

Then & Now with Communication Department Alumni

by Ally Mejia

Each semester, the Communication newsletter recognizes hard working successful students who have found professional opportunities after graduation. Highlighting these students and their experiences serves as a guide to others interested in pursuing a similar career — students have a strong desire to know: “What happens after graduation?”

For this article, we interviewed three Manhattan College Communication Department Alumni who were previously featured in *comm-unity*: Melissa Gallardo (Class of 2019), Anna Occhino (Class of 2019), and Lauren Schuster (Class of 2020). Each provided an interesting perspective on transitioning from the world of internships to a professional career, along with giving important advice to give to students.

Melissa Gallardo



Melissa Gallardo is the Content Services Coordinator at Viacom CBS and recently launched her new business, Bonita Fierce Candles. Through this Melissa has learned to embrace her Latinx heritage and newfound passion for candle making.

[Fall 2018 comm-unity feature](#)

Anna Occhino



Anna Occhino is the Assistant Account Executive at Ink & Roses, a full Services marketing and communication firm located in New York City.

[Spring 2019 comm-unity feature](#)

Lauren Schuster



Lauren Schuster is a Proofreader at E2G Sports, a sports podcast available on blog-talkradio.com, Spotify, and Apple to name a few.

[Spring 2020 comm-unity feature](#)

How did your past highlighted internship prepare you for your current role?

Melissa: I learned how to network and edit videos in Adobe Premiere at WABC-TV. I was the only intern in my department and was editing all day long. I had to leave the editing bay in order to talk to other producers and it forced me to get uncomfortable. It was extremely rewarding since I still keep in contact with producers at ABC today! The technical skills I learned were so helpful.

Anna: My internship at NBC taught me the basic workings of public relations. The main difference is working in-house at a company and working at an agency. The roles are relatively the same, but at an agency, you have more responsibilities. Overall, my time at NBC was very interesting and my first real step into the PR world. I enjoyed myself and met a lot of great people and learned lessons that I still use to this day.

Lauren: My internship at TV Guide Magazine definitely helped me to feel more comfortable with how to operate in the workplace. Even though I am working from home in my current role, I learned a lot about collaborating on work from my time at TVGM, and that is obviously a huge skill needed for my role as proofreader. Also, one of my duties at TVGM was periodically to proofread/fact check their email newsletter, so that was great practice as well.

Since your last feature in the comm-unity Newsletter, what are some goals that you had previously set that you managed to accomplish?

Melissa: I managed to accomplish the impossible. I graduated Magna Cum Laude, with 6 internships under my belt and studied abroad. I work at my dream company, enrolled in graduate school and started a business. In 2018, I didn't expect to be where I am today - not in my wildest dreams.

Anna: I think being promoted was one of the goals that I achieved. So much has changed since that time of my career, especially with the pandemic. I did lose my previous job as a result of COVID, but I ended up learning so much about myself. This time forced me to think of what I wanted in a new position and I am so happy I was able to find that with my new firm.

Lauren: My main goal as I approached the end of college was to be able to live in NYC after graduation, which is one that I have thankfully been able to accomplish! While I'm currently working 2 jobs to make it happen, it's definitely worth it, and will be even more worth it as the pandemic begins to come to an end and I can go back to enjoying the wonderful culture of the city safely!

Are there any goals that you would still like to accomplish?

Melissa: 100%. I'm on track to finish my Master's degree by the end of 2022. Only 4% of Latinas have completed a Master's degree or higher. With that statistic in mind, that in itself will be one of the biggest accomplishments I'll have in my career. Degrees lead to representation and paving the way leads to breaking generational stigmas. Being a first generation Latinx college student and graduate means that I am part of a larger conversation in the professional world. My dream is to take my business full-time and be my own boss. What better way to pave the way by breaking generational obstacles than to build a successful business from the ground up?

Anna: Right now, I am focusing on learning as much as I can. Since I work at a fairly small firm, a lot of responsibilities fall into my lap. I try to stay calm and organized and I hope that in the future I will receive another promotion or finally be able to attend live events that we plan and work on regularly. I also hope to finally be able to meet my coworkers in person!

Lauren: I would love to continue to develop my editorial skills and eventually go back to writing articles. I definitely miss it! I also want to explore other publication genres outside of sports, like lifestyle writing, entertainment writing, and fashion/beauty writing.

What is the biggest way you've grown since your last feature in the comm·unity Newsletter?

Melissa: I've learned how valuable your network and connections are and how they can truly change your life. I've learned how to better navigate the professional space, what it truly means to build generational wealth, and knowing your worth.

Anna: Since Spring 2019, I have matured alot, to the point where I can say I am almost a completely different person. Many things have happened in my life that helped shape that, especially the pandemic. 2020 changed everything for me and for many others. It was an unexpected whirlwind time, and I found myself in the same position I was when I graduated from Manhattan College in 2019. I lost my job in April of 2020, I was still living at home and I felt really confused and lonely. I knew that so many millions of others were going through what I was, but I couldn't help but feel sorry for myself. I was a mess (LOL). I applied for jobs every-day, and just when I thought it was a lost cause, I was interviewed at the company I am at now. I love my new job, and I feel like I am picking up where I left off. I'm sure many people feel the same way that I do, but the important thing is to never give up on yourself. If you want to do something, be your own advocate and push yourself to work hard. I believe that everything happens for a reason, and I am so glad that things happened when they did for me. I will hold on to these lessons forever.

Lauren: I think the biggest way I've grown since Spring 2020 is that I've developed a great deal of strength and resilience while job searching during the pandemic. It's exhausting, but I had to convince myself to keep pushing forward. Since E2GSports.com just launched in March 2021, when I first started job searching, my current position didn't even exist. So, it took a very long time for me to keep holding on and not give up on the idea that I would eventually get a job in the editorial arena, but I did it!

If you could tell your past self anything, what would it be?

Melissa: Know your worth. You're worth it and worth fighting for. You'll succeed no matter what you do.

Anna: If I could tell my past self anything, it would be to enjoy every moment, don't let the little things get to you, and work hard to get through the bigger things. Always remember that it's okay to put yourself first sometimes and taking a break is necessary. My first job out of college, I worked almost 60-70 hour weeks, and never took any time for myself. I think that the pandemic literally forced me to take a break and truly think about my career path. I am really happy about all the lessons that I learned.

Lauren: Well, if I could go back and speak with my pre-pandemic self, I would certainly tell her to ful-

it does get better, and that while the pandemic continues to be exhausting, many great moments both professionally and personally will still happen within the next year!

Lastly, do you have any advice for current Communication students that want to be in the spot you are in today?

Melissa: I can't stress enough how important it is to network especially within your internships. Go out and meet people, learn how to create your elevator pitch, talk to everyone. Everything you need is already inside of you, tap into it! If you're not uncomfortable, you're not learning!

Anna: For all current Comm students, it's okay not to see the clear path ahead of you. Every experience you have, person you meet, grade you get is meant to teach you something. Always try to be on top of your game, but if you mess up just know that mistakes are how you learn. During this difficult year, you still managed to get things done. You pushed past the pandemic fog and gave up a lot of things that most college students normally experience. Just know that this made you learn things about yourself that you may not have known had you not gone through it. Know that there are always people thinking about you and rooting for you, and no matter what, keep pushing yourself to become a better version of who you were yesterday.

Lauren: I have two main pieces of advice for current students. The first is that I cannot overstate the importance of doing internships! They are really big draws for employers, they give you great experience, and they help you form a network of industry professionals to get references and advice from. The second piece of advice is to expand your job search in light of the shift to remote work that has happened due to the pandemic! When I first graduated and was job searching, I limited my search to positions tied to NYC offices only. However, in the end, I ended up at E2GSports.com, which is completely remote work for a small company with no headquarters in one specific city. I have coworkers from all over the country! My boss (the company founder) lives in Massachusetts, but still works closely with me and communicates with me frequently thanks to things like Slack, Gmail, etc. While commuting into Manhattan like I did for my TV Guide Magazine internship can definitely be exciting, the flexibility of my remote role has also been really great for me and has opened my eyes to new ways of working that have been great! ★