why I feel passionate about the material.”

Turvey splices the course into six parts, with the first three focused on films’ form and style. In addition to the aforementioned American filmmakers, Turvey mines the work of foreign directors like de Sica (The Bicycle Thieves), Bergman (Wild Strawberries), and Kurosawa (High and Low), showcasing various aspects of filmmaking such as editing or narrative, with each technique highlighting some creative deployment of the moving image. Other films he covers range from mainstream Hollywood films such as Zero Dark Thirty (Kathryn Bigelow)
to avant-garde classics like *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren). A fair amount of media theory is also included, and students must discuss and write about topics ranging from art and genre to character identification. One short paper and a longer, final piece of writing make up the bulk of the workload. As an introductory course, it’s open to all students.

Midway through the semester, the class plunges into television to examine how the moving image transitioned from screen to tube—a change still taking place in sometimes unexpected ways.

“When I began [teaching], cinema was considered the most important artistic mass medium. TV was thought of as a poor second cousin, and of course there was no internet or interactive digital art,” he says.

“Cinema remains very important, but students are now equally interested, it seems to me, in TV and digital media. Cinema is no longer perceived as the dominant medium, but is instead just one of several.”

This contemporary bent keeps the course fresh and lively. It also neatly connects the present to the past—the timely wit and physical comedy of the sitcom with heavy weight of early experimental film. Turvey sees fit to juxtapose clips from *I Love Lucy* and *The Big Bang Theory*, for instance, with the “intellectual montage” of Eisenstein's 1928 take on the Russian Revolution, *October*. The result is an illustration of both the range and power of the screened image—an art form that now stretches back more than a century but continues to grow more vital than ever thanks to television and digital media.

Yet for all of television (and media’s) recent groundbreaking, cinema remains the premier vehicle for the visual storyteller, says Turvey.

“While cinema must certainly now share seats at the table with other mediums, I doubt it will decline in importance. It seems to me that viewers still want strong visual storytelling that is spectacular and absorbing. As long as cinema can continue to offer that, it will remain significant,” he says.

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**FMS online**

FMS continues to expand on the web!

Please take a moment to visit our [website](#), where you’ll find photos, useful links and video files from many of our events. If you have a career update, please send it to John Ciampa.

Like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter by clicking the above icons.

You can also visit our YouTube and Vimeo pages to hear from current students, alumni, and to view our extensive archive of student films and event coverage!
Media internships help students make connections, not copies

By Leslie Goldberg

Many students learned this fall that media internships can make all the difference in gaining the valuable, hands-on skills they will need to find a job after graduation. Students in the course FMS99 — Media Internships — didn’t just bring coffee or answer the phones. They wrote press releases, researched and filmed their own news stories, tweeted and blogged, analyzed consumer data — and more. Students worked in advertising agencies, public relations firms, local television stations, and magazines; companies included Boston Magazine, the Improper Bostonian, Hill Holliday, Nickerson PR, and the New England Center for Investigative Reporting.

FMS has many resources to help students find internships. This semester, we expanded our online database to include more listings and detailed descriptions of the many available internship positions in Boston, New York, and throughout the country. FMS also held a standing-room-only walk-in session to guide students through the internship search process. Walk-in sessions, held a few times a year, address the frequently asked questions students have about finding and obtaining credit for media-related internships. In the coming months, we will continue to develop and expand our programs to help students find interesting, career-enhancing positions.

For more information about obtaining a for-credit summer or fall internship, contact Leslie Goldberg at leslie.goldberg@tufts.edu or John Ciampa at john.ciampa@tufts.edu.

Student internship reflections...

I decided to intern at the New England Center for Investigative Reporting (NECIR) this fall because I wanted the opportunity to observe the daily work of a journalist. The internship was located at the radio newsroom at WGBH, where I assisted an investigative reporter with research to propel his stories. Investigative reporting relies on data, and I got to work with data in many ways. I sent emails, made phone calls, and traveled to government agencies in order to obtain data. My supervisor showed me how to look for signs of foul play in public documents and data files. I learned that businesses and politicians all file financial reports that can be found online. I even learned a few special skills, including how to place geographical data on a map.

It was a thrill sitting in the newsroom for one of Boston’s local NPR stations, and by the end of the internship I had formed professional connections with several reporters. Although the internship was in investigative reporting, I was able to observe radio reporters and podcast producers, too. I gained knowledge, connections, and direction from the experience— I’m now looking for a next internship in radio reporting!

— Jordan Abosch, A17, Philosophy/Economics

I spent my fall semester as an intern for Hill Holliday's analytics department, where I was able to pursue my career goal of being in marketing and advertising. I worked closely with an incredibly sharp team of analysts who tracked the campaign success of major national brands such as Dunkin’ Donuts and Bank of America. On top of gaining technical skills working with big data sets, I gained invaluable experience with storytelling about consumer insights, which has become very useful in my job search. Hill Holliday structured the internship experience to maximize our learning potential, setting up "aducations" (advertising education) sessions on a weekly basis so we could learn about the roles of the other 400-plus employees at Hill Holliday's Boston office, a perfect opportunity to network with industry head honchos!

— Suah Lee, A16, Sociology/Minor in Entrepreneurial Leadership Studies
I’ve watched a great deal of local news bloopers in my years on YouTube, and this semester I finally got the chance to create a few of my own. This fall, I had the opportunity to intern on the Somerville Neighborhood News (SNN) program, which is part of Somerville Cable Access Television 3. SNN concentrates on news stories of local interest and the impact of national news stories in Somerville. The news team was made up of interns in various undergraduate and graduate media and journalism programs across the Boston area, and I had the insider view as the only Somerville resident on the team. We were responsible for working as “one man news teams” — meaning that when I went out alone, I was the camera operator, the sound technician, the interviewer, the writer, and the editor of the story. This was not easy, but it forced me to learn quickly and on my feet. I was lucky to be able to spend time getting to know the many faces and groups that make up the diverse fabric of Somerville, and I hope I gave them a voice on local television. The most important thing I learned this semester at SNN is to take risks, experiment, and always send a thank you follow-up!

—Brendan Donohue, A16, English/Minor in Communications and Media Studies

During this past fall, I interned in the strategy department of Jack Morton Worldwide. What I enjoyed most about working at Jack is how valuable the company made me feel. At no point was I relegated to the stereotypical intern jobs like getting coffee or making copies. Instead, I was given opportunities to contribute to client work on a variety of projects, ranging from top-level brainstorms and planning down to analytics and measurement for clients in various stages of their campaigns. Additionally, the work environment at Jack is extremely warm and inviting. From day one, I sensed that being a part of the Jack community was very important. Some memorable quotes I heard were, “aim to produce work worthy of applause” and “we take our work extremely seriously, but ourselves, not so much.” Reflecting on my internship with Jack, I’m very happy about the experience I was able to gain and the variety of work I was exposed to, because getting real strategy experience early in one’s professional career can be challenging.

—Miles Fossett, A16, Interdisciplinary Studies/Minor in Communications and Media Studies

Nearly 30 students took part in our annual “Winternship” program from January 4 to 8, with placements at companies in Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles.

Above: Claudia Udolf, A18, at the blackboard during her stint at BBK Worldwide in Boston (hosted by Joan Bachenheimer, J75), while Maya Blackstone, A17, (right) records inside a teddy bear-laden sound room at Nancy Glass Productions in Philadelphia (hosted by Nancy Glass, J77).
Interning along the thin blue line

By Xander Landen, A16

(Editor’s note: the following is a first-person account of Xander Landen’s contributions to a news story that picked up considerable traction last summer on various news outlets and social media channels. Landen, a CMS minor who interned at WNYC in New York, found himself thrust into an investigation inside the city’s disclosure—or lack thereof—on police conduct.)

With a microphone in hand, I spent most of my days last summer running around New York City and asking a lot of questions. My internship at WNYC usually sent me out of the office to chase down Mayor Bill de Blasio at press events, cover protests at City Hall and interview New Yorkers about their opinions on new city-wide housing and policing policies.

But one day in July that all changed—I got a new assignment that would keep me glued to my desk and out of the muggy New York heat for the rest of the summer.

An investigative reporter for the station, Robert Lewis, was working on a story about police officers in the city who had credibility problems. These were officers who racked up histories of disciplinary complaints or infractions for behavior including the use of excessive force and lying in court or on police records. But in New York, a law referred to as “50-A” shields officer misconduct records from the public under the pretense that as government employees, police have a right to privacy. Lewis wanted to know if other states have similar laws that shield similar misconduct records and asked me to look into it.

That day I scoured the Internet in search of a state-by-state breakdown of laws that control police department transparency. I came up with very little: only vague or partial lists that disclosed states where officer misconduct records were "probably available" or "most likely unavailable" to the public. But instead of being discouraged by this dearth of information, we viewed it as an opportunity and decided to fill in the gaps by broadening the story about New York’s transparency problem and investigating it on a national level. Our goal was to build a resource people could use to find out if police misconduct records are available to the public on a state-by-state basis. When we found states where records were hidden, we would explain why.

In the six weeks spent reporting the story, I sifted through federal and state public records law and interviewed over 200 sources from all 50 states. I spoke with public records experts, first amendment advocates, and police union leaders to find out what specific statutes or case law governed the accessibility of police misconduct records in each state.

I also spoke to criminal defense attorneys from every state, and learned how important access to these records is to the work they do and to the public at large. Without being able to look into an officer’s disciplinary history, it can be hard or impossible for lawyers to cross-examine the police effectively and defend their clients. When police officers’ records are off limits or hard for the defense to access, officers with histories of lying or using excessive force can continue these behaviors. If the police can’t be thoroughly vetted as witnesses, it means that people accused of crimes can be put away based on falsified or exaggerated testimony.

“Defense lawyers act as some kind of oversight of the criminal justice system and when they’re prevented from getting that information, that’s another sort of oversight that goes away,” Molly Schmidt-Nowara, a criminal defense attorney in Albuquerque, New Mexico told me in an interview.
Police officers on the other hand, believe that their right to privacy outweighs the public or defense attorney’s right to see their disciplinary information at their own discretion.

“It’s intrusive to have unfettered access to these records. It allows people to go on witch hunts of police officers,” says Delroy Burton, chairman of the Washington, D.C., police union. “Even if someone saw that an officer was accused of misconduct and cleared of the allegations, that’s the only thing they’d focus on. They would take that accusation and run with it. Not only could this ruin his career, it could put him or his family in danger.”

By the end of the reporting process, I found out that in 38 states, police disciplinary records are either confidential or very limited in their accessibility to the public. The reporting I did on the national level became a crucial component of Lewis’ larger investigation into police officers with misconduct histories, and I served as a source in one of the series’ radio pieces. Another reporter, Noah Veltman, who works on WNYC’s Data News Team, helped turn the reporting into a visual, multimedia story: an explanatory map of the country and a list that details the extent of police department transparency in each state. When the story was released in October, it got picked up by major outlets, including Vox and Salon, and was shared online by news organizations including ProPublica, The Center for Investigative Reporting, Politico and The Marshall Project.

The story was released at a time when police departments across the country were already coming under scrutiny from the public. Now, following recent events, they’re facing even more of it. After a dashboard camera video of a police officer in Chicago shooting and killing a 17 year old was released in November, advocates for transparency and government agencies are arguing that this sort of footage should always be made available to the public. Some critics of police departments are returning to the idea that in order for these incidents to stop, the public needs to know about officers with riddled pasts—this has renewed a state-wide debate over the access to disciplinary records.

Several states are currently debating whether to increase police department transparency. This year, Illinois decided to open access to police disciplinary information while Maryland decided to close it down. In Massachusetts, lawmakers are currently arguing over House bill No. 1243 which would make police misconduct records that are partially available to the public completely unavailable in order to protect officers’ privacy rights.

Deepening my knowledge about this national issue by reporting on it allowed me to learn what is at stake when those who hold power and the institutions that give it to them aren’t put into question. Now, when legislatures around the country are debating the public’s right to know vs. the police’s right to privacy, it’s important to understand both sides of the story. Only more work needs to be done to determine why in some states the rights of an individual are held above the public’s ability to access information.

The radio story focused on why police disciplinary records are off-limits to the public in New York State (law “50-A”) and the impact of lack of transparency. Here I’m interviewed as a reporter/source and give information about New York in the context of police transparency in all other states. And here is a state-by-state break down of the accessibility of police disciplinary records across the country.

(Editor’s postscript: The reporting Xander conducted at WNYC was part of the series, "NYPD Bruised," which recently won a 2016 duPont-Columbia Award. The series as a whole investigated questionable practices in the New York Police Department. The stories Xander worked on addressed a lack of police transparency in New York City as well as in all 50 states. He is currently at work on a CMS senior project about investigative reporting that builds on this experience.)
Chronicling our life and times

By John Ciampa

A leading television news figure for more than two decades, Anthony Everett, A83, has become an almost ubiquitous figure for millions of television viewers in the Boston area.

Everett is currently the co-host of Chronicle, WCVB Channel 5 Boston’s longstanding newsmagazine show. Since it first hit the city’s airwaves in 1982, Chronicle has enjoyed steady popularity through its varied, long-form coverage of news and events across the region.

Before taking over the desk at Chronicle in 2005, however, Everett was already enjoying a successful career in WCVB’s news division. Joining the station in 1990 as a general assignment reporter, he soon developed a penchant for in-depth reporting and spot news coverage. Twenty-five years later, Everett is still on top, and enjoys a distinct place among the city’s deep pedigree of broadcast journalists.

Everett grew up in the New York area and came to Tufts at the suggestion of his high school guidance counselor. Initially interested in becoming a biology major, he settled on English and philosophy, taking up residence inside the offices of the Tufts Daily when it was a fledgling, mimeographed shell of what it would become, and was still seeking to establish itself on campus. Everett became the paper’s third editor-in-chief in the spring of 1982, overseeing its transition from what he describes as a “Xeroxed version” to a full-fledged broadsheet – and setting the structural framework for hundreds of student journalists to follow. At the Daily he crisscrossed campus, landed interviews, and met deadlines until the journalism seeds had been planted. He moved to Aspen, Colorado shortly after graduation, netting a job at KSPN-TV, first as a sports reporter and then as anchor/news director. It was the kind of small-market station where journalists could ably fill their toolbox before moving on.

Following a three-year stint he returned to Boston, and began freelancing for WCVB before joining the staff just as the 1980s were drawing to a close. That decade was good to WCVB, as it cemented its place atop the city’s news ratings and expanded its coverage both locally and abroad. It was an environment that was ideally suited for Everett, who always had a deep interest in substantive news coverage.

“There was a sense back then that we needed to cover international news. Of course, things have changed since then in terms of how we use our resources. But for me, the basic elements of the job remain the same – a good journalist has to have a significant amount of curiosity and engagement about the world. If not, you’re in the wrong business.”

Everett took over the weekend anchor desk at WCVB in 1994 and moved to the nightly desk in 2000. But when Chronicle came calling five years later, he felt it was the perfect chance to continue the kind of news-based storytelling he valued most.

“[Televised] news was becoming increasing fractionalized and brief, and you had to turn to shows like 60 minutes or even the Web for long-form coverage,” he says. “Chronicle was one of those rare places where you could still tell stories like that, so I relished the opportunity.”
By the time Anthony signed on with Chronicle, the show had already enjoyed sustained success. Under longtime anchors Mary Richardson and Peter Mehegan, Chronicle grew to become appointment viewing for local households—sort of a post-dinner nightly ritual that brought the region together. With each trip Mehegan took during the popular segment *Main Streets and Backroads*, scores of New Englanders could seemingly fit comfortably in the backseat of his lumbering ‘69 Impala as he visited unique and sometimes hidden locales. It was the kind of television that drew people in, picked them up and kept them along for the ride. At 33 years going on 34, Chronicle remains the longest running, locally-produced news show in the U.S.

Now Everett’s in the driver’s seat, and it’s something he says he doesn’t take for granted.

“It’s the type of journalism I enjoy, and it’s a rare opportunity to be a part something like this,” he says. “Whether it’s visiting a restaurant or some other story, I feel I have a special opportunity to tell it.”

Everett says that there’s no magic formula for Chronicle’s success, nor is there an exact science to generating the show’s seemingly endless flow of intriguing stories. Everett says the show receives a “huge volume of suggestions” from viewers, which can sometimes lead to a topic worthy of coverage. The show’s reporting staff also brings its own ideas into the mix, sifting through what might be covered and how they’re going to cover it. Some stories may take longer to cover, he says, resurfacing over several episodes throughout a given season, while others, such as last summer’s examination of the state’s opioid crisis, are more timely and reminiscent of breaking news coverage. There are also longer form, hard-news pieces, such as this December 2014 report called “Generation Debt,” that extend over several consecutive shows.

It’s the type of coverage that has earned the program numerous regional Emmy Awards and other national honors like the duPont–Columbia Award.

“I don’t think it’s something you can do everywhere,” Everett says with regards to the show’s format. “Boston is a highly-educated area with many strong industries. It also has a unique geographic and historic character, and all of this is condensed into a relatively small section of the country. I think a lot of our success is simply due to where we are.”

Everett continues to work closely with FMS, and feels optimistic about journalism’s outlook through what he’s observed in the classroom.

“I’m always impressed by the intellect and engagement of Tufts students – and that’s a good start as a journalist,” he says. “In the 10 years since I began teaching, I’ve observed that students today are much more aware of the amount of info that’s out there, and more concerned with the quality of it.

“Hopefully Chronicle continues as it has existed – a little bit untouched by what’s going on in commercial news. We evolve in minor ways, but much of what it was continues today. I think good things are ahead for young people looking to work in our field. I think there will always be people looking for good, sober, and thoughtful reporting.”

Everett has taught “Multiplatform Journalism for the 21st Century” on a rotating basis for CMS. It’s a course that provides hands-on knowledge and the practical journalistic skills necessary for news coverage in the digital age.
The storyteller

By Stacie Boucouvalas-Gianourakos

Stories and media have always been where I feel most safe and comfortable,” remarks Sarah Ullman, A10.

“Some of my earliest memories are of my grandmother…singing a song to me: ‘Tell me a story, tell me a story, tell me a story before you go to bed,’ and she would rub my back and tell me a story as I would fall asleep,” she reminisces.

In high school she was involved in a group called Looking in Theatre that traveled locally, performing at hospitals, mental health clinics, high schools, and the like. “We explored really tough social issues,” she explains. “I got into theatre and telling stories that way, so I already had an interest in combining theater and social change when I arrived at Tufts.” Accordingly, she enrolled in the class “Producing Films for Social Change” her first semester, where she began to extend her love for creating stories from beyond the stage to the screen.

The following year she had the jarring and life-altering experience of losing a friend to death. While processing her grief, she reflected on where her true happiness lay and came to realize that it was in the consumption and creation of stories; so, she changed her major from Arabic to English and declared a minor in Communication and Media Studies (CMS).

Julie Dobrow, director of the former CMS program, remembers Sarah fondly. “Sarah is someone who had more energy than five people put together,” she says. “A veritable whirlwind of activity, her four years here were spent engaging in innumerable activities in and outside the classroom. From the moment she set foot on the Tufts campus it was clear that this was someone to watch!”

In just five and a half years since leaving the Hill, Ullman has already held positions at multiple Hollywood studios and agencies – among them ICM Partners, Paramount, and Maker Studios - and has founded her own business as a “full-stack” digital video consultant, a term she borrowed from the technology industry to describe an individual who develops an idea from its initial concept through execution and consumer consumption.

When she begins her relationship with a new client she examines the digital platform(s) they are already using – such as YouTube – and looks at what tends to be successful on those platforms, what has worked for them in the past, who their audience is, and perhaps most importantly, what the company hopes to achieve. “There’s a balance between helping them accomplish their goals and also helping them understand what they should be making that works on the platform they’re using,” she explains.

Ullman says that the digital medium has a unique set of rules, which are far less restrictive than those of linear television and film. One of the consequences of that is the audience becomes the prevailing driver of content. The process of making such “digital native” content ends up being “creator-led,” which, in her perspective, means that “a lot of the power is in the hands of creators and those who control the distribution channels.”
Although she initially gravitated toward the traditional, or studio system-style of media production, she felt a tug that pulled her toward the digital realm. “It felt like there was more room for people to take risks and chances; and you make stuff so much faster, you’re in charge of your own distribution plan….I was drawn in by how interesting the ecosystem has proven to be.”

Her transition to digital set her apart from her colleagues still working within the traditional studio system and because they “didn’t understand what was happening or what was coming,” she says, she found herself consistently being invited to coffee or to lunch for the sole purpose of having her brain picked about this new digital video realm. Recognizing that she was fielding the same questions each time, she was inspired to create a newsletter and decided to name it The Jungle, initially aiming it at film and TV executives, who she felt needed specific information that she had available to disseminate.

Several months later, she launched her own company, Master Plan so that she could focus more intently on her digital consulting and production. She credits her experience at Paramount with helping her to do so. During her time there, she says her boss forced her to cover the town like an agent, hustling for information.

“He made me go out and get information for him, and therefore meet a ton of people for fear of my job,” she reflects. While she found it to be quite difficult at the time, in retrospect, she concedes that it equipped her with her initial audience and clientele base “All those people that I met were the ones who were asking me questions when I was working in digital, so they became my community.”

In addition to The Jungle, she is also producing and directing several projects. These include digital content for the Nickelodeon network, as well a documentary-style show on the making of Snapchat content, the latter of which is “going to experiment to see how you can use the geocaching and participatory nature of Snapchat to cause people to go somewhere and have an experience.”

The term Ullman uses to describe herself, “full-stack digital video consultant,” is one she invented out of necessity. Her creativity, energy, and entrepreneurialism, evident when she was an undergraduate seemed to have blossomed in current work. Her former advisor, Julie Dobrow, smiles and comments, “I still love watching Sarah Ullman and can’t wait to see what she’ll do next.”

FMS welcomes new staff assistant

The preceding story was written by our new staff assistant, Stacie Boucouvalas-Gianourakos. Stacie holds a master’s degree in media arts from Emerson College and a bachelor’s in psychology from Boston University. She has extensive experience in television production, marketing, publicity, and media literacy. As our staff assistant, she manages the FMS internship database, mailing lists, and social media and assists with a range of administrative duties. She also helps manage the ExCollege’s media equipment.

Before joining FMS, she worked at several community media centers and was a freelance producer and stage manager for a range of local productions and events.

We are thrilled to have Stacie on board and look forward to working with her as FMS continues to grow!
Alumni Updates

Samantha Bissonnette, A13, is now a production associate PBS KIDS Digital in Boston.

Nicole Blank, A15, is now a production assistant for the WGBH-Boston show, Greater Boston.

Samantha Elander, A15, is now a digital coordinator at PBS in Washington D.C.

Jordan Kolasinski, A04, is now working at Hulu in Los Angeles.

Lisa Lax, J86, and Nancy Stern, J86, of Lookalike Productions, recently produced the film tributes at the Kennedy Center Honors event.

Jane Lee, A14, recently enrolled in law school at George Washington University.

Jaffar Mahmood, A00, is a filmmaker who recently shifted his focus from film to television, directing an episode of About a Boy, starring Minnie Driver for NBC/Universal TV.

Maya Navon, A15, is now a research assistant for Neal Shapiro, A80, president and CEO at WNET in New York.

Brad Puffer, A95, is now vice president at Greenough Brand Storytellers in Boston.

Laurie Rabin, A13, is now an associate producer at Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in New York.

Jon Rosen, A04, was the recipient of the Alicia Patterson Fellowship, which will allow him to take a series of trips over the coming year to Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, and possibly other African locales to cover news.

Sam Singal, A97, is now the new executive producer of NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt.

Carter Thallon, A15, is now the director of marketing and strategy at Asset Strategy Advisors in Natick, MA.

Kelley Vendeland, A09, is senior manager of marketing and communications at Recurrent Energy in San Francisco.