

SIUE Mass Comm Week explores complex media landscape

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE - The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Mass Communications presented global perspectives from nationally and internationally recognized speakers on today's complex media landscape, during Mass Comm Week held April 3-6.

"With this week's theme of "Diversity Amidst Adversity," we wanted to shine a light on the unusual and complex dynamics we're seeing right now in terms of our political climate," said Elza Ibroscheva, PhD, professor and chair of the Department of Mass Communications. "Of course, we were interested in focusing the conversation on the role of the media in these specific circumstances and the unique times in which we're living."

“Throughout the week, we emphasized that diversity doesn’t just mean a couple of different ethnicities or races in St. Louis, added Mark Poepsel, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Mass Communications. “We want our students to be global citizens who are capable of building economies for themselves and for other people.”

In his presentation, award-winning *Chicago Tribune* reporter and SIU Carbondale professor William Recktenwald, senior lecturer and journalist-in-residence, answered the question *Is the Press Losing Its Credibility and Power?* on Monday, April 3.

He emphasized to the audience the importance of media literacy, discussed the decline in the public’s confidence in the media, and shared personal examples of his impactful investigative work while at the *Tribune*.

“Anybody around the world can publish news and call themselves a journalist,” Recktenwald said. “It’s important to always understand and question where our information comes from. It’s important to discern fact from fiction. True journalists work to expose the things that are legally and morally wrong. The media is not your enemy.”

“Hearing from a veteran journalist like Bill Recktenwald was important because in the current adversarial climate of distrust and negativity toward the media, many people, including students, might have doubts about the importance of media work, and specifically the work of news outlets,” Ibroscheva said. “Professor Recktenwald was able to relay important experiences from his illustrious career as a journalist, and a truth-seeker, that inspires confidence in the function of the media as the Fourth Estate and the voice of the people.”

Mass Comm Week attendees also had the opportunity to participate in an “Ask the Expert” session with former journalist and anthropologist Sarah Kendzior, PhD, on Wednesday, April 5. Kendzior is a frequent political commentator, and writes about the prestige economy, among other topics.

“Journalism would benefit from the use of ethnographic methods, long-term studies and in-depth interviews,” she told the audience of mostly students. “One tenet of anthropology is ‘don’t go in assuming you know the answer.’ Don’t go in and prejudge everybody. Take the time to figure out where people are coming from. Everyone has problems. We have a lot of things to tackle and complain about, so I encourage you to hold those accountable who are endorsing or practicing repressive thoughts.”

On Thursday, April 6, Gary Broome, director of communication and marketing at the International Institute of St. Louis, spoke about national and international coverage of refugees. He was joined by Patrick McCue, with AmeriCorps VISTA.

“We wanted to make a strong St. Louis connection that it is a welcoming place for refugees and immigrants,” Broome said. “We also pointed out that refugees are not a drag on the economy. They’re actually contributors and strong growth generators for the St. Louis regional economy.”

“The communications students here have a wonderful opportunity to tell these stories in the coming years, because as existing journalists retire, we have a new crop of journalists coming up to tell real-life compelling stories about what refugees bring to society,” he added.

“It’s beneficial for students to hear the perspectives of people who are out in the job field or market with first-hand experiences,” said Graduate Student Brian Lallish, of New Baden. “This week’s featured speakers have presented on topics that are timely, important and of interest in various ways for students studying mass communications, as well as those in other disciplines.”

The finale of Mass Comm Week was a presentation by internationally acclaimed author and media critic, Jack Shaheen, PhD, SIUE professor emeritus. His exhibit “A is for Arab,” which captures, displays and visually deconstructs the stereotypes of Muslim and Arabs in the Western world, was also on display in the Dunham Hall Theater Foyer.

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