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Q&A WITH PROF. DOROTHY CLARK, MASTER LECTURER AT COM AND WEB FOUNDER OF THE COMMUNICATOR

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Prof. Dorothy Clark is a master lecturer at BU's College of Communication, teaching courses in multimedia, social media and writing for the web. She is the director of the department's adjunct writing faculty. For over a decade, Clark owned Media Wise, a promotional writing service handling treatments and scripts, multi-image shows, features, press kits, brochures, newsletters and advertisements.

The COMmunicator is celebrating 10 years as a digital publication, so I sat down with Prof. Clark, who is also the founder of The COMmunicator website, to hear how the website was started and how it has changed over time.

Sara Magalio: What inspired you to create The COMmunicator website?

Dorothy Clark: The COMmunicator had been a print piece for many years, and it was time to do something else with it. The person who was doing the print version had been running it for 11 years and was ready to pass it along. The Department Chair, Barton Carter, asked me if I would take it over, because I seemed the logical person to take it over being that I am a writing instructor.

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I said I would not take over the print newsletter; I would only take it over if I could turn it into a



website.

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SM: Why did you think it was so important at that point to move The COMMunicator to a digital platform?

DC: Because we were about 10 years behind the times. It desperately needed to be updated. This way, we would reach more students and we would get many more students to participate. I think there were only three or four people each semester who worked on the print version, if there were that many. So the newsletter did not get much exposure in the wider community because of the size of the production.

SM: What were some of the biggest challenges that you faced in getting the website up and running?

DC: We had no staff, so that was an issue, but we did have Puneet Sandhu, who was scheduled to become the editor of the print version. I knew Puneet through having her in my classes, and I was thrilled that she was the one that I was going to go to and say, “How about working on a digital platform?”

I also needed someone who was tech savvy and inventive at the same time to be a partner in this, so I selected DJ Capobianco. He was an undergrad in one of my classes at the time. He is so bright and inventive, I used to call him Mr. Google. (*Side note: DJ now works as a manager at Twitter, conducting research for U.S. automotive & media/entertainment brands.*)

The three of us, Puneet, DJ and I, brainstormed and tried to get an idea of how the website would look. I made a list of everything that I wanted on it, feature stories, alum Q&As, study abroad bloggers and lots of multimedia.

We got help from designers and webmasters to get the thing up and running. Jonathan Surmacz, the webmaster for the College of Communication website, was very helpful. I then went to undergraduate and graduate students that I knew were good writers, and I asked if they would join.

Positions were not offered for credit then, so it was purely a voluntary thing, and we wound up getting six or seven students. We worked for months putting it together.

The biggest challenge really was getting people together. Figuring out what we wanted on it was not that difficult, because I had done newsletters before, and I was looking forward to utilizing the multimedia aspect of a website and looking at ways to bring in a wider group of students.

SM: What were some of the aspects of starting the new website that you were excited about?

DC: My favorite thing about starting the website was the capacity to bring in students that were studying abroad. Students when they are abroad offer really interesting stories, and the visuals they provide from the photos and videos that they share while they are away are really interesting content. That’s something that could not really be tapped into in a newsletter.

The most rewarding part of The COMMunicator overall is that students become invested in it. That it’s not something that I have to cheerlead constantly, and I don’t. The COMMunicator becomes important to the people that work on it, especially the editorial team, they really care about it.



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I wanted to create a site where people would go, “I’m so happy that I was a part of that while I was at BU.”

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I wanted it to be a community feeling, and of course, the main point was to get student work published. The investment that students have had in the website has been very gratifying.

SM: Over its 10 years, how has the COMMunicator evolved to keep up with emerging media trends?

DC: Our social media presence has evolved. We did not have Instagram at first, and we did not have as many of the blogging elements when we first started out. All of those were kind of new. In 2009, there were still several writing courses that taught none of these things, nothing online.

So it’s the evolution of making sure that we kept up with what was happening. I think the best thing that’s happened for us is Instagram, because so much information and visuals can come through that, that it becomes a really engaging way to get more readers and more people to visit the site.

SM: Why do you think it is important for communication students to participate in websites like this outside of their traditional classes?

DC: Well, it gives students who may have not had an opportunity to take a course that does work similar to this a chance to try it out.

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I know that students take a variety of courses to give them exposure to these techniques, but The COMMunicator is freer.

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Some students work for the website for two credits per semester and some volunteer, but there’s so many ways that you can go with this and there’s so many different roles that you can play.

Maybe you didn’t get the chance to take a photography class, but you’re a photographer, you can do that. Or maybe you’ve never worked on a website before, you can do that.

Certainly, because you get published, you can use that in your portfolio. A student can say, “I worked on this.” People, and prospective employers, can go to the website and see their work published in a professional manner.

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All of the content on the website is original; it is all content created by the students themselves.

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I do not have anything to do with editing what students do, the student editors are responsible for that and they handle it quite well independently. I do not consider myself a faculty advisor, I am equally invested in the website as the students

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Through this website, we are promoting that we are good at these things, writing and blogging, photography and videography, and we do not cut any corners whatsoever when it comes to the work. That's because we know better, and that's what makes this school and this website so great.

SM: Where do you see The COMMunicator 10 years in the future?

DC: I'm sure I won't be employed here 10 years from now, but I would hope that there would still be a COMMunicator, and that somebody would take it on and give it that life through time. We have all these excellent students with skills that will grow and change as technology does, as platforms do, and hopefully they'll have a faculty member that cares about it, that's pretty important.



Sara Magalio, *Editor in Chief*

Sara Magalio is a first-year journalism graduate student in COM at Boston University. She received her B.A. in journalism and B.F.A. in dance performance from Southern Methodist University's Meadows School of the Arts in Dallas, Texas. She was born and raised in New Jersey, and is thrilled to be back in the northeast. Sara is passionate about writing and sharing compelling stories with readers.

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