Beyond JMU and Into the Real World
An alum shares her experience working in the communication field
by Martha Cunningham, class of 2005

After only seven months in the “real world,” I have learned a lot about the communications field and even more about my professional capabilities. Shortly after graduating in May 2005 I accepted a position with The Ocean Conservancy in Washington, DC as their Print Production Manager. I enjoy using my communications skills in the nonprofit sector because I am able to apply the skills I learned at JMU to an important cause.

My general job responsibilities consist of overseeing the conception, execution, and publication of all print materials. However, I also write for the web site, copy edit press releases, and conduct pitch calls to reporters. I encourage all future graduates to maintain a well-rounded education because it is very rare that you be responsible for only one aspect of communications, especially in your first job.

I did not have a lot of experience in print prior to accepting this position, but the strength of my education made it possible for me to learn quickly. I recommend future graduates to look for opportunities that you may not be 100% qualified for, because they will give you more opportunities to grow. Also, seek out former SCOM or SMAD graduates for employment opportunities. Networking is important regardless of the industry.

Finally, apply for positions you think you will enjoy but don’t limit yourself. Often times, a seemingly uninteresting position or organization/company can turn into an unbelievable opportunity!

Alumni Survey Results For Communication Graduates

A June 2005 survey by the JMU Office of Institutional Research found that the average annual salary of recent JMU Communication Studies graduates is $36,402.


According the Class of 2003 Employment Survey results, the range of annual salaries for Communication Studies graduates employed full-time was from $12,000 - $70,000. This resulted in an average annual salary of $36,402 compared to an average annual salary of $34,790 for all College of Arts and Letters graduates.

In looking at the Communication Studies graduates employment status, approximately 89 percent of the respondents were employed full-time. The remaining were either employed part-time, attending graduate school, or student teaching.

Respondents were asked to participate in the survey through e-mail as well as in paper form. A total of 1,379 JMU graduates responded to the survey.
Dear Alumni, Students, Faculty, Staff, and Friends of SCOM,

Welcome back to spring semester 2006! We are fortunate this semester to have Molly O’Brien on board as the first SCOM Professional-in-Residence. Ms. O’Brien is a former Vice President of Tunheim Partners, one of the most successful independent public relations and public affairs firms in the U.S. During spring semester, Ms. O’Brien will moderate a series of three interactive discussions about starting and maintaining a career.

Session I, “Starting Your Career: The Interview Process from the Employer’s Side of the Desk,” will occur on Wednesday, February 22, 5:30pm to 6:45pm in Taylor 400. She also will hold individual office hours for interested students on Wednesday, February 27, 1pm-3pm, location to be announced.

The remaining sessions will occur on March 27 and April 17. Details about these sessions will be available in future newsletters and through other posted materials.

Eva M. McMahan
School Director

Lambda Pi Eta Inducts new Members

The Communication Studies Honor Society, Lambda Pi Eta, held their inductions at the local restaurant Taste of Thai on January 24, 2006. Lambda Pi Eta inducted 53 new members this year. Some of Lambda Pi Eta’s goal are to recognize, foster and reward outstanding scholastic achievement at JMU. In addition LPH works to stimulate interest in the field of communication, promote and encourage professional development among communication majors, and provide an opportunity for members to be involved with the Harrisonburg community. Congratulations to all new members!

Left: New members gather at Taste of Thai to enjoy a nice induction dinner. Middle: LPH inductees sporting their member shirts. Right: President Martha Eppler inducts new members.
After graduating from JMU in 2004 I assumed I wouldn’t be reading textbooks and writing papers in the near future . . . or ever again. Now here I am almost two years later, and guess what? I’m a part-time graduate student at Johns Hopkins University, and I attend classes twice a week at the school’s Washington, D.C. campus.

The idea of being a part-time student is what sparked my interest in the JHU Communication in Contemporary Society program. Classes are offered in the evenings only and they all begin after 5 p.m. Students have the option of going to school full-time, but most people I’ve met have 9-to-5 jobs and then come to class at night. Additionally, the program allows students to progress at their own pace. Nine courses, plus a thesis, are required to receive the master’s degree, and the school gives students up to five years to complete the coursework.

There are four concentrations in the program: Public and Media Relations, Political Communication, Health Communication, and Digital Technologies. All classes are taught by D.C.-area seasoned communications professionals. The professors’ backgrounds are varied, but each person’s long list of credentials and places of employment are impressive: Fleishman-Hillard, Weber Shandwick, APCO Worldwide, National Institutes of Health, National Gallery of Art, United Nations, CNN, Nightline, All Things Considered, and Morphius Records, to name a few. Many have also worked as legislative staff and press secretaries on Capitol Hill.

I love the program’s flexibility, the courses offered, the professors, and the people in my classes. I can’t say enough good things about the program at Johns Hopkins. Check it out online at: http://advanced.jhu.edu/communication/.

Communication Graduate School Programs, hear about them first hand from JMU alum

by Kate Marshall, class of 2004

Mark your calendar

Feb. 14: Student Assessment/Faculty Assistance (no classes 8 a.m.- 4 p.m.). Evening classes (those beginning 4 p.m. or later) meet as scheduled.

Feb. 14: Last day to submit an application for a degree if graduation requirements are to be met by the end of 2006 summer session.

Feb. 20: President’s Day

Feb. 22  5:30 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. in Taylor 400: Workshop “Starting Your Career: The Interview Process from the Employer’s Side of the Desk,”

March 13: Spring Classes Resume

March 6-10: Spring Break. Classes do not meet