

# What's Your CJ Story?

A publication of the Writing for Public Relations course at the  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

University of Wisconsin  
Eau Claire

The Power of

**AND**

# Letter from the Chair

Hello former, current, and future communication and journalism students. Welcome to the inaugural edition of “What’s Your CJ Story?” - a magazine of alumni stories produced by the students in the Writing for Public Relations course. Over the last six years as department chair I have watched the CJ department flourish thanks to the successes of its alumni, the passion of our students, and the dedication of our faculty.

Stretching from coast to coast, and even internationally, CJ alumni continue to showcase their talents and impact society in positive ways. Every alumnus’ story has the potential to inspire current and prospective students. As you look through the magazine, hopefully you will see that choosing a CJ major does not pigeonhole you down a single career path. This inaugural issue highlights graduates with public relations majors, but as you will read, the skills learned as a public relations major are useful for careers in a wide variety of fields.

This commitment to teaching students transferable skills useful for a variety of careers is evident in our new Integrated Strategic Communication major, which will begin fall 2015. This major will combine public relations, advertising, and multimedia coursework, allowing students to gain experience in all three areas, thereby making them more marketable after graduation for a wider variety of positions. Additionally, with our small class sizes, and dedication to high-impact practices (e.g., working with community clients, student-faculty collaborative research) we are committed to offering experiences that are hard to match at other institutions.

Whether you are an alumnus, or a prospective student, I know you will enjoy reading this publication. At UW-Eau Claire we offer our full support to help you write your story; because in writing your own stories, you help us write ours.



Sincerely,  
Mary Hoffman  
Ph.D.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary F. Hoffman".

The Power of

Communication **AND** Journalism

**Do YOU**  
have a CJ Story?

Want to be featured in the  
next issue?

Contact Dr. Evan Perrault  
[perrault@uwec.edu](mailto:perrault@uwec.edu)

# Table of Contents

<b>Alumni Featured</b>	<b>Page #</b>
Nick Miller	4
Kayla Kozak	5
Danielle Johnson	6
Ryan Thibodeau	7
Aimee Murphy	8
Karrie Hedding	9
Katlyn Head	10
Sarah Wier	11
Darin Schluender	12
Morgan Sprattler	13
Tara Cegla	14
Jennifer Lanzel	15
Lindsey Kaiser	16
Luke Anderson	17
Courtney Horrmann	18
Lindsay Stewart	19
Christine Breese	20
Leslie Damico	21
Sam Lynch	22
Brooke England Lee	23
Claire Lindstrom	24
Patrick Jones	25
Aaron Miller	26

# Nick Miller

Class of 2010



**General Manager**  
**LEGOLAND Discovery Center**  
**Chicago, IL**



CHICAGO, Ill. - Right out of college, Nick Miller stumbled upon a business that has led him to a career path that he never imagined having. Nick considers himself a theme park enthusiast and has always been interested in working in the industry. Today, he is the general manager of LEGOLAND Discovery Center located in Chicago, Ill. He is responsible for overseeing everything that goes on in the facility. From finance operations to guest experience and marketing, Nick manages the facility that welcomes a couple hundred thousand guests a year. After graduating from UW-Eau Claire in 2010, he began working for a business called Merlin Entertainments and has continued to work with them for the past four and a half years. They run LEGOLAND parks and discovery centers, wax museums, aquariums, and theme parks around the United States and Europe. Nick has moved around the world working for Merlin Entertainments in different locations until ultimately landing his current position as general manager of LEGOLAND Discovery Center in Chicago one year ago.

## **How did UW-Eau Claire prepare you for your career?**

Attending UW-Eau Claire prepares you for more than just your career; it prepares you for your life. The classes I took throughout my college career were great. The liberal arts system provided me with the opportunity to take a wide variety of classes. Looking back, my involvement with the forensics team was extremely beneficial in preparing me for the job I have now. I gained the confidence to stand up in front of important people and communicate effectively.

## **What do you know now, you wish you would have known when you were in school?**

I've learned that to be successful in any position, you need to be adaptable and you need to know a little about a lot of things. Businesses change, priorities change, and sometimes your job will change. You will have a better chance at picking up new skills if you are adaptable and willing to learn new roles and responsibilities. Take advantage of any opportunity you have to try new things. The more skills you develop, the more marketable you become. I believe that having an attitude like this will help you grow in your company, in your career, and in yourself.

## **What stood out to you the most about LEGOLAND Discovery Center that made you want to work for them?**

One of my life goals is to never actually grow up. Working for a toy company is not too far from this goal. I had worked for a LEGOLAND theme park in San Diego, California, which is where I discovered the LEGOLAND brand is something I truly cared about. I was excited when I was offered the option of taking over a fairly large business in Chicago. I like that I can make decisions that directly impact the company. A lot of responsibility is left up to me, which provides me with the ability to make positive changes.

## **What is the most rewarding part of your job?**

I love being able to see people grow and reach their goals. Besides developing the attraction to make it better, I believe the main priority of the company is developing the people who work there. Seeing employees get promoted who deserve it is one of my favorite things about my job. Of course another benefit of my job is the access to hop on the shooter ride when I'm having a tough day at work.

## **What advice do you have for students graduating as they enter the working world?**

When I started out in my career, I didn't expect to be where I am today. My first year was tough trying to figure everything out. I traveled frequently and even lived in the U.K. for 6 months. In those challenging and risky times I learned how to take care of myself, how to grow in a job, and how to become open to change. My advice for students is to not be afraid to take chances. Invest a little bit of time and effort into something you don't expect to care for. Try everything at least once because you might surprise yourself. The risks you take now are what will shape you down the road. Taking the nearby job is the easy way out. Instead, choose something exciting and go for it.

***“The risks you take now are what will shape you down the road. Taking the nearby job is the easy way out. Instead, choose something exciting and go for it.”***

Written By: Betsy Albers  
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# Kayla Kozak

## Class of 2009



**Relocation Associate**  
**WHR Group**  
**Pewaukee, WI**

PEWAUKEE, Wis. – Kayla Kozak graduated in 2009. After graduation Kayla did what many graduates do and moved back home in order to save money and plan the next step of her future. Kayla attended Northcentral Technical College in order to take some post-grad courses. She was offered a teaching position at that same college and taught several economics and communication courses while simultaneously working at a bank. In 2013, Kayla decided she wanted to experience living abroad. She moved to Thailand where she taught English for a year before meeting a family looking for someone to assist with taking care of their show dogs. Kayla moved back to the states in July 2014 for the position she has today.

### **Why did you choose to major in mass communication?**

I thought it would give me a creative outlet for my writing skills, and I liked the idea of selling an image or idea. I feel that majoring in mass communication gave me an edge on most of my competitors in the job market as well. It gave me a keen awareness of how much communication skills impact everything.

### **Describe your current position.**

I am a relocation associate. I assist relocated corporate employees with buying and selling their homes. In addition, I handle all benefits associated with the employee's relocation. I have to balance the interest of the client with the well being of the transferee, which do not always go hand-in-hand.

### **What is the most interesting part of your job?**

I really enjoy interacting with different people. I work with everyone from pipeline workers to vice presidents of huge corporations. It is really rewarding to get good feedback and see just how much you helped someone through one of the most stressful times of their life.

### **How do you apply the skills you learned in college to your current position?**

We don't realize it, but college teaches us so much more than what is in the books. I learned how to be a good listener, how to work in a team, and how to deliver bad news without making it worse. Communication is a huge aspect of my job. I have to deliver some of the best news these people will hear right along with news about serious setbacks and frustrations. Being able to communicate well, and with empathy, makes all the difference in this field.

### **How did UW-Eau Claire prepare you for your career?**

I created a decent network of professors who were there to provide references for me over the years. I think I graduated college with a well-rounded education. However, I did not necessarily feel prepared for the crushing reality of the job market.

### **How tough was it to find a job after graduation?**

Very. I graduated at a very low point in employment for our country. The majority of jobs available to me were available to people without degrees as well, which was frustrating at the time. However, I believe we all have

a path to follow to get us to where we need to be, and that path isn't always direct or how we expect it to be.

### **Do you have any words of wisdom for current or future mass communication students?**

Show off your work to your professors and visit them during their office hours. Having a strong relationship with at least one professor can greatly impact your job prospects after graduation. Practice your skills and do not be afraid to start at the bottom. Advancements are there for those who work hard, and you will be rewarded for taking risks!

***“We don't realize it, but college teaches us so much more than what is in the books. I learned how to be a good listener, how to work in a team, and how to deliver bad news without making it worse.”***

Written By: Kristen Bates  
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# Danielle Johnson

## Class of 2011



**Public Relations**  
**Wisconsin Department of Tourism**  
**Madison, WI**



MADISON, Wis. – Danielle Johnson is originally from Green Bay, WI and moved to Eau Claire to begin her dream. She graduated in 2011 from The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire with a bachelor's degree in mass communication with an emphasis in public relations and a minor in psychology. After graduating she took the job she still has today, working in public relations for the Wisconsin Department of Tourism in Madison.

### **Briefly describe your “normal day.”**

I don't think there is ever a “normal day,” but I have to balance different projects, help with radio and TV interviews, as well as write press releases and newsletters. During my average day at work, however, a lot is done through email. Whether I am emailing journalists who are looking for photos, tourism businesses looking for promotions for events, or different agencies about press releases, a lot is done in today's world through emails. In my opinion, the most interesting part of my job is finding creative ways to promote the variety of travel opportunities in the state and implementing those ideas.

### **What are some positive aspects gained from UW-Eau Claire?**

Throughout my experience at UW-Eau Claire, one of the advantages I was provided was the endless amount of opportunities to get involved on campus. Being a Campus Ambassador, I gained public speaking skills by giving tours and speaking to groups. I was able to conduct interviews, and above all was helping to promote the campus as a whole, which was really beneficial by adding experience in public relations. There were numerous opportunities right on campus that benefitted my education and future career, as well as making my time in college more enjoyable.

### **How important are internships?**

Vital. Being a public relations intern for Eau Claire Jazz Inc. I was able to get experience writing press releases, working on websites, and dealing with TV and radio

broadcasts. When I was applying for my job the only experience that I had was from my internship and if I had not done that internship all I would be able to say is that I took some classes about public relations. Although the communication and journalism department allows numerous opportunities for hands-on experience, without an internship your credibility doesn't compare.

### **Was there anything you felt unprepared for after graduating?**

Emailing is one of the most common forms of communication in today's world. Connecting back to my normal day at work, I want to emphasize the importance of being able to write a professional email. Another advantage of college that students tend to overlook is the importance of working with others. In the professional world nothing you do will be done completely on your own. I used to hate group work in college, but it's real life. You're not on an island. You never do anything by yourself. Any project that I work on contains multiple people that I need to collaborate with in order to get the job done.

### **Do you have any advice for PR graduates looking for jobs?**

My first piece of advice for those looking for jobs is to tailor your resume or cover letter to each specific job. If you see the words assertive or creative, use those specific words in your resume to describe yourself. Any chance that you have as a student to be in a leadership position or manage a group in a club or organization will always look great as well. Another point I want to stress is the importance of asking questions to the person who is interviewing you. If the employers ask if you have any questions at the end of your interviews, be prepared to ask them what their favorite part about their job is or any questions you may have. Having questions to ask the employer when you're in an interview will help make you truly stand out.

Written By: Chelsea Fibert  
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***I used to hate group work in college, but it's real life. You're not on an island. You never do anything by yourself.***

# Ryan Thibodeau

## Class of 2011



**Marketing and Development  
Director**  
**International Hearing Dog, Inc.**  
**Denver, CO**



DENVER – Out in the mountain ranges of Denver, there is more to be found than chair lifts, bears, and pine trees. There is one UW-Eau Claire alumnus who is working hard and living his dream. Ryan Thibodeau graduated from UW-Eau Claire with a degree in mass communication with an emphasis in public relations. He currently is the marketing and development director for International Hearing Dog, Inc., a nonprofit that trains service dogs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. He also serves on its board of directors. Thibodeau, a Wisconsin native, has worked his way up to where he is now through hard work and determination. He credits UW-Eau Claire as being a huge factor in his success.

### **How well did UW-Eau Claire prepare you for your career?**

UW-Eau Claire gave me the confidence to know that I am capable of going above and beyond what my current employer needs from me. The classes I took also set me up for success and gave me a lot of knowledge in my current field. My favorite class was event planning taught by Dr. Mary Hoffman. I liked it because it was set up like a real working environment. It allowed me to prepare for work outside of college.

### **Who was your favorite professor at UW-Eau Claire and why?**

That is a difficult question to answer. Most all of my professors meant a lot to my education. I was able to narrow it down to two: Dr. Martha Fay and Dr. Mary Hoffman. Dr. Fay was very engaging and made me want to pursue a career in the communications field. She was one of the first professors I had when I started my path toward a degree in public relations. As for Dr. Hoffman, she was very personable and always left her door open for her students. You could tell she cared a lot about our education and our future. She was very approachable.

### **What did you do immediately after graduation?**

I moved to Denver without a job. It took a while to get my feet on the ground, but it was a goal of mine since high school and I knew it was the best opportunity for me to get there. I wasn't successful overnight though. I took odd jobs from sharpening skis to selling Internet door-to-door. I practiced my interview skills and was lucky enough to get my foot in the door at my current job, but it took a lot of hard work to get to this point. It is important to stay positive during that time and not allow yourself to give up.

### **What's been the most exciting/interesting part of your job?**

I would have to say the best part of my job is talking to the people we have helped. I love working with dogs and I like having them in my office all of the time too. However, there is no better feeling than hearing someone talk about how much my work has affected his/her life in a positive way.

### **What is the most important advice you can give to someone wanting to go into your field?**

Make sure you stand out from the rest. You go into communications and public relations because you have great communication skills, but so does everyone else in your field. Make sure you work hard in your classes and in your internships. Make a name for yourself and never sacrifice your integrity for anything.

### **What do you know now you wish you could have known when you were in school?**

Become more involved. I know it's something every college kid hears again and again but it is true. I was a part of PRSSA and other groups, but I wish I had done more. I would have liked to be more involved with groups and done more to put on my resume. You never know whom you will meet and what they can do for you and your future career.

***“I moved to Denver without a job. It took a while to get my feet on the ground, but it was a goal of mine since high school and I knew it was the best opportunity for me to get there.”***

Written By: Abbie Fiedler  
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# Aimee Murphy

## Class of 2010



**Marketing Coordinator  
Wisconsin Foundation &  
Alumni Association  
Madison, WI**



MADISON, Wis. - She reflects fondly about her journey after graduation. It has been a journey of continued growth through changed career paths and a driving desire to make an impact. Aimee Murphy has long enjoyed writing, a passion that developed during her childhood living in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. When she arrived at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, she looked to build upon that passion and declared a major in journalism. She pursued journalism for a couple of years, before changing to public relations. Initially working for Special Olympics Wisconsin, to a PR Agency in Chicago, Aimee currently works as a marketing coordinator for the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association, where she helps engage UW-Madison alumni and Wisconsin residents with the activities and updates happening at the university.

### **How did the communication and journalism department prepare you for your career?**

Classes were a good size and always had like-minded students and professors interacting and learning. From what I remember, there were lots of group projects and assignments that seemed to be very effective.

### **What are your ultimate career goals?**

I want to work in an environment that fosters creativity, learning and growth. I've always wanted to be a part of the "bigger picture" and be able to see where my hard work connects to helping others in Wisconsin and across a global landscape.

### **What's been the most exciting part of your job?**

I enjoy making the connection between my projects and the individuals they affect. The opportunity to educate and inform various stakeholders about activities and important updates happening at UW-Madison has made my job extremely fulfilling.

### **What do you know now that you wish you knew in college?**

I was involved in some organizations and clubs during college, but I've now learned the importance of networking and building relationships with those in similar roles; so I would stress the importance of getting into that mindset in college. Sure, you're busy studying and writing papers, but go out and meet folks outside of the classroom and start to build your network while you're young. I am a very organized person but time management is crucial to learn and practice, starting in college. The real world is hard and I've hit a time in life where I really understand that now. Eventually, you will be the one to manage your life and often times there won't be someone there to help you. So, start to be as independent as you can.

### **How do you balance work and your personal life?**

It's certainly different for our generation with technology allowing us to be connected 24/7. That being said, I've been working for four years now and I have a pretty good grasp at work-life balance. If there's a project I'm working on that's time sensitive and high priority, I'll check e-mail and such after business hours and on the weekend. However, I've gotten into a good habit of not doing that if it's not necessary. Since most of us work five out of seven days per week, I think it's completely acceptable to stay "offline" for at least two days during the weekend as well as go home and really be present with our families, spouses, or pets. I've

realized that there is more to life than work, and building relationships with your loved ones is what will actually get you through your day. While it's important to help your organization grow, it's most important to help yourself by being healthy and focusing on things unrelated to work, too. In turn, you'll likely further succeed professionally because of the happiness level you'll achieve outside of the office.

***"I've realized that there is more to life than work, and building relationships with your loved ones is what will actually get you through your day. While it's important to help your organization, it's most important to help yourself by being healthy and focusing on things unrelated to work, too."***

Written By: Michael Fiez  
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# Karrie Hedding

## Class of 2010



**Copywriter**  
**Mason Companies**  
**Chippewa Falls, WI**



CHIPPEWA FALLS, Wis. –With a bachelor’s degree from Viterbo University in English, Karrie Hedding came to the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire to continue her education. Originally intending to get a master’s degree in English, she would later shift her focus to obtaining a second bachelor’s degree in public relations after working in the university’s News Bureau. She graduated in 2010 and soon after secured a job working for Mason Companies as a copywriter.

### **What did you do immediately after graduation?**

Immediately after graduation, I worked a part-time job while I searched for a job. I was also interning at the YMCA of Eau Claire doing public outreach for them. I wrote feature stories for the organization as well as press releases. After about six months I found a job working for Mason Companies in Chippewa Falls.

### **How hard was it finding a job?**

I think there are a lot of factors that go into finding a job. Some of it depends on what you’re looking for. The location is also important, deciding if you want to move and how far you are willing to go. You want to find the right place to live. I liked the Chippewa Valley area so I decided to stay around here after I graduated. It took around six months, but I came across the position at Mason Companies and applied.

### **How did UW-Eau Claire’s communication and journalism department prepare you for your career?**

The mixture of classes that were offered to me was important. Classes like Mass Media Law, Mass Media Ethics, and all writing classes really helped me get a better understanding of the field. The variety of classes, in juxtaposition with that hands-on experience was really valuable to preparing for a career.

Written By: Kody Hart  
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### **What do you know now, that you wish you would have known when you were in school?**

It took me a while to figure out what area of communication I wanted to go into. Internships and hands-on experience are opportunities that really help you find out what part of the field you are best suited for and enjoy the most. If I knew that when I first started my academic career, I would have taken on more internships to help make my decision sooner.

### **What is the most important advice you can give to someone wanting to get into the field?**

Like I said, experience is important. Take advantage of internships and hands-on experience as often as you can. It will be helpful down the road to finding out what your strengths and weaknesses are, and finding out what you enjoy. Really do your research to find opportunities and look into career paths that you find interesting. As for being in school, I kept a portfolio of the work I produced from my internships and job at the News Bureau. It was helpful when applying for jobs. I brought my portfolio to my interview for Mason Companies without them requiring me to and that really helped me prove I was the right candidate for the position. When you are talking to a potential employer about the great classes and university you’ve attended, and then are able to show them what you learned, it really speaks volumes about your abilities.

### **What has been the most interesting part of your job?**

As a copywriter, I get to do a little bit of everything at Mason Companies. I am working on print catalogs one day, online content the next, or uploading things to the internet. In general I am working on different projects throughout the year and it never gets boring. I go to work and do something special every day. I continue to learn at my job which also keeps it interesting. Most importantly, I have a great team at work. We support each other and it’s nice to have a job where you are supported by the whole department and company.

***“The variety of classes, in juxtaposition with that hands-on experience, was really valuable to preparing for a career.”***

# Katlyn Head

Class of 2011



**Conference Services Assistant  
English Language Institute China  
Chiang Mai, Thailand**



APPLETON, Wis. – Growing up in eastern Wisconsin, she never strayed far from home. It was not until her job as a waitress in high school that she felt inspired to pursue public relations. She never imagined she would one day pick up her bags and travel across the world, but found herself on a plane to England to study abroad for a year while in college. Her love for travel took her to 11 different developing countries where she volunteered after graduation. Now, Katlyn Head is ready to take on the next chapter as she heads to Thailand.

## **How did the CJ department help prepare you for life after graduation?**

The education I received at UW-Eau Claire served me well because it was comprehensive. I learned to write and speak well, skills that are imperative to a successful career. I also learned to effectively work in groups, which is more important in the business world than I had expected. And the professors in the CJ department were helpful because of their ability to draw on their own professional experiences and provide insight into what the work world is like.

## **What challenges have you faced so far in your career and job search?**

Balancing my personal passions and the reality of the work world has been a challenge. It has been three years since I graduated and I finally feel like I am entering a job that balances those for me. Many times, you won't find your dream job or even one in your desired field right out of school. It will take a few jobs before you find what really works for you. A job may be your dream on paper but the reality may not be as shiny as the dream. That can be a hard pill to swallow. It all comes down to the realization that finding your niche might take longer than you expected, but once you find it, you will be confident in your decision.

Written By: Hanna Johnson  
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## **What was it like to take a year off and volunteer in 11 different countries?**

It was an amazing experience that I would highly recommend. Traveling to the developing world was a completely different experience than studying abroad in Europe. I was able to serve others and grow as an individual. And working in small teams prepared me well for the professional world.

## **What is on the horizon for your career?**

I just accepted a job as the Conference Services Assistant for an organization called English Language Institute China (ELIC) and will be moving to Thailand in January to work for them. Their offices are based in Colorado, but the Thailand office focuses on planning the yearly conference that is held there. My education and my experiences abroad have given me the confidence to take

on this professional role overseas and the self-assurance that I will be able to do my job well.

## **What advice do you have for someone interested in international communication?**

Start traveling now. Study abroad, intern abroad or volunteer overseas.

Be sure to have an understanding of the context of where you are traveling. Take a world history or religions class to gain that knowledge and stay abreast of what is happening in the world. And most importantly, go all in. Immerse yourself in the culture; eat where the locals eat, live with a host family and really become a part of where you are.

## **How has traveling enhanced the education you received at UW-Eau Claire?**

Traveling has given me the opportunity to reflect on what I have learned through multiple perspectives. It was, and continues to be, a great way to round out my education. Being abroad has opened up my world and allowed me to see things in a new light. It is an educational experience in itself. I would not have had the opportunities I have today without the education and experiences I gained during my time as a CJ student at UW-Eau Claire.

***“A job may be your dream on paper but the reality may not be as shiny as the dream.”***

# Sarah Wier

## Class of 2011



**Operational Claims  
Representative  
Travelers Insurance  
St. Paul, MN**



ST. PAUL, Minn. – When Sarah Wier graduated in the spring of 2011, she knew figuring out how to be a successful public relations professional meant taking the skills she had learned in the classroom at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, and effectively applying them in different ways. While her post-graduation journey has included fulfilling a long time dream and moving to a bigger city, Wier continues to take what she learned as a PR undergraduate at UW-Eau Claire and apply those skills in her current position..

### **It's been a little over 3 years since you graduated so, where are you working now?**

Currently I work at Travelers Insurance in St. Paul. I'm working as an operational claims representative in the office.

### **Did you work there straight out of school?**

After graduation I worked as a store manager in a retail store in Janesville, Wisconsin. I worked there for two years before going into the Peace Corps.

### **Wow! That's quite the change of pace. Why did you choose to go into the Peace Corps?**

I heard about the Peace Corps in high school and knew it was something I wanted to be involved in. I worked as a Peace Corps volunteer in Tonga which is off the coast of Fiji in the South Pacific. Unfortunately due to illness I was forced to come home early however I was grateful to have gotten the experience.

### **Now that you are back home, how do you feel some of the things you learned in your CJ classes are paying off?**

I feel like for the most part, the classes I took really built on each other. For example understanding effective communication practices and picking up on visual cues are essential in any job. The skills learned in PR writing and

public speaking have been phenomenal, and you take that with you everywhere.

### **What are three skills you have learned are necessary in the working world to be an effective PR professional?**

Communication is definitely key. If you can't communicate, people aren't going to hire you. Flexibility is also really important because in any role things are going to come up. Integrity is an important quality to have as well.

### **Is there anything you wish you would have learned more about before graduating?**

I think it is important to realize that in the real world there are not given guidelines or rubrics like there are in the classroom. It would have been nice to have had the freedom to take in my surroundings, decide how to best figure out the problem and then fix it. I think having the freedom in college to practice and apply different skills (and sometimes messing up) is a safer way to learn than on the job.

### **Finally, what's the best advice you could give someone starting out in the communication and journalism department at UW-Eau Claire?**

Sometimes you learn the most from classes you are reluctant to take. There were some elective courses in the CJ department that I thought I wouldn't benefit from but took as electives that continue to pay off today. And the bright side is that if you don't learn something you'll meet someone. You never know what classes are going to help you in the long run, and you never forget the classes you don't think you'll use.

Written By: Sarah Jayne Johnson  
johsarja@uwec.edu

***"The skills learned in PR writing and public speaking have been phenomenal and you take that with you everywhere."***

# Darin Schluender

## Class of 2008



**IHS Coordinator**  
**PKT Enterprises**  
**Minneapolis, MN**

MINNEAPOLIS – As a public relations and sociology double major during his time at UW-Eau Claire, Darin Schluender cultivated a wide range of skills that provided him with the tools for success after graduation.

Schluender, a 2008 graduate, worked as a production assistant at WEAU before graduating with his bachelor's. After graduation, however, he decided to utilize his broadly applicable communication degree to switch gears and follow his passion for helping others by moving to Minnesota and working in non-profit organizations. Today, Schluender still makes his living aiding others and lending a helping hand to those in need.

### **Where do you work, and what are the basics of your position?**

I work at PKT Enterprises in Minneapolis managing personal care assistants (PCAs). PKT Enterprises specializes in aiding adults with developmental disabilities live out their day-to-day lives through both group home settings and in-home assistance. I personally manage things on the in-home side of the organization by working with the PCAs to ensure that each client is having his or her needs effectively met while also remaining within the county and state guidelines for our organization.

### **How does your degree in public relations benefit you in your position as an IHS Coordinator?**

A lot of my job is person-to-person relationship building, which is where I feel my public relations degree comes in handy. Being an effective communicator is invaluable when it comes to establishing relationships with your employees and your clients. I think knowing how to communicate with the PCAs and the other employees makes me a better boss, and it makes me a better employee for my bosses, too.

### **In what ways do you feel the public relations program best prepared you for your career?**

Obviously the curriculum taught me a lot in terms of the technicalities of writing and communicating, but I think some of my greatest learning came from the relationships I cultivated with my professors. Eau Claire, in comparison to other schools, offers really small class sizes so students get an opportunity to really get to know their professors and create a bond with them. For me personally, I think the ability to be treated like an adult by people who were experienced professionals in the field helped me learn some lessons that I couldn't have learned from a textbook or in a lecture. I think creating those relationships in and of itself was a lesson in how to succeed in any communications-related job.

### **What is your biggest piece of advice for students or recent graduates when it comes to finding work?**

I think my biggest piece of advice would be to not be afraid to work really hard, because in reality, a lot of people don't. There's a big value in going to work, putting in the hours, and doing your best. If you're a person that's smart, thinks out of the box, and questions things, you will be invaluable. Beyond that, don't be afraid to make mistakes! Too many people of our generation get discouraged when we make a mistake

and just give up. Work hard, and if you happen to fail don't just walk away. There's something very noble about being a hard worker who perseveres, and employers will see that.

### **In your opinion, what is the greatest advantage of a degree in the communications field?**

A degree in communication is great simply because it applies to a limitless number of fields. Almost any job that you may apply for will use some of the skills you learn as a communication student. That skill set you learn comes in handy for your entire professional life.

***“Work hard, and if you happen to fail don't just walk away. There's something very noble about being a hard worker who perseveres, and employers will see that.”***

# Morgan Sprattler

## Class of 2010



**Portfolio Manager**  
Schwegman Lundberg & Woessner, P.A.  
Minneapolis, MN



MINNEAPOLIS – Morgan Sprattler works at Schwegman Lundberg & Woessner (SLW) P.A., a patent law firm. She has been with SLW for three years, first starting as a case manager assisting paralegals and attorneys. She was quickly promoted within a year and now holds a portfolio manager position. Her job duties include assisting patent attorneys with managing their clients' portfolios. Sprattler graduated with a bachelor's degree in public relations. Although she doesn't use public relations in her job, she still analyzes and manages data for her clients. To obtain new clients for SLW, Sprattler assists in some marketing initiatives. She finds it very interesting to work with up and coming technologies and inventions.

### **Why was UW-Eau Claire the right fit for you?**

With not knowing what I wanted to do specifically, UW-Eau Claire was a good, all-around school for me to figure out what I wanted to do. You can't beat the campus, and how friendly the staff and students are.

### **How did UW-Eau Claire's communication program prepare you for your career?**

The program is awesome in teaching good writing and all-around communication skills. The program also taught me good research skills, which I have used in all of my jobs.

### **How tough was it finding a job after college?**

I waited until after graduation, so it was pretty tough finding a job. Sales is always open and I gave it a shot. It was more who you knew after graduation more than anything.

### **What advice would you give to current and future communication students?**

Get involved as much as you can, with clubs or organizations such as PRSSA or BUS. Get to know your professors and counselors because they can help you with recommendations. Look for an internship before ending school. Search for jobs and get into contact with some employers. By doing so, you can see what types of jobs are available and also to get your name out there before graduation.

### **What do you know now, you wish you would have known when you were in school?**

I wish I would have known how important it was to make contacts during school. I got the jobs I have had because I got some help from making those contacts. It is important students realize that they need to take full advantage of networking opportunities. I have learned that work life isn't that much different than student life. You put in the work, either researching or studying a client for a certain amount of hours and then you can shut it off. You are still learning and meeting new people every day.

### **What were your previously held positions before working at SLW?**

I worked at Lifetime Fitness as a member engagement adviser selling gym memberships. I also held the position as a marketing coordinator intern at Cascade Tissue Group in Eau Claire.

***"It is important students realize that they need to take full advantage of networking opportunities."***

Written By: Brendon McCarthy  
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# Tara Cegla

Class of 2011



**Communications  
Specialist**  
Spring Lake Park Schools  
Spring Lake Park, MN



MINNEAPOLIS – Tara Cegla graduated in May 2011 with a degree in public relations. She took every opportunity to become involved on campus, which helped her prepare for life after graduation and make her stand out on résumés. When she graduated her dream was to work at a public relations agency, but found telling stories of students and staff in schools, and working with the media, was more rewarding.

## **What did you do when you graduated?**

I started looking for jobs in the Twin Cities during the winter of my senior year. I really wanted to work at a PR agency after graduation so I started to build connections. I got an internship with the Minnesota State Fair, which was one of the most fun experiences I've had out of college.

## **How did you start working in schools?**

While working for the Minnesota State Fair I worked with a lot of different PR agencies, one of which later hired me. One of our clients was Midwest Dairy, which has a unique partnership with the Minnesota Vikings called Fuel Up to Play 60. The goal of the program is to encourage students to exercise daily and eat right. We would occasionally go into schools to promote the program with the Vikings and that's when I realized school communication was even a job and I might enjoy that experience. I applied for a job with Robinsdale Area Schools, which was the first school district I worked for. A year and a half later, I started working for Spring Lake Park Schools.

## **Did you see yourself doing what you do now when you graduated?**

I wanted to work at a public relations agency. I thought that was the best way I was going to get the most versatile experience. One down side of working at a large agency is you often get pigeon-holed in one specialty; that's something they don't tell you in college. You have to find your niche, and I found mine in education.

## **What is the most interesting part of your job?**

There is never a consistent day with public relations, and I like the variety of my job. I work with a team doing social media, photography, design, website management, writing, community and internal relations, and media relations. But besides the variety, I'm in the people business. I'm not trying to sell something. I tell clear and concise stories of our awesome students and staff, and write content so it's easy for families to read; that's rewarding.

## **How does UW-Eau Claire benefit its students?**

The more experience you can get the better, even if it means going outside the classroom to get it. One of the benefits of UW-Eau Claire is its size. There are so many opportunities on campus to become a leader and gain experience. Having a great relationship with staff members too is always a great resource. I'm glad to hear the CJ department is incorporating more multimedia into its curriculum because it is crucial to have that skill set when applying for jobs. Every job expects you to know how to deal with all forms of media.

***“Everyone has to find their niche, and they will; it might just take some time to find it.”***

## **What do you know now, you wish you had known when you were in school?**

Working in an agency might seem glamorous, but I found out I enjoyed more rewarding work. You may get some really cool clients at an agency, but you may also get stuck with trying to make a sexy pitch about bug repellent. What's great with working with one company is that you get to know it really, really well. That may sound boring to people who would rather know a lot of things sort of well. There are lot of different paths in PR. Everyone has to find their niche, and they will; it might just take some time to find it. Keep your mind open. Find out what makes you stand out.

Written By: Katie Dean Miller  
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# Jennifer Lanzel

## Class of 2008



**Meeting Planner**  
**Energy Center of Wisconsin**  
**Madison, WI**



MADISON, Wis. – When Jennifer Lanzel graduated from UW-Eau Claire in 2008, she was certain she wanted to work in the wedding or event planning industry. After several years in the industry, she wanted to pursue other options and explore what she could do with her public relations degree. Now she is a meeting planner for the Energy Center of Wisconsin, where she organizes educational programs for professionals in the residential and commercial building industry. These programs provide training on the latest trends and technologies, to making buildings more energy efficient and sustainable. Jennifer's role begins with scheduling and booking venues, and continues through the planning process into the on-site coordination and logistics. She believes her education at UW-Eau Claire provided her with the necessary skills to put these programs together.

### **How did UW-Eau Claire prepare you for your career?**

I think the public relations degree does what it is designed to do and gives you really excellent communication skills. I have benefited from those skills since I left UW-Eau Claire in every job that I have had. Being able to communicate with people effectively, whether it is written or orally, is always something you will need. That is the number one thing that I took from my education. The capstone course at times was very challenging, but you learn a lot, specifically how to edit and write more clearly and efficiently. I took away the most from that course.

### **What did you do immediately after graduation?**

Immediately after I graduated I was working in retail and I travelled. My first career job after I graduated was as the event coordinator at the Eau Claire Golf and Country Club. Since then I have done everything from event planning and wedding planning to meeting and conference planning.

Written By: Taylor Pelissero  
pelissta@uwec.edu

### **What has been the most interesting or exciting part of your job?**

I would say the most interesting part of my current job is the different people that I get to work with on a daily basis. I work with people who are registering for the courses, the speakers, and the hotel and venue staff. I am constantly interacting with new people and different personalities, and that keeps things very interesting

### **How do you balance work and your personal life?**

I know from experience balancing work and personal life can be difficult. This is especially true in your first jobs out of college when you are trying to prove yourself and put in the extra hours. Finding the balance during that time is hard but also very important. I would say the best way to

do it is just to force it. You have to have a life beyond work, and understand that work is not the most important thing in the world. Commit yourself when you are at work, so you can be productive and accomplish your goals during your work hours, and then leave. Even if you have to put in more hours later that night, get out and

do something social or something just for you. You will see how much better you feel and how much more motivated you are to work so you can have that social life. It is just healthy and will make you happier in the long run.

### **What is the most important advice you can give to someone wanting to get into your field?**

Look beyond what you think you want to do. There are so many interesting and different opportunities out there that you can use your degree for. The job you are looking for may go by five different names depending on the company, so be sure to read through all job descriptions and keep an open mind. You may find something that will lead you down a road to a position you didn't know existed or an industry that you didn't realize needed your services or expertise. It is amazing how many opportunities are out there that you wouldn't know about because you are focused on one thing. You are needed everywhere.

***“Look beyond what you think you want to do ... Keep an open mind ... You are needed everywhere.”***

# Lindsey Kaiser

Class of 2008



**Tax Associate  
Olsen Thielen CPAs  
Roseville, MN**



HUDSON, Wis. – As any young person knows, graduating college around 2008 and finding an entry level position was nearly impossible. Lindsey Kaiser, who graduated from UW-Eau Claire with a double major in public relations and English in May 2008, experienced this first hand. The Auburndale, Wisconsin native now lives in Hudson, Wisconsin and works as a tax associate at Olsen Thielen CPAs in Roseville, Minnesota.

## **What did you do immediately after graduating from UW-Eau Claire?**

I moved back home to Auburndale and applied to a few PR positions around that area, but with the economy the way it was around that time it was very difficult to find an entry level position. I ended up working at the grocery store I had worked at through high school and college and eventually ended up going back to school at UW-River Falls. I graduated from there in December 2012 with a degree in accounting.

## **So what does your new career entail?**

I prepare tax returns for individuals, businesses and non-profit organizations. During tax season it is extremely busy and I usually will work for over 8 hours a day. I also assist in tax planning for clients such as preparing estimates or answering or researching any questions they may have. Each day is different at Olsen Thielen, so I don't exactly have a daily routine.

## **What are the most exciting and interesting aspects about your career?**

The most exciting time for me is April 15, when you finally finish that last tax return. I would also say I find it interesting to see what different careers and individuals earn on a yearly basis. I also really enjoy doing the returns for non-profit organizations.

Written By: Sean Rice  
ricesp@uwec.edu

## **Do any of the skills you learned in the public relations program transfer into your current career?**

Well, during my time in the PR program at UW-Eau Claire I had the opportunity to intern at United Way, which gave me real world experience and insight into how non-profit organizations operate. Also, believe it or not, there is a lot of writing involved in accounting, and writing for public relations transfers well to the accounting field because you have to be short, straight, and to-the-point often. The communication skills I learned in that program also helped prepare me to interact with different types of people at my current job.

## **How do you balance work and your personal life?**

Well, during the four months of tax season, I don't. I'm constantly at the office doing a return for someone or answering their questions regarding their returns. During the rest of the year though I like to keep my work at the office and try not to talk about work at home. The good thing about my job too, is that they offer a good amount of vacation hours every year.

So even though I have to really work hard during those four months of tax season, I usually will be given around six to seven weeks of vacation time per year which can really help to lower the stress level.

## **What is the most important advice you can give to someone who is preparing to enter the professional world?**

Make sure that what you are getting a degree in is something you want to pursue in the future. Sit down and imagine your future. Just because you have that degree does not mean you are stuck in that field. Don't be afraid to change your mind. And as much as students don't want to believe it, you're basically never done with having to study and do homework. I still find myself having to do research outside of the office for clients. Finally I would say that students should appreciate the "college life" like hour long classes and summer and winter vacations. You don't really get those in the professional world.

***“Sit down and imagine your future. Just because you have that degree does not mean you are stuck in that field. Don't be afraid to change your mind.”***

# Luke Anderson

## Class of 2010



**Marketing Coordinator**  
**BlueSpire Strategic Marketing**  
**Minneapolis, MN**



MINNEAPOLIS - The chances are unlimited in a career with communications- Luke Anderson started his search for a career in public relations with various internships and summer jobs. What he didn't expect was to find a career in marketing. However, the similarities between the two professions are so close that without the title you would not be able to see a difference. Starting his college career in print journalism, marketing was one of the last places Anderson thought he would end up. Anderson has always had a dream to work in sports related public relations. His position as Marketing Coordinator for BlueSpire Strategic Marketing is only the first step; the possibilities are endless when you choose a degree in public relations.

### **How difficult was it to find a job?**

After graduating, it is important to understand there are thousands of students competing for the same jobs as you. What I learned is to keep trying and never stop applying. You have to get used to rejection. I had a few part time jobs here and there before I found my current position. It was easy to find this job but it was not easy to get this job. It was not until after the first couple interviews with other companies that I realized I could have been using a better approach. You need to go into an interview or application prepared. There is no such thing as being over prepared for an interview.

### **What is the most interesting or exciting part about your job?**

My job is never the same. There are a variety of things I am responsible for; I get to work a lot with social media and blogging. I love writing and started out as a print journalism major so it is rewarding to get to write every day. I also get to work with the development team with the opportunity to collaborate on different projects. I like that my workdays are never the same. It keeps the job interesting.

Written By: Cassie Rudd  
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### **What are the most important skills you feel are needed to succeed in a communications career?**

From my experience, I can strongly say good communication skills. The easiest and most pleasant people to work with are the ones who know how to communicate well. In any job you need to be able to talk within the company, as well as communicating with other companies related to your own. I would also say it is important to have strong writing skills. People don't always have time to listen to what you have to say so it is important to be able to successfully get your point across in written form. Having good writing skills also helps your overall credibility.

### **What do you know now that you wish you knew in college?**

I wish I were more prepared when I graduated. I should have used the career service center more. I would go to it a couple times my last semester but there was much more I could've

learned or worked on. I also wish I would have networked more. I was only a part of a few organizations while in college and I wish I had made more professional connections that I could reference for jobs.

### **What advice would you give to current and prospective students?**

Don't be too narrow or picky when searching for jobs. It is important to approach each opportunity with an open mind. A job and its responsibilities are much more than what appears on paper. No matter what you do, there are often unexpected responsibilities that help gain the right experience.

### **How did the UW-Eau Claire program prepare you for your current job?**

I loved the support I got from the faculty at UW-Eau Claire. I was not always a public relations major but the department made it easy to transition and make the switch. I changed my major during my junior year and still graduated in a total of five years.

***“There is no such thing as being over prepared for an interview.”***

# Courtney Horrmann

## Class of 2008



**Senior Staff & Training Coach**  
**Cru**  
**Stevens Point, WI**



STEVENS POINT, Wis. – Courtney Horrmann loved college. In fact, she loved it so much she never really left. As Senior Staff and Training Coach with the campus ministry organization Cru, Horrmann uses many of the skills she learned as a public relations major at her current location at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Horrmann is pursuing what she is passionate about and loves making a difference in the lives of students.

### **What's been the most exciting part of your job?**

I would say the most exciting part of my job is the fact that I have a front row seat to life changes. Seeing students grow and change is so fulfilling. I also really enjoy my role as a jack of all trades. I do event planning, programming, teaching, social media, blogging, problem solving and design. I do it all and appreciate the variety.

### **How do you balance work and your personal life?**

This is really a challenge regardless of the field. For me, I've had to understand what my personal capacity is. I've learned I thrive when I have more balls to juggle, but it also takes more time for me to unplug. I don't have a nine to five job which means I have to be intentional about setting boundaries and discovering what will refresh me.

### **How did the communication and journalism program prepare you for your career?**

The program at UW-Eau Claire was so helpful in preparing me for what I currently do. The school is the perfect size to seize opportunities; I studied abroad in France, interned at the admissions office, and worked for The Spectator. I learned how vital it was to ask questions, to take part in the creative process, and to successfully problem solve. In job interviews I had an answer for everything because of all my experiences.

### **What is one thing you would have done differently in college?**

I was very busy in college. There is a lot of pressure put on students by professors and parents and I wish I had been more intentional about engaging with others rather than just trying to survive. We don't always know how to ask questions and it's become a skill to be able to connect relationally with others. I wish I wouldn't have let my busyness and fear keep me from spending time building relationships with those who were different from me.

### **What is the most important advice you can give to someone wanting to enter your field?**

Senior staff with Cru give leadership to a team of Christ-like laborers who are committed to reaching a campus or people group by planting and building movements.

Knowing this, I would tell them that if they don't have passion they will fail. The transition from college to the real world is a seismic shift. Everything about your world changes. I had to fight my own expectations of myself, and my passion gave me the will to persevere. Don't be put in a box. Find a mentor to help hone in on who you are because life does not get simpler.

Be passionate about what you do and be passionate about your school. I am proud to be a Blugold and I want everyone to know that UW-Eau Claire is a fantastic university! You are not just a number; you are an individual.

### **What's next for you?**

This summer I will be directing one of Cru's Australia summer projects. I will be bringing college students from my region on a six week mission trip to Australia, which is a new level of leadership for me. At UW-Stevens Point, I am working to harness my skill set by providing additional guidance to the women's ministry as well as training and coaching staff. I am looking to grow in leadership and I am excited to continue to use all I learned at UW-Eau Claire.

***“Don't be put in a box.  
Find a mentor to help  
hone in on who you are  
because life does not get  
simpler.”***

# Lindsay Stewart

## Class of 2008



**Digital Marketing Specialist**  
**Patterson Dental**  
**St. Paul, MN**



ST. PAUL, Minn. – Lindsay Stewart lives in the Twin Cities working for Patterson Dental as a Digital Marketing Specialist. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire she worked for NAS Recruitment Communications in Milwaukee. Working there for a year she moved to Minnesota and worked for Steven H. Snyder & Associates and ReachLocal. In the last year she has come to work at Patterson Dental where she creates digital campaign strategies and budgets for her clients' needs.

### **What do you know now, you wish you would have known when you were in school?**

Get involved. Your degree will only get you so far. I spent numerous hours working with The Spectator and that experience landed me my first job. Don't rest on your GPA and leadership projects to connect you with future employers.

### **What did you immediately do after graduation?**

Immediately after graduation, I put my resume on every job board and website that I knew existed. Social media was not as big of a resource back then, so the conversations I had with potential employers and networks was via phone and email. For a recent graduate looking for a career, tell everyone you know you're looking for a job. Don't look for jobs all by yourself. Free help is out there.

### **What is the most valuable skill you have learned?**

One of the most valuable things I have learned in my career is how to manage people not only below me, but those who are above and equal with me. It is not very common for everyone to get along and for everyone to agree on an idea. You have to learn to manage your peers and reports respectfully. Sometimes your boss' management style doesn't align exactly with your ideal working style and it's best to learn how to handle that.

### **What jobs did you have after graduating and leading up to the job you currently hold?**

I started my career at a small recruitment advertising agency in Milwaukee as an account manager, then jumped to a marketing consultant at a Minnesota law firm, then quickly moved to a client relations specialist and senior account manager at a digital advertising agency. I think each job has been important in growing my skill set. For example, I never would have held my position at the digital agency unless I would have started experimenting with pay-per-click advertising at the law firm. I was

exploring new digital advertising methods and took the initiative that helped me in my next role.

### **What's the greatest challenge of digital advertising?**

As digital marketers, we have to keep up with the Internet. There are thousands of blogs one could read to stay informed about the newest Google update. Everything you do in digital advertising is traceable-and measurable. Don't be afraid to test

new theories and tell your clients they will be "pioneers" with the newest search engine optimization strategy. If something doesn't work there is always an answer.

### **How did the public relations program at UW-Eau Claire prepare you for your career?**

The best part of the public relations program at UW-Eau Claire was teaching us how to present solutions to a problem as a team. In my experience in marketing I work on an integrated team that must create advertising solutions and campaigns for our clients. Just like group work at UW-Eau Claire, most marketing teams require a number of different skill sets to accomplish a task. You have to learn how to work with everyone and how to shine.

Written By: Jake Stendahl  
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***"It is not very common for everyone to get along and for everyone to agree on an idea. You have to learn to manage your peers and reports respectfully."***

# Christine Breese

## Class of 2011



**Communication Specialist**  
**CUNA Mutual Group**  
**Madison, WI**



MADISON, Wis. – Christine Breese is a 2011 graduate who constantly works toward becoming an elite public relations professional. Breese majored in public relations and minored in strategic advertising. She is currently a Communication Specialist at CUNA Mutual Group in Madison. She supports the human resources department by communicating effectively with employees, as well as helping the department get news out by producing written materials with a subject matter expert. She also earned her Master of Science Management earlier this year, enhancing her communication skills. Christine provided her insight not only on her current position, but also some advice for current and future students, as well as how attending UW-Eau Claire was vital for her career.

### **How did the communication and journalism program help your career?**

It helped me to write professionally. There is a big difference between writing those long essays and writing for a company. While it takes time to learn how to write for your specific company, it is essential to have the backbones of good writing.

### **How did UW-Eau Claire help you prepare for your current career?**

The number one factor that helped me prepare for my career was the ability to work with others so closely. That is something you will find valuable in your career. Each day you are surrounded by different people, personalities and potential conflicts. Having the social skills to interact with individuals at all levels was something I learned when working with students and faculty members.

### **What is something unique about UW-Eau Claire that other universities might not have?**

The class sizes really helped me to flourish. I wasn't scared to ask questions, reach out to the professors, or work with classmates because there was a high likelihood that you knew them, had seen them or had mutual friends.

### **How did college in general prepare you for your career?**

I think that the ability to work on multiple projects at one time is key. Also, the stress of college is really good practice for the stress of a day-to-day job.

### **How closely related is your career to your major/minor that you graduated with?**

They are related, but definitely not the same. If you would have told me that I would be working in internal communications at an insurance company when I graduated, I would have told you that you were nuts. While I do like my job, I am not sure that this is what I want to do with the rest of my life. I am 26 and still have a lot to figure out when it comes to future professional plans.

### **How important are internships to have as a college student?**

Internships are absolutely vital to succeeding. Employers want to hear about past experiences and your abilities. It is hard to demonstrate those skills without an internship; so internships are essential.

### **What is the most important advice you could give to a student wanting to get into your field of work?**

Networking is essential. In this field, you have to know people and be comfortable being uncomfortable. Make sure you talk to strangers and ask questions.

### **What is one thing you would go back and tell your college self?**

You won't know what you want to do with the rest of your life and that is ok! Just go with the flow, enjoy the experiences and you will figure it out eventually.

***“Make sure you network. In this field, you need to be comfortable being uncomfortable. Make sure you talk to strangers and ask questions.”***

Written By: Megan Stokes  
stokesmm@uwec.edu

# Leslie Damico

Class of 2011



**Integration and  
Software Specialist**  
Eau Claire Area School District  
Eau Claire, WI



EAU CLAIRE, Wis. – Keeping her love of art and photography in her college curriculum was important to Leslie Damico. Although her adviser thought that her minor in photography was not useful, Damico knew differently. As a part of her daily routine, Damico uses the skills she gained during her four years at UW-Eau Claire in all aspects of her work. She notes that the skills learned in the classroom transferred to every position she has come across, including her current position as the integration and software specialist for the Eau Claire Area School District. Before getting that position, Damico worked at a call center in order to stay employed and work further on her interviewing skills, resume and cover letters. Damico says it is important to not have gaps in employment and show employers that you are dedicated to your work. She loves her job and is ecstatic to come to work everyday.

## **How did the CJ program prepare you for your career?**

I would say the writing classes and being able to write professionally is something that I think benefited me in finding a job and in my current position. I think I chose well in choosing mass communication because it applied to so many different areas that had a lot of job opportunities. The multimedia classes and program applied to the skills that I need on a day-to-day basis as well.

## **What is the most important advice you can give someone wanting to get into your field?**

I don't have a teaching background, but I support about 1,400 staff and teachers, so I think being flexible and understanding that you don't have to be an expert in everything will enable you to succeed in all fields. Another thing to keep in mind is always keep working on your personal and professional development, and always ask yourself 'what's next?'

## **Having a career now, what do you wish you would have known or been prepared for when you were in school?**

I wish I would have done an internship. I did work in college, but I worked on campus and wish I would have been exposed to a professional setting prior to graduation. It would have been beneficial to catch a glimpse of what a full-time position entailed and how to navigate it on a daily basis.

## **What has been the most interesting or exciting part of your job?**

The most exciting part was the summer of 2013 when we started our one-to-one iPad project. It involved a lot of research to see what other school districts were doing and what would fit best with our program. I was on the initial training program that staff received and seeing the progress that has been made has been very powerful. Students and staff are taking risks and trying new things and it's all because of the technology that we provided them with.

## **What skills did you learn from the department that have aided you in your career?**

My minor was in art with an emphasis in photography, which is one of my passions. I decided to follow that passion and I am so happy that I did. Now, to my understanding, the CJ department is a lot more multimedia focused which are skills that have benefited me on a daily basis. The classes where you are writing a story, shooting photos and working on video production were helpful as well. Your organization might not have the specific software that you were taught on, so having the knowledge to transfer those skills and being able to pick things up can set you apart when job hunting.

## **What advice would you give someone that is about to enter into the work force?**

Diversify your skills and interests, and be open to opportunities. If you see a job that you want and are interested in, don't be afraid to go for it. Even if you have to take a step outside of your initial plans, like doing an internship, be open to that opportunity. People move up all the time in organizations and they get other opportunities to move into a role that they want. It's good to have a diverse background and not focus on one thing.

Written By: Stephanie Tyink  
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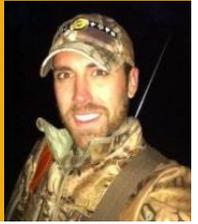
***“Being flexible and understanding that you don't have to be an expert in everything will enable you to succeed in all fields.”***

# Sam Lynch

## Class of 2011



**National Account Manager/  
Customer Service Manager  
Do-All Outdoors  
Nashville, TN**



NASHVILLE, Tenn. - Breaking away from the frigid, six month, Wisconsin winter, Sam Lynch has flown south and landed in Nashville, Tennessee. Even though he is now a southern boy, Lynch has his roots in Menomonie, Wisconsin and graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire communication and journalism department. Immediately after graduation, Lynch moved to the Twin Cities and was offered a job at Gander Mountain's corporate office in St. Paul. Through a little bit of travel and corporate networking, Lynch ended up with an interview with one of Gander Mountain's clients, Do-All Outdoors. He landed a job as the National Account Manager as well as the manager of the Customer Service department and headed south to Nashville.

### **What is your favorite thing about your current job?**

I would say interacting with clients on a daily basis is my favorite part about my job. Also, just working in the outdoor product industry in general is great, because I love all things hunting, fishing and camping. So for me, being able to work with this stuff every day is really awesome.

### **What has been the most interesting or exciting part of your job so far?**

I get to travel a lot, at least once a month, but usually more. I travel all over the United States to visit and meet with different clients and I even get to travel to Germany in March for an international conference.

### **How closely related is your current job to the degree you graduated with?**

I think it's getting closer and closer to my major. I'm utilizing quite a few skills from my public relations and mass communication classes. And since I'm at a small

company, I can sometimes jump in on social media posts. In general I'm able to do a lot more outside of my specific role.

### **In what ways did the CJ program at UW-Eau Claire prepare you for your career?**

The program really helped me to improve my writing skills and gave me the ability to clearly and effectively communicate with people. I feel like UW-Eau Claire prepared me for the professional world and taught me how to appropriately communicate in a business setting.

### **What is something that you know now, that you wish you knew or wish you did while you were still in school?**

No matter what job I have, computer literacy is always going to be a huge factor in any position that I'm going to be in. So, I really wish I would have taken a few more technical computer classes while I was still in school, it would have been really helpful.

### **What is the best piece of advice you would give to someone wanting to get into your field?**

I would say just open yourself up to any new opportunity that comes your way. Both of the jobs I've had since graduation weren't what I was looking for in school. I wanted to be in an agency or PR firm. I never thought I'd be in the position I'm in today. You really need to open yourself up to different things, because you never know what you might like to do or be interested in if you don't try it. Just go for it, put yourself out there and try something new.

***“Open yourself up to different things, because you never know what you might like to do or be interested in if you don't try it. Just go for it, put yourself out there and try something new.”***

Written By: Nicole VandenPlas  
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# Brooke England Lee

## Class of 2008



**Senior Marketing  
Executive  
Procurement Leaders  
London, England**



LONDON - The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire can take you anywhere in the world, and Brooke England Lee is a shining example of that. A 2008 graduate, Brooke used a combination of study abroad experience, internship networking, and volunteering to launch her career in integrated strategic communication. Brooke currently serves as a senior marketing executive for Procurement Leaders, a global intelligence network focusing in procurement/supply chain intelligence and networking. She recently offered great advice on the changing field, finding a job internationally, and the art of networking.

### **What is the most important piece of advice you can give to young professionals entering the job force?**

I think there's an expectation young graduates have of finding the perfect job immediately upon graduating, and that's usually not the case. The most important advice I can offer to young professionals is this: take the unpaid internships or volunteer experiences. More often than not these experiences will help shape your future career search. This is also a great way to network and gain experiences. Even though the organization or non-profit might not have a position open, your networking efforts could pay off later. If not, you still gained great real-world experience that you won't gain in a classroom.

### **Did you learn the skills for an international job while studying at UW-Eau Claire, or were those skills gained elsewhere?**

UW-Eau Claire taught me technique, but my experiences studying abroad and in internships or volunteerism really taught me the most practical skills I know. However, the focus on writing in the communication and journalism program has been beneficial. I do copywriting daily, so learning how to write in a concise, grammatically correct style has been so useful. UW-Eau Claire was also a great stepping stone between high school and the real world and

it helped me mature while gaining a taste for international life through the study abroad program.

### **What are some tips for finding an international job?**

Visas are difficult to get, so internships with multinational companies are the best option for getting your foot into the door of an international job. If there's a company you have your eye on, see if there's a satellite office in the city or country you want to work in. If you have the means to study abroad while at UW-Eau Claire or for your master's, do that and find an internship while you're there. That experience and networking opportunities opens you up for even more opportunities.

### **Is there anything you know about PR that you wish you would have known when you were in school?**

UW-Eau Claire keeps marketing and communications pretty separate, which is rare to find in the workplace today. Because marketing and public relations both build strategic campaigns, most companies make the two divisions collaborate. The traditional sense of PR is dying, so it's important to have an understanding of traditional marketing. As technologies progress, an understanding of digital marketing is also important. Both forms of marketing are now integrated with public relations.

### **What is one thing you look forward to at your job every day?**

My job is very data driven, and I love to check my stats every morning to see if my numbers are closer to my goal. Data and analytics are everything in marketing.

***“Take the unpaid internships or volunteer experiences. More often than not, these experiences will help shape your future career search.”***

Written by: Aaron White  
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# Claire Lindstrom

## Class of 2008



**Continuing Education  
Program Manager**  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire  
Eau Claire, WI



EAU CLAIRE, Wis.— Claire Lindstrom graduated in 2008 with a degree in mass communication with an emphasis in public relations. After graduation Lindstrom went on to work two part time jobs, one at Wisconsin Public Radio as a volunteer and events coordinator and the other at the YMCA in the child care development center. Due to the economy Lindstrom had difficulty finding a full time job. Therefore, 8 months after graduation, Lindstrom decided to pursue her master's degree in Information Communication Technology at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. After acquiring her master's degree Lindstrom came back to UW-Eau Claire and is currently working as the Program Manager at the office of Continuing Education at UW-Eau Claire.

### **What's been the most exciting part of your job?**

I like the variety of tasks that my job offers for me. My days are never the same. Today I may be planning a program or looking at a catalogue and the next day I will be working on a budget.

### **What do you know now that you wish you would have known when you were in school?**

There are things that you learn on the job and that can't really be taught. But I wish I would have paid more attention to timelines. I always knew that timelines were important, but I just wished I would have paid more attention to the processes from start to finish.

### **How do you balance work and your personal life?**

I used to have my work email on my cell phone and I would always receive emails at home, therefore it seemed like I was always working. After I got

married, I removed my email from my phone. I now try to leave work at work and save the time at home for my family.

### **What did you learn from the public relations program that you applied to your current job?**

Working as a program manager for the office of continuing education requires me to plan a lot of programs. One thing that benefited me the most from the department of communication and journalism was my capstone class, the Public Relations Management course. My job requires me to plan ahead, make timelines, and organize a marketing plan for each semester. Therefore, with a background in public relations and campaigning it made it really helpful.

### **What is the most important advice you can give to someone wanting to major in public relations.**

A CJ major is very versatile, do not try to fix yourself in a tiny specific market. Public speaking, writing, and planning are skills that are translatable to many jobs. Do not be afraid to explore other jobs and utilize the skills you learn from the CJ department.

***“Public speaking, writing, and planning are skills that are translatable to many jobs. Do not be afraid to explore other jobs and utilize the skills you learn from the CJ department.”***

### **Did you like the CJ department public relations program and advisers?**

I really enjoyed the department and I actually started out as a different major and switched majors a couple of times. The advisers were really helpful with that process. I enjoyed all the professors that I had and their lessons.

Written By: Tou Za Xiong  
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# Patrick Jones

Class of 2009



Account Executive  
Siteimprove  
Bloomington, MN



BLOOMINGTON, Minn. - The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire prepared Patrick Jones for his future with its welcoming atmosphere and a multitude of unique experiences. The skills he gained through the public relations program coupled with the social and family-like groups he formed through the music department helped him thrive as he lives his life as a Blugold alumnus.

## What did you do immediately after you graduated?

Right after I graduated I took a trip with Eau Claire's Singing Statesmen to Argentina. I can't put into words how incredible it was.

## Did you start looking for a job right after you returned from Argentina?

Yes. I moved back to Burnsville, Minnesota and immediately started applying to jobs all over the state. It only took me about a month of searching and applying to land my first one.

## Where are you currently employed?

I am currently working as an Account Executive for Siteimprove which is a web-based software company located in Bloomington, Minnesota.

## What is the most exciting part about your job?

I'd say that the most exciting part about my job is the company culture. I love the collaborative workplace because it thrives on creativity and it encourages group thinking. The creative aspects are incredible and it's really fun and helpful to work with so many people who have different ideas.

## How difficult is it for you to balance your work life with your personal life?

I think one of the things I like the most about Siteimprove is that it's a company that's passionate about leaving your work at work. They encourage you to separate your

work life and personal life so you can function well and focus on the two worlds separately. I'll sometimes put in additional hours, but once I leave and go home I won't open my computer until I return to work the next day.

## How did the communication and journalism department prepare you for your career?

I graduated from that department with a strong set of communication and writing skills. That's what was most helpful because most of the classes and experiences were practical and they helped me prepare for future careers.

## How versatile is the public relations emphasis?

The public relations major is extremely diverse because it provides you with an essential set of skills that can be applied to jobs in many different fields. I'd say most people with a PR emphasis do not end up in the PR field.

## Is there something you know now that you wish you would have known when you were in college?

Something I think is so crucial is gaining experience through internships while in college. I've noticed that even entry level PR jobs require at least a couple years of experience.

## What do you miss most about Eau Claire?

I really miss the music department. I have so many fond memories of the Concert Choir, the Singing Statesmen, and the Innocent Men a cappella group. I was heavily involved in each of those and I think it contributed to my unique experiences at UW-Eau Claire.

***“The public relations major is extremely diverse because it provides you with an essential set of skills that can be applied to jobs in many different fields.”***

Written By: Nathan Zeiter  
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# Aaron Miller

## Class of 2009



**Director of Human Resources & Marketing**  
**Great Plains Health Alliance**  
**Phillipsburg, KS**



PHILLIPSBURG, Kan. – From small town Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin, Aaron Miller has always been interested in public relations. This brought him to UW-Eau Claire. Recently, Miller found the perfect position at Great Plains Health Alliance in Phillipsburg. He is currently the Director of Human Resources & Marketing. Miller believed that confidence is what has gotten him this far. He realized that working the jobs he had right out of school was not for him. They often entailed working over 60 hours a week by designing websites for car dealerships and giving Leinenkugel tours. After applying to several places he wouldn't settle for less than exactly what he wanted.

### **How did the UW-Eau Claire program prepare you for your career?**

UW-Eau Claire has helped me prepare for my career by teaching the importance of networking, which is something I still use today. My professors taught me the importance of communication.

I also took an intercultural communication class that I will remember for the rest of my life because it taught me how to properly communicate in the business world. PR has always been something I was interested in. I enjoy writing and public speaking. I get to do a lot of that in the communities we serve. We don't have a PR person on staff so a lot of the presentations and speeches that get presented, I get to have a big hand in writing.

### **How difficult was it to find a job after you graduated?**

It was extremely difficult to find a job after graduation. I was persistent with applying to different jobs. My first job out of college was designing an online website for a car dealership. This job was extremely difficult and I was not excited to go to work every day, so I applied to other places. At this point I was working 60 hours a week wherever I could find hours. This was a great learning experience for me because when I got this job, I appreciated it and I enjoy coming to work every day.

### **What has been the most exciting or interesting part of your job?**

The most exciting part of my job is I get to meet smart and cool people every day. A large part of my job is dealing with court cases; I enjoy this part because it is personal and has to do with the hospital. A large part of the reason why I love my job is because it allows me to pick other people's brains apart and learn what makes them tick.

### **How do you balance work and your personal life?**

I was not very good at this at first and I struggled. I had to teach myself not to answer the phone or emails during meal times. I would leave my phone in another room so I wouldn't be tempted. My wife and I just had a baby recently and I have learned to focus a lot of my attention on that when I am home and leave work at work.

### **What do you know now, that you wish you have known when you were a student?**

I wish that I would have known the importance of studying when I was a student. I liked to wing a lot of my tests and projects and I now understand that a lot of what is taught I could have used today in my job. The professors are teaching these things to you because they will help you in the future. Six more hours a week studying would have made such a difference and I recommend that to every student.

### **What is the most important advice you can give to current students?**

The most important advice that I can give students right now, and graduates just entering the work force, is to never give up. Getting a job may take a little longer than you would like, but don't give up. You need to be persistent. Confidence is key. Put faith in yourself and work toward an end goal. With confidence I believe you can do anything you put your mind to. Believing in yourself is the most important advice I can give you.

***“Confidence is key. Put faith in yourself and work toward an end goal. With confidence, I believe you can do anything you put your mind to.”***

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**Thanks for  
Reading**

