

# NEWSLETTER

Spring 2026



## Letter from the Chair

Welcome to the inaugural edition of our biannual department newsletter. Here we'd like to spotlight our faculty, highlight our research, and share news of what is happening in the department. In my time as chair, I have met so many of the amazing people who have come through the program—truly some of UCLA's most impressive graduates. We are extremely appreciative of all the people who have supported the program over the years, including parent donors and non-alumni supporters. We want you all to stay connected to the department, so this newsletter is a new way to stay in touch.

It has been a privilege to chair this department as we grow into a disciplinary leader, following in the footsteps of several previous chairs who together have helped bring us to where we are now: a thriving, evolving, vibrant community of scholars engaged in research and teaching in the interdisciplinary field of communication. Stretching back to the early days of the Communication Studies interdepartmental degree program, we have always been at the cutting edge of scholarship in the social sciences. As we enter our 20th year of being a department, we are now graduating doctoral students and continuing to provide a world-class education to our always outstanding undergraduates. We hope you enjoy learning about what we are up to, and we look forward to seeing you at our final 50th-anniversary celebration on campus on April 17. Details to come!



Greg Bryant - Professor and Chair of Communication

# Meet the Faculty:

## Assistant Professor Elisa Kreiss



Dr. Elisa Kreiss joined our faculty as an Assistant Professor in Winter 2024 after completing her Ph.D. in Linguistics at Stanford University. She is also the director of the Computation and Language for Society (COALAS) lab and the co-director of the UCLA Natural Language Processing (NLP) group. Combining her knowledge of cognitive science and linguistics, specifically computational linguistics, she is currently researching how both people and large language models communicate visual information. Prof. Kreiss explains, "I'm interested in how people communicate, how (AI) models perhaps communicate similarly or differently, and how we can then leverage these models to help people in meaningful ways." She describes current AI models as often providing excess or irrelevant information to the user and hopes her work

will improve how AI models "translate" images into textual information that is both accurate and useful. Her work has direct applications for making visual information accessible to blind and low vision users through verbal descriptions. Read more about Prof. Kreiss here: <https://www.coalas-lab.com/elisakreiss>.

## Featured Lab Group:

### Political Communication & Behavior Lab

The Political Communication & Behavior (PCB) lab was initially formed at University of Michigan under the direction of Professor Stuart Soroka and has continued its focus on studying behaviors and attitudes surrounding political media. The lab's work is particularly interested in affect, emotionality, and negativity in the production and consumption of political content. When presented with emotional news and other media, people can experience physical feelings; researchers use various methods such as monitoring heart rate and sweat production to examine these psychophysiological responses. More recently, the lab started to include the use of other data sources like eye-tracking and digital trace data. Prof. Soroka believes studying how and where people engage with political media is "especially relevant in a period when media are becoming much more affect-driven and becoming much more affectively polarized." Check out current work from the PCB lab here:

<https://www.snsoroka.com/political-communication-behavior-lab>.



Political Communication  
& Behavior Lab



## Graduate Student Success

Students from our first cohort of Ph.D. candidates graduated in June 2025 and are moving to the next chapter of their careers. Dr. Jun Luo is now an Assistant Professor in the School of Humanities and Social Science at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen; Dr. Kelsey Neuenswander is currently a postdoctoral researcher in the Social Perception and Cognition Lab at the University of Toronto; Dr. Sisi Peng has been working in Scientific Affairs at a women's health company in Santa Monica and is an affiliate at the UCLA Center for Reproductive Science, Health & Education. She will also be teaching *COMM 114: Understanding Relationships* for our department this summer.



## Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars for the evening of Friday, April 17th, 2026 for the

Department of Communication's 50th anniversary celebration. While Comm Studies has been around for a little over 50 years, this year we are celebrating our history. Many of you attended our first installment in October, themed "The Bridge to Humanizing AI," featuring Dr. Martine Rothblatt (Class of '77). Our second and final installment will be focused specifically on the program's history with former professors and students coming back to speak, including Jeff Cole, Geoffrey Cowan, Leslie Gilbert-Lurie (Class of '81), Marde Gregory, Neil Malamuth, and Paul Von Blum, who has been teaching in the program almost as long as it has existed (and is still going!). Please join us for a wonderful night of memories and reunions, complete with food and wine.

## Department News

Congratulations to Professor Michael Suman on his retirement at the end of the Fall 2025 quarter. Since joining the department as a lecturer in 1995, Prof. Suman has taught a wide range of sociology and media-related classes and guided countless students through the rigors of COMM 10. We wish him a healthy travel-filled retirement!



## Student Spotlight:

### Lucy Rich



Lucy Rich is a senior majoring in Communication with a Minor in Digital Humanities. As part of the Departmental Honors Research Program, she is conducting original research on consumer behavior. Although many students participate in the Honors Program with the goal of pursuing further research in academic environments, Lucy is approaching her research with the intention of applying her findings and skills to corporate and public-facing non-profit settings. In particular, she enjoys the collaborative aspect of research, explaining that "(being) an intermediary between a brand and some other entity is really appealing to me because I like spending my day connecting with people." Her project, titled, "Thinking Outside the Box: The effects of blind boxes on consumer preferences and behaviors of young Americans," examines the effects of the blind box model (think,

Labubu and Sonny Angel) on consumer preferences and behaviors among young Americans. In addition to her studies, Lucy currently volunteers at the non-profit animal shelter, *Wags & Walks*. In her spare time, Lucy enjoys metalworking, photography, and traveling.

## Alumni in the Community: Sandy Grushow

We're excited to announce Sandy Grushow as the alumni commencement speaker for the Department of Communication's 2026 graduation ceremony. Sandy graduated *summa cum laude* from the UCLA Department of Communication Studies in the class of '83, and as a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

He immediately began an illustrious 25-year run at Fox Entertainment, where he served in numerous positions and oversaw the launches of shows such as "The Simpson's" and "American Idol." The rapid growth of Fox's broadcast network and TV studio reflected Sandy's own rise through the company, where he was ultimately named Chairman of Fox Television Entertainment Group. Sandy writes, "I was named President of the network's entertainment division at the age of 32, making me the youngest exec to ever hold such a title. Imposter syndrome? You bet!"



After 25 years, Sandy left Fox to pursue his interest in digital media and technology start-ups and early stage companies. He established a strategic advisory firm called Phase Two Media and promptly became involved with the launch of a brand new ad-supported, streaming video service called Tubi, which ironically was later acquired by Fox. Sandy remains active as a board member and strategic advisor to numerous other companies.

Sandy notes his experiences at UCLA played a pivotal role in everything he's achieved in business and in life. He claims the University's academic rigor prepared him for the hard work, discipline and sacrifice required when first entering the workforce as an intern at Fox.

Looking back at his years at UCLA, he fondly recalls many wonderful professors and courses, but he notes one person in particular. "I'd have to say my most memorable experience occurred as a result of the department's internship program, run by Marde Gregory. After spending four years inside the classroom, I was chomping at the bit to work inside an actual Hollywood entertainment company and Marde helped make it happen. That's when the rubber really met the road for me at UCLA."

We're quite pleased to welcome Sandy back as our commencement speaker this year. He also plans to attend our upcoming 50th Anniversary Celebration.

## In the Press

- Professor Rachit Dubey won the 2025 Science & Nomis Young Explorer Award based on his research on climate communication. Read his work, recently featured in *Science Magazine*, here: <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aeb2654>
- The Online and AI Systems' Integrity & Safety (OASIS) lab, led by Professor Homa Hosseinmardi and Dr. Amir Ghasemian, recently received a \$1.7 million grant to study the role of social media algorithms in mental health. Read about the project here: <https://www.cc.gatech.edu/news/new-study-could-show-how-tiktoks-algorithm-affects-youth-mental-health>
- Professor Georgia Kernell was recently featured on the University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation's *Talking Policy* podcast. Listen to her episode on comparative politics here: <https://ucigcc.org/podcast/american-party-politics-and-the-crisis-of-representation/>
- Dr. Rob Carpenter recently published his sixth book, *The Creative Leader*, with co-author, UCLA alum and Emmy nominated former *Jeopardy* producer, Bob Boden. Read the *Daily Bruin's* coverage here: <https://dailybruin.com/2025/06/28/coauthors-rob-and-bob-shed-light-on-movie-magic-creative-leadership-in-new-book>

## In Memoriam: Mario Biagioli



The Department of Communication remembers Dr. Mario Biagioli, Distinguished Professor of Law and Communication at UCLA. Prof. Biagioli passed away on May 17, 2025. He was known amongst his wide-reaching academic community as an enthusiastic scholar of law, science, technology, and art. His numerous works, including the widely-influential *Galileo, Courtier* and *Galileo's Instruments of Credit*, characterize his scholarship at the intersection of society and science. During his career, he taught at UC Davis, Harvard University, Stanford University, the University of Chicago, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, and the European University at St. Petersburg. He is survived by his wife, Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli (Professor in the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television) and his sons, Luka and Gabriel.