



Department of Communication

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For Immediate Release

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Network with nation's leading communication professionals

Annual forum aims to connect students with their passion

Fairfax, VA Tuesday, October 22, 2019 -- George Mason University's Department of Communication and the Insight Committee will host the annual fall forum, Find your Future, on Tuesday Oct. 22, 2019. The event takes place in the HUB Ballroom on the Fairfax campus.

Find Your Future is a networking opportunity, featuring a keynote speaker and a speed-mentoring session that includes more than 20 working professionals representing a range of fields of communication. All Mason students are encouraged to attend.

This year's keynote speaker will be Rana Novack, an advocate for refugees who works for IBM's North American Communications Strategy and uses expertise for the corporation's refugee and migration predictive analytics. Novack will share her story about how she has utilized her communication degree to make an impact as an inspirational speaker on international issues.

After the keynote speech, the audience disperses into individual speed mentoring tables where professionals working in the field of communications will share their experiences and answer questions from students.

Students may attend as many as six mentoring tables to discuss career strategies and skills needs with their chosen mentors. Each session lasts approximately 20 minutes. Mentors' expertise ranges from crisis communication, broadcasting, health communication, public affairs and more.

"The conversations started at this event lead to realistic job contacts," said Kate Sweeney, Department of Communication's director of journalism and faculty liaison of the Insight Committee, a group of industry professionals who voluntarily assist with the event.

Mason alumni, who include participating mentors, benefitted from previous forums and encourage students to connect with professionals at the forum and afterward when seeking career advice, internships and jobs. More than 300 students attended last year's event.

“I was always interested in public relations professionals' career stories and advice. My curiosity and interest was bigger than my fear, and my curiosity gave me the courage to connect with professionals at events,” said Huong Cao, a recent Mason graduate working at Sage Communications as a public-relations account coordinator. “I actively kept in touch with professionals via email after the forum.”

Agenda:

8:30 a.m. Registration opens

8:45 a.m. - 9:15 a.m. Networking reception

9:15 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. Welcome and introductions

9:30 a.m. – 9:50 a.m. Keynote address

10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Mentoring sessions

12:45 p.m. – Doors close

Confirmed mentors and their affiliations:

Internal & Interpersonal Communication

- Kelsey Agostinelli, senior director, business and change communications, Mars, Inc.

Federal Government

- Jeff Houston, senior public affairs specialist, Naval Criminal Investigative Service

Local and State Government

- Susana Castillo, press secretary, Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser

External Relations, Corporate Communications, and Strategic Marketing

- Patrick Fernandez, senior consultant, Booz Allen Hamilton

Non-profit Organizations

- Suzanne Naylor, marketing program manager, Goodwill Industries International

Trade Associations and Advocacy Organizations

- Gavin Gibbons, vice president of communications, National Fisheries Institute

Political Communications

- Derrick Robinson, vice president, Fenton Communications, White House Office of Communication, President Barack Obama administration

Journalism

- Marcella Robertson, reporter, WUSA-TV
- Bill Lord, former general manager at WJLA, WRC

Public Relations

- Lauren Herchert, vice president, Hill+Knowlton Strategies
- Julie Murphy, partner and vice president of public relations, Sage Communications

Advertising & Marketing

- National 4-H Council

Sports Marketing

- Kate Greenberg, senior director, strategic marketing, Washington Nationals

“This annual event has evolved over the years, but it has always been completely focused on addressing the needs and interests of the students,” said Chad Tragakis, the Insight Committee chair.

Feedback from post-event surveys shape the following year’s forum. In recent years, students asked for more time with mentors so the forum’s format focuses on that aspect. “We also expanded our mix of mentors to address a broader base of communication related careers, both in terms of practice and industry,” said Tragakis. “Lastly, when students raved about a particular mentor, we made an extra effort to get them to come back and volunteer again.”

Students are encouraged to research participating professionals and come prepared with questions. “While curiosity and willingness to learn may give you the courage to get out of your comfort zone to connect with new people, authenticity, effort, and patience are what help you develop strong relationships,” said Cao, a recent Mason graduate.

Light refreshments will be available before the keynote address. For more information about the forum, contact Megan Edmondson at medmond3@gmu.edu or visit <https://communication.gmu.edu/co-curricular-activities/annual-career-forum>. Registration for the event is encouraged at <https://communication.gmu.edu/events/9927>.