

# Sophia Sakellariou Recieves Top Paper Award for Senior Thesis

by Caroline McCarthy

Sophia Sakellariou had the honor of presenting her Senior Thesis, “Adopting Strategies for the Hyper-real Battlefield: Fake News vs The New York Times” at the New York State Communication Association (NYSCA) after receiving the award for the top undergraduate paper. Sakellariou, a communication major concentrating in journalism, is set to graduate at the end of the Fall 2020 semester. She wanted her thesis to explore the news industry after facing criticism from family and friends about her desire to write ‘fake news.’

“I was really interested in exploring the potency of that word [fake] and how it affected news media,” Sakellariou said. “Especially as a journalism student, I feel like so much of what we learned was shaped by how the news is being attacked right now.”

The paper received recognition as part of “Political Communication and Rhetorical Strategies During Trump’s Era” panel at NYSCA. Sakellariou’s paper challenged the presidential rhetoric surrounding the media and its impact on journalism and the community.

Assistant professor of communication, Michael Plugh, encouraged Sophia to enter her paper to the conference after an abrupt end to the class due to COVID-19.

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began preparations for the conference on Oct. 16-18. Though many Manhattan College professors offered friendly faces and encouraging jokes over Zoom, Sakellariou still felt overcome by nerves when presenting.

Sakellariou recalls hearing her voice choke up during the presentation, which she gave remotely from home, after hearing her parents listen in from the other room. She felt the added aspect of being in her room at home reminded her of the current state of the world, and all the experiences being missed.



“If this was normal circumstances, I would be at the conference, and I would have pictures, and it’d be more exciting,” Sakellariou said. “So the fact that... my parents were still trying to have that excitement to listen... it made me really sad.”

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“Seeing [the professors] faces and all that definitely helped me push through the nerves a bit,” Sakellariou said.

Succeeding her presentation, Sakellariou has taken steps to avoid feeling the “burn out” that so many college students and soon-to-be-graduates experience.

Sakellariou has set a reputation for herself at Manhattan College as someone who will always go the extra mile, take on another task, and be a reliable source for anything that needs to be done.

Sakellariou has served as the production editor for *The Quadrangle*, the Editor-in-Chief for *Lotus Magazine*, the health and social chair for her sorority, Sigma Delta Tau, the secretary and vice president of the politics club, and she hosts her own radio show on WRCM. She has also held two internships and attended multiple journalism panels through the Center for Communication. Her first internship for The Plunge was cut short in January due to structuring issues within the company. She found her second internship on LinkedIn at Open Road Integrated Media, where she is interning now.

Due to rising application numbers amid the pandemic, Sakellariou describes she feels the stress of applying for internships, and continues to feel that same nervousness while looking for a job.

“You feel that stress where it’s like, oh, if you’re not in a big name now, like, that’s it” Sakellariou said.

But as she perseveres through applications and interviews, Sakellariou refuses to settle for a job that is subpar to her dreams. Her advice to other up and coming graduates is to keep going.

“I’ve learned that people are more accessible than you think, especially now,” Sakellariou said. “I reached out to former [NBC] Pages on LinkedIn, people who are producers at NBC, at the beginning of October, and I said, I’m graduating in December... and I’m just kind of trying to like gauge people’s opinion of what they like about their jobs.”

After graduation, Sakellariou wishes to pursue her passion by working in broadcast television. She intends on making connections with industry professionals before asking for a job in an attempt to build relationships where they know her– not just her resume.

“Hopefully, I would get my foot in the door one day,” Sakellariou said.

And then, in true Sophia Sakellariou fashion, as soon as the interview concluded she logged on to another meeting. Her thesis award is only one testament to the talent and determination Sakellariou has for the media industry.

To view more of her work, visit <https://www.sophiasakellariou.com/>.

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