

Meet the Professors of Practice in the Communication Department

by Caroline McCarthy

The Manhattan College Communication Department is fortunate to engage four professionals in the communication field to teach courses for the 2021 Fall semester. These professionals range in expertise in public relations to homepage design and video editing - and students are very excited to learn from active industry experts.

S.J. Velasquez

“As a homepage producer, we kind of have to have my finger on the pulse of everything in the world at all times.”



Sarah (S.J.) Velasquez, homepage editor for BBCNews.com, is excited to teach Advanced Reporting and News Writing this upcoming fall. Velasquez earned her undergraduate degree at Canisius College in 2007, followed by an MA in Magazine, Newspaper and Online Journalism from Syracuse University in 2009.

Before working for BBC News, Velasquez served as Multimedia Content Coordinator for Buffalo.com. Her job brought the Buffalo news “into a new century” by creating a space that forged a path for a new demographic of younger readers to be engaged with The Buffalo News.

“We just had so much fun,” said Velasquez. “[Print journalists] weren’t doing video production, and I had a video background, so we did a video series where we would recreate viral videos or jump on trends. Kind of like what you see with TikTok now.”

One of her most notable video recreations was the Buffalo remix of Carly Rae Jepsen’s hit song “Call Me Maybe,” where local celebrities, organizations and companies lip-dubbed the words. The video received over 10,000 views on YouTube.

Velasquez noted that the job was a major learning experience for her, as she thinks the Buffalo News was slightly stuck in its’ traditional ways. “I try to remember that [experience] when I meet young journalists who might have less overall experience than me, but they might have really really unique intel as to what’s going to be up and coming,” Velasquez said. She added that sometimes she wished she could “spiritually (not physically) slap” older journalists who told her this new wave of journalism wouldn’t work out for her.

Velasquez feels there will be a mutual opportunity for her and her students to learn from one another in fall. She recounts that while she was a journalism student, it was her professors who were currently active in journalism that gave her the most insight and opportunities into the “real world” of journalism, because they knew the current professional atmosphere and taught as if they were her editors, not her lecturers. This practice inspired her to take on the role of adjunct professor at Manhattan College, where she is excited to continue

teaching the next generation of journalism students.

Her course last semester mirrored a real newsroom with fast-paced assignments, quick turn around time and edits before the final draft was due.

“That’s something that happens in journalism,” said Velasquez. “It’s not often that you submit one thing and your editor looks at it and then like...grades you. No! They’ll look at it, [say] this is missing, I don’t understand this. Fix it and give it back to me.”

Velasquez admits she assigns a lot of work, but by doing so she hopes to foster confidence in her students that their ideas are valid, their instincts are correct, and they are never too young to be journalists.

“It doesn’t matter that you’re a ‘student journalist,’” said Velasquez. “You’re a journalist if you write, and you are journalists if you report. So be a journalist now. Take control, craft the story and be fair. Don’t shape the story how you want it to be, but put the story together, take responsibility for it and be a voice for others now.”



Jared Diamond

“It’s my job to figure out what’s interesting and what should be written. The only way you’re going to stand out is if you’re writing things that nobody else is writing.”

Jared Diamond, Staff Reporter for the Wall Street Journal, currently covering the New York Mets and Major League Baseball, has accepted a new role as Adjunct Sports Reporting and Writing Professor for the 2021 fall semester.

Diamond started at the WSJ as a 22 reporting assistant, which he said was work ‘nobody else wanted to do.’ He continued at this job for two years, thrilled to be a part of such a major publication and gaining valuable experience.

In 2013, Diamond was given the opportunity to cover the Mets full-time at the WSJ, and continued this beat for three years until he was switched to the Yankees beat in 2016. He was offered his current position as the National Baseball Writer shortly after, in 2017.

“The job I’m in now is the one I’ve always wanted,” said Diamond. “It’s the best job I could have ever asked for because I’m covering everybody, I get to write about what I want to write about and what I find interesting.”

Diamond credits his success to his starting job at the WSJ, where he was immersed into the culture of being in the clubhouse everyday, and where he “lived and breathed the team for years.”

As National Baseball Writer for the WSJ, a major component of Diamond’s job is devising ideas for his beat. “It’s funny, you could think of this job as a writing job, and it is, but in many ways the writing is actually the easiest part,” said Diamond. “If you have a good idea, and you’ve reported it well, the story should just write itself. If it’s not and you really find yourself struggling to get words on the page, it’s probably because you didn’t succeed somewhere earlier in the process and you should go back to that and figure out where you’re what you’re missing.”

Diamond utilizes social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to grow his audience. In this day in age, he says it’s important to build a name for yourself so that your readers aren’t just picking up your publication to read it, they’re picking it up to read you and your work.

“I’m not bigger than the Wall Street Journal by any stretch of the imagination,” said Diamond. “But I do think that I’m able to build [a] sort of little audience that might not read [the entirety] of the Journal, but like my work.”

Diamond plans on delving into this idea of brand building through social media in his class this fall. Teaching has always been a goal of his, and he is very excited about his new role at Manhattan College.

“As time went on I started thinking, okay, I think there’s still more I could do and I’d love to have more personal interaction with aspiring journalists and try to be a mentor to them as much as I can,” said Diamond.

Diamond then got in touch with Manhattan College and said there was a mutual interest between him and the school, which Diamond hopes is the beginning of a long-term relationship. He hopes to inspire his students to get involved with journalism at both the collegiate and professional level. He believes our D1 athletics will provide ample opportunities for students to formulate ideas, write stories and get published.

“I think that I could provide value as a working journalist now... who can provide, I think, like a very practical look at what the industry is really like, and what the job is really like. [The class] is not going to be about theory. It’s not going to be academic, per se; it’s going to be about practice,” said Diamond.

Robert Colaianni

“It’s all about talent, and it’s all about that creativity and that creative energy.”



Robert Colaianni is an alum of Manhattan College; he graduated in 2012 with a degree in Communication with a concentration in Broadcasting. After graduating, Colaianni accepted a role at Nickelodeon as a Production Assistant where he did “a little bit of everything.”

After two years as an assistant at Nickelodeon, Colaianni felt he was not learning what he needed to achieve his career goals, and accepted a position at Definition 6 as an Assistant Editor, where he felt he could better pursue video editing. He was rehired as junior editor and eventually rose through the ranks to his current role as a video editor, where he focuses on promotional work for the network. Currently, Colaianni just wrapped the Teen Choice Awards, where he was Lead Editor, and is now promoting the new Rugrats reboot on Paramount Plus.

Colaianni says the Kids Choice Awards is his favorite project to work on because of the high stakes, and additionally loves working on “anything with Spongebob.”

Colaianni was able to engage his recent post-production class with his work at Nickelodeon last semester by showing them what he was working on and allowing them to have a hands-on approach even in the wake of COVID-19.

“I don’t consider myself much of an academic. I am a video editor -- what I do is entertainment, it’s fun,” said Colaianni. “I didn’t know how [teaching] was going to go, but I think that what inspired me to do it was, I liked hearing the practical examples of what the industry was like when I was a student.”

Colaianni credited his return to Manhattan College to his relationships with professors that never dwindled throughout his professional career. As a student worker, Colaianni formed close relationships with the Communication Department and was offered a position as adjunct professor after speaking at the annual Lambda Pi Eta induction ceremony three years ago.

Colaiani hopes to give his class insight into what it is like in a professional creative career. He feels his experience will provide students with knowledge that the textbooks don't cover. He hopes to serve as a "teacher slash recruiter" to find students that remind him of himself as a college student to one day recommend for jobs.

"I want students to understand that this industry isn't easy. It is challenging. It's oftentimes anxiety provoking. But I want to show them and teach them that with correct preparation and the certain amount of drive, you can not only get into the industry - and yeah you'll have your rough days and you'll have your days where there's a learning curve and you're just trying to survive it, you know like, like the way I did - but be successful at it."



Sabrina Lynch

Sabrina Lynch, adjunct professor for Advanced Public Relations, started her career as a PR intern for the Edelman group. Since then, she has worked as a Global Director for Mission, a communications platform focused on marketing and advertising and driven by culture; a Global Communications Consultant for Saatchi & Saatchi clients; Senior Vice President of Consumer Marketing at the Zeno Group; Senior Vice President at Vision7 International; and Senior Vice President of Culture and Marketing Communications at Taylor PR & Communications.

Lynch has been an adjunct professor at Manhattan College since 2015 and is known for pushing her students for real-world success. Madison Smith, a senior in the public relations concentration, was a student in Lynch's Advanced PR class in the spring of 2020. Smith claims the class was one of the most difficult classes she's taken at Manhattan College but is grateful for the opportunity to build on the skills she learned in previous communication classes with the guidance of an industry professional.

“ [I] tell my students that maturity, demonstrating basic knowledge about PR – such as strategy and insight– mixed with a clear appetite to learn goes a long way. ”

“Sabrina is a really great teacher and brings a unique perspective because she's an industry professional herself,” wrote Smith in an email. “It's really great to hear about trends and industry insights directly from her.”

In an interview with Women in PR, Lynch stated three words to describe her were fearless, adventurous and grounded. Her students conclude this as they describe her as a

tough grader, but only so that she can teach them to be the best they can be.

In the same interview with Women in PR, Lynch said, “[I] tell my students that maturity, demonstrating basic knowledge about PR – such as strategy and insight – mixed with a clear appetite to learn goes a long way.” ★