

# SCOM 2023 AWARDS

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School of  
Communication Studies

**The School of Communication Studies celebrates our  
2022-2023 Outstanding Students**

# SCOM 2023 AWARDS

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## RILEY MILLER | ADVOCACY



Riley Miller is an outstanding student and highly effective advocate. She has made the most of her time on campus and contributed greatly to JMU and the local community. On campus, she is a member of Lambda Pi Eta, held leadership positions in Alpha Delta Pi sorority, coached her peers at the JMU Communications Center, and served as a research assistant in American Political Reform and Innovation Laboratory. In the community, Riley tutored groups of elementary schools with the Gus Bus, interned with Congressman Lloyd Smucker on Capitol Hill, and worked on the campaigns for Governor Glenn Youngkin and Delegate Chris Runion. She did all of this while excelling in the classroom as evidenced by her earning the highest GPA among all graduating advocacy students.

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## SIDNEY ROTH | CULTURAL

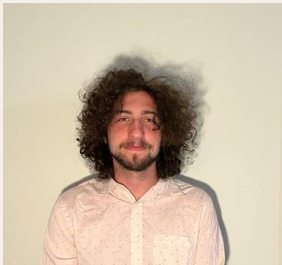


Self-reflexive, critically engaged, committed to personal and cultural change, brave and vulnerable – these qualities are some among many that characterize Sidney as a student of cultural communication. Sidney is thoughtful in her offerings in class, intentional and thorough in her completion of class assignments, and reflective about her learning experience and how it relates to her positionality in the world. She pushes conversations to new levels and encourages everyone—faculty and students alike—to dig deeply into the concepts at hand. Her Honors thesis project examines transition innovations in Virginia's "coal country" in response to renewable energy regulations brought about by the Virginia Clean Economy Act of 2020, and employs qualitative interviewing methods to explore how community members feel about these transition projects and the move away from coal. She writes, "I hope to overall gain a deeper understanding of how communities that were built around coal, and more broadly unsustainable energy resources, are reacting and adapting to the transition to renewable energy sources. I want to understand how these communities can be part of the transition so that they do not feel left behind and how their economies can be brought forward."

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## ELI MULLIGAN | GENERALIST



Eli Mulligan is the definition of a communication generalist; taking a vast amount of courses in most of the concentrations in our department. In the classroom, Eli is a prominent voice, frequently adding important insight to the discussion. He is intrinsically motivated to learn everything he can about communication; not just so he can earn exceptional grades (which he has), but so he can grow as an individual.

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## ANNA MERKLINGER | HEALTH



Anna Merklinger is a health communication major with a minor in humanitarian affairs who has made an impact both in and outside of the classroom. Anna has served as a communications coordinator for Health Tech Without Borders, a global non-profit that aims to mitigate healthcare crises by leveraging digital tools and technology to provide access to health resources. Anna interned with OneDigital, a financial services and HR consulting advisory firm, and is now working as an internal communications coordinator for OneDigital. This semester, in SCOM 470: Health Communication Campaigns, Anna is examining the relationship between college students' social media use, perceived social norms, and diet. Congrats Anna for all your accomplishments!

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## KATE BENTLEY | INTERPERSONAL



Kate Bentley is a senior SCOM major concentrating in interpersonal communication and minoring in military leadership, a Battalion Executive Officer and a Human Resources Assistant for JMU's Army ROTC, a JMU First-Year Orientation Guide, and an active member in JMU's Greek life (Rho Gamma & Delta Delta Delta). In the classroom, Kate is engaged and attentive, asking several thought-provoking questions and always contributing to classroom discussion every chance she is given. Kate is a superb writer, exceptional public speaker, and an all-around confident, dependable, driven individual. Her work ethic is impeccable and her dedication to learning is impressive. This May, Kate will be commissioning as an Army Second Lieutenant. After officer training school, she will be going to her first duty station and serving her time as an Army Adjutant General Officer, where she will work under the Army Commander and be the point of contact for all information related to accountability and personnel.

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## ALEX YOUNG | ORGANIZATIONAL



Alex Young said that he has been so thankful to be a student in the Organizational Communication concentration because it allowed him “to put a name to an idea.” From the time he stepped onto campus, Alex wanted to use his degree and his involvement in extra-curricular activities to “pursue a front-end, public speaking and/or corporate communications role after graduation.” In summer 2022, Alex earned an internship as a Summer Analyst for Goldman Sachs in its Corporate and Workplace Solutions Division, which is in Dallas. He did work for both the Real Estate Strategy Team and the Internal Communications Team, learning how to build social media plans, optimize internal web pages, and facilitate keynote speaker events for the firm. After graduation, Alex will return to Dallas and Goldman Sachs. He would love to serve as a connection between that organization and the Organizational Communication concentration.

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## NATE MOONIS | PUBLIC RELATIONS



Nate Moonis is everything we seek in a public relations student. He is “that” student who can turn a regular classroom into an interactive and engaging space. He always comes to class prepared, and ready to learn and participate in class discussions. He is willing to step in and help whenever something needs to get done, which can mean taking on a lot when you are an essential member of several student-run organizations, including PRSSA, Bluestone Communications, and Lambda Pi Eta. While his skills and grades are excellent, it’s his infectious positive attitude and energy that really make him stand out.



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## SAMANTHA CASTRO | CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

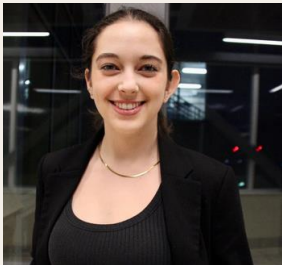


Graduating with a 4.0 in her coursework in Communication Studies, Samantha Castro demonstrates excellence academically, while also pushing her peers to excel in class discussions. Her instructors describe Samantha as a joy for the classroom. In a sea of post-lunch, sleepy eyes, Samantha is the alert, affirming, and responsive face in the crowd. Samantha is a consummate and reflective student of communication, deftly focused on the theoretical concept or principle being examined and open with her own lived experiences. Her comments help her classmates to reflect on their own communication behavior and move beyond their personal opinion. Her engaged contributions to the classroom raised the bar, which she then helped her fellow students to also meet.

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## HALY JUNGWIRTH | POLITICAL COMMUNICATION



Haly Jungwirth is a meritorious Political Science major with minors in Political Communication, French, and Honors Interdisciplinary Studies. Haly exceeded all expectations both inside and outside the classroom. During her time at JMU she participated in JMU's Summer in Paris Program and worked as Event Service Assistant and Building Manager at the JMU Union. She held numerous internships with distinction, including as an External Affairs Intern for Axios, a Communications Intern for FairVote, and a Digital Intern for AL Media Strategy.

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## REBECCA CUTSINGER | POLITICAL COMMUNICATION



Rebecca Cutsinger is known for her exceptional communication skills, passion for political advocacy, and perseverance through adversity. In her studies, Rebecca excelled as a Media Arts and Design major, with a concentration in Journalism, and minors in Political Communication and Honors Interdisciplinary Studies. Outside the classroom, she is a student athlete on JMU's Cheerleading team and founded JMU's chapter of the Network of Enlightened Women. In the political arena, Rebecca interned for Unleash America PAC and worked for Hung Cao and Jeanine Lawson's congressional campaigns. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career in political communication.

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## SAVANNAH REGER | SPORTS COMMUNICATION



Savannah Reger has proven to be an exemplary role model for sports communication students. Not only has she served as The Breeze's managing editor and written an excellent article about Title IX, but she has also started taking photos at JMU basketball games. Savannah teaches others how to capture sports photos as part of the leadership team. In addition, she has excelled in her classes and consistently demonstrated outstanding academic performance. Overall, Savannah's exceptional work and leadership make her an inspiration to her peers. Congratulations Savannah.

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## MATT CONWAY | DEBATE



Matt Conway has been a pillar of the JMU debate team over the last two years. As sophomore, Matt has already qualified twice to the National Debate Tournament, reached elimination rounds of the CEDA National Championship and finished in 3rd place JV Nationals last season. Matt consistently takes on leadership roles, volunteers to help out teammates, and pushes the entire JMU debate team to be better. He is a dedicated competitor and stalwart team player and we're proud to have him in the team

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## PAUL MABREY | FRIEND OF DEBATE



Paul Mabrey is a vital supporter of the JMU Debate Team and well-deserving of the title, 'Friend of Debate.' A former assistant director of the JMU Debate Team and excellent debater himself, Paul has been a model of a faculty support for the program. He has been a mentor to debate, often including them as tutors in the Communication center. He has worked with Madison Cup and a variety of other JMU Debate Team programming. Perhaps mostly importantly, he's been a crucial sounding board and, as the title of this award says, friend to the current director, helping him to navigate the wide-range of challenges that confront the team. Paul is one of the reasons we continue to have a happy, healthy, and successful team.

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## LEXIE BURNS | INDIVIDUAL EVENTS



Despite having joined the JMU Individual Events Team just two and a half years ago, junior Lexie Burns has made an incredible impact on its competitive trajectory as well as its prioritization of advocacy in its events. Lexie is an outstanding student-scholar, and this has been made abundantly clear as she prioritizes attention on topics of import when researching, writing, and revising her speeches. She not only balances an exceptional academic load, but she is also dedicated to improving her campus, her surrounding community, and society more broadly. She continues to impress her coaches and teammates with her ability to weave all of these dynamic and important elements into her speeches and their messages.

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## BONNIE WILSON | INDIVIDUAL EVENTS



Bonnie Wilson joined the JMU Individual Events Team just last year and has already begun to leave her lasting mark on the team's dynamic. She has had impressive competitive success and has improved dramatically in the range and number of her nationally qualified events during her short time on the team, but her willingness to invest in and support every single one of her teammates alongside her dedication to ensuring the team is a motivated, energized, and driven space is nothing short of remarkable. Bonnie truly is the definition of team spirit and the JMU IE Team is all the better for having her as a driving force.



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## MALLORY KNABEL | BLUESTONE



Mallory Knabel served as a firm director of Bluestone Communications for two semesters after working with an account team for two semesters. Mallory contributed greatly to revamping the firm structure and building better team chemistry for Bluestonians. Under Mallory's leadership, the firm successfully renewed its affiliation with PRSSA National. Thank you, Mallory.

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## JULIA YEAGER | BLUESTONE



Julia Yeager joined as a creative intern at Bluestone Communications and has contributed as an assistant director and director of the creative team for four semesters total. Under her leadership, the creative team established a solid team structure. She made a great effort to refine the communication between the account and creative teams. Thank you, Julia.

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## NATE MOONIS | PRSSA



Nate Moonis has been the glue holding PRSSA together this year. This is often the role of the PRSSA president every year, but it means a lot this time around because Nate stepped up to be president when we were struggling to find someone willing to take over and it came with the added challenge of shifting from being mostly virtual to trying to reengage students in person. While he was unsure at first, he has done everything to continue the efforts of our award-winning chapter. Along with help from his other executive team members, PRSSA brought back in-person field trips to Richmond and D.C., had several incredible guest speakers and workshops, organized a successful fundraising event, and checked off a long list of other important duties.

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## CHLOE LASCARA | LAMBDA PI ETA



Chloe Lascara stepped into a leadership role for Lambda Pi Eta, the Communication Honor Society as the group, like other student organizations, was trying to reengage members after COVID. She led successful recruitment efforts bringing the organization back to over 35 members and has helped shape a variety of programs for the organization as well as collaborating with PRSSA.

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## GRACE WARREN | COMMUNICATION CENTER



Grace Warren is exemplary of what it means to be a Communication Center consultant and team member. She defines student centeredness, keeping the whole person she is working with at the core of her support, never trying to make the student do the work how she would do it, but identifying the students' goals and collaborating to empower them such that they can take ownership of the work. Her contributions to the Center through mentoring, research, process improvement, and genuine care will impact our area for years to come. Grace, it has been a pleasure to work with you, learn alongside you, and witness your growth and improvement.

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## KARA FRANK | OUTSTANDING ALUMNI



Kara Frank, SCOM 2012, is a public relations professional. She worked for Adfero for 7 years before she joined Stracomm in 2019, now holding an executive position there as a vice president. Kara was a fully engaged student in her time at JMU, having been in Lambda Pi Eta, Student Ambassadors, The Madison Society, PRSSA, an orientation guide, and an athletics communication student assistant. She has continued to be a fully-engaged alumnus, helping form the Alumni Advisory Council in 2019 and serving as its first vice president, and then serving as president from 2020-2021, and coming back for almost every single Alumni event we host. She is passionate about connecting with our students and helping them navigate the transition into the world of work. She offers smart, no-nonsense advice and a realistic view of the working world and how to use the skills gained at JMU in Communication Studies to make a positive impact on workplaces.

Recently, she returned for the College of Arts and Letters Career Conference and asked to meet more students during her visit. She gave a guest lecture in two public relations classes and met with LPH, PRSSA, and Bluestone Communications students in the evening. Kara has been a great resource for our faculty and students and has grown into a role model for SCOM students who want to work in the public relations industry or any organizations that need good professional

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## COREY HICKERSON | PROFESSOR OF THE YEAR



Dr. Hickerson's students remark on how he helps students see a vision of their future and make see how the skills they are learning will shape their careers and their lives. As one student aptly shared, "Dr. Hickerson, for the short time that I have had him as a professor, has taught me crucial skills that will make me fully equipped to not only excel in the classroom, but also in the workforce. He shows his students their potential and makes it very known that he wants us to work together for ourselves and for the good of our group. His gentle nature immediately makes his students feel heard and comfortable in his classroom which has a huge impact on our class discussions and overall success in his course. He truly cares about his students and it shows each day. I view him as both a phenomenal professor and mentor." Thanks for all you offer students Dr. Hickerson!

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## NATHAN SELOVE | LECTURER OF THE YEAR



Nathan Selove is an exceptional educator and an Assistant Coach for our Individual Events Speech Team. Students have remarked about how Professor Selove makes “everyone in our class feel so important, seen, and heard. He never misses an opportunity to get to know us better or let us see into his life. His service dog, Blake, is a nice perk as well!” He is an exceptional colleague as well and stepped in to cover a class for a colleague who needed to be away. The students in that class said that he has done a fantastic job taking over the class, creating a great class environment and facilitating meaningful discussion. He also offered a new class on Disability Advocacy which made significant impacts on the students enrolled. One student remarked that “throughout this course, I learned more about this world and myself than I ever had which was insanely empowering. I did a lot of self-reflection on the information we were learning and applied it to my life. I learned how to become a better self-advocate, gained confidence, and became more responsible for my health. I never thought I would ever be so confident in who I am or what I want to do for years.” Thanks for all you offer students Professor Selove.



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## NINA MANSER | SCOM ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT



Nina was an all-around star student in the SCOM department, concentrating in public relations and completing the Sport Communication minor. While managing her perfect major GPA, she worked at UREC as a marketing specialist and at ESPN+ as an assistant producer, working closely with the producer and the director to broadcast JMU Athletics' games on the ESPN+ platform. At Bluestone Communications, she was an account manager and led an account team to meet the goals of multiple local clients. She is also a member of Phi Sigma Pi, a co-ed Honor Fraternity, serving as their Vice President last year, and she is a member of the Public Relations Student Society chapter. Congratulations on your great accomplishment!

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## CUDA ZMUDA | OUTSTANDING SCOM STUDENT



Cuda is studying Finance and Communication Studies at James Madison University, with minors in Spanish and Entrepreneurship. In SCOM, he has served as the first student representative on the SCOM Alumni Council, helping plan career events with alumni including a fully virtual alumni conference during the pandemic. He is also the Assistant Director of Campus and Community Engagement for the Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue. This long string of words means that he designs and facilitates productive conversations and strategy sessions for clients. He has also been a super-engaged Duke, working with JMU Outriggers, Make Your Mark On Madison, Student Ambassadors, and the service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega.