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SPRING 2022

Lily Arida, Agon Shehu and Deirdre Heavey's Senior Seminar Papers Garner Recognition from ECA, ETC



by Jenn Guilbeault

Every communication major, as a junior or senior, is required to take the Media Theory and Research course. In this course, students learn many different communication theories and research methods that will help them in the next course in the communication core sequence — Senior Seminar. In Senior Seminar, students work on a 25 page communication research project under the guidance of their professor.

This year, the senior seminar paper authored by Lily Arida '22 was selected to be presented at Eastern Communication Association (ECA), a professional organization of communication scholars, teachers, and students. On April 9, Arida presented her project at the ECA annual conference in Philadelphia.

During Arida's time in Media Theory and Research, she already had an idea of what she wanted her project to be about. She stated, "I knew what I wanted to do my project on, but all the topics I came up with at first seemed too academic for me. I was more interested in influencers' strategies to gain and grow an audience and I feel as though this is why it got so much attention, because I generally was interested in it." When asked how she felt towards the reactions her senior thesis received, Arida said that she was surprised at all the positive feedback.

2021 alumna Deirdre Heavey's senior seminar paper was also accepted to the James C. McCroskey and Virginia P. Richmond Undergraduate Scholars Conference at ECA, and she was invited to present her research at the virtual event in April 2021. Heavey's research was also published in Logos last year and she won the first ever Interdisciplinary Award. It was also published in ETC: A Review of General Semantics, Volume 78, Numbers 3 and 4. Heavey's topic was to determine whether New York City practices the progressive ideologies it preaches. While coming up with this topic, Heavy struggled. This was because she felt like her scope had to be limited to communication studies, such as studying newspaper articles or analyzing her favorite television show.

Agon Shehu '22 completed his paper on virtual reality in the Senior Seminar course in fall 2021. His project will be published in ETC: A Review of General Semantics. Thom Gencarelli, Ph.D, is the magazine's editor and was Shehu's professor in Senior Seminar. Before Shehu came up with his senior thesis topic, he was not quite sure what to write about. He "picked something very generic but also interesting and a little more personal." He has always been interested in virtual reality and virtual reality technology. Since it has become a more popular topic nowadays, Shehu thought it would be interesting to have more of an "understanding of how we use virtual reality today, what we preserve of it, and its potential impact on us as a brand new medium."

Since these three Manhattan College students had great successes with their Senior Seminar papers, both the seniors, alumni, and Manhattan College professor Thom Gencarelli, Ph.D, offered advice for future students taking



Media Theory and Research and Senior Seminar. Arida suggested that students should not just think of the most academically challenging idea or what might sound most interesting on paper, but to do more on what is happening now and [research] what you're most generally interested in.

"I think that's what made mine a lot different," she said. "Because you could tell when I was presenting, I was excited about what I was presenting and there were some people doing it to just get it over with. That's what I believe was the big difference." Heavey also agreed with this statement.

Shehu's advice was about time management. He stated that he looked through his schedule and would set aside a few hours per day to work on different parts of the project. He mentioned that it was very important to set deadlines for himself. "In the beginning I would spend a few hours a day, maybe two hours, and then halfway through the semester, leading to the end, I was spending the majority of my time on this project, making sure it was as polished as possible." Shehu also suggested that students, "should enrich their knowledge and use this time to have fun and enjoy their research."

Both Arida and Shehu agreed that students attempting this kind of a semester-long research project should ask their professors lots of questions, and to go through their project with them multiple times. They mentioned that the writing center was also a great resource when it came to their senior thesis. Heavey also gave the advice that, "The communication field is so broad and there is no limit to how much you can do with your thesis. Make it your baby!" Thom Gencarelli, their professor for these projects, stated that all students should know "you are not just writing for a class, you're joining the conversation. You're capable of doing this, you're ready to do it if you believe it." He continued to emphasize that all Senior Seminar students are able to "contribute to the existing literature."

Lily Arida, Agon Shehu and Deirde Heavey's Senior Seminar successes could definitely impact the way current Media Theory and Research students are thinking about their topics and how their work will inspire others to research in future. By researching what one is interested in and how much time is put in, the resultant work will be worth it in the end. Manhattan College Communication Department students should go into Senior Seminar with a few ideas, talk to their professor about what they believe will be the best outcome, and begin researching as soon as they feel they are ready to begin the journey. ★

