The internship application process can seem daunting at first. For student Shakinah Starks ’19, after applying to more than 200 internships for the summer, she realized she needed help.

So, she booked an appointment with Chief Undergraduate Advisor Allison Butler for advice. Butler told her she needed a new approach, and they embarked on a plan of action that meant using the resources available to Starks – UMass alumni. Starks attended a few alumni networking events held in the Integrative Learning Center Hub, which allowed her to hear different perspectives and make connections.

One alumni advisory board member in particular answered the call for help to coach Starks through the process. Henri Hebert ’94, has created, produced, cast, directed, and written nonfiction projects for print, syndication, and network and cable television for more than 20 years. Hebert does life and career coaching as well.

Hebert reviewed Starks’ cover letter and résumé. After some fine-tuning, Hebert reached out to her contacts at several production companies, including DiGa Studios in New York City. The studio was founded by former MTV president Tony DiSanto. Although it was late in the season for finding an internship, Hebert had built up a good working relationship with the company and it just so happens, they were in the final week of accepting résumés.

It was also the same company that Hebert had previously recommended another UMass Comm student, Eden Igielski ‘17, for an internship.

“Getting students placed in highly visible companies like DiGa can really benefit not only them but our Communication Department and UMass,” said Hebert. “This makes us more competitive in the marketplace and gives our students a chance.”

And because Igielski had performed well at DiGa and left a great impression, the internship coordinator was happy to interview another UMass student.

“Inexperience can be a great thing. I went in as a blank slate and always gave my best effort to complete my tasks effectively and efficiently,” said Igielski. “Take a chance and use the people and resources available to you because you never know what could come from a simple conversation with someone.”

As someone who works in the entertainment industry, and does freelance work, Hebert interviews a lot and has picked up a thing or two over the years. She has shared her insight with countless students, including Starks, whom she prepped for her interview. Though Starks’ interview went well enough that she was offered the internship, more challenges lay ahead. She had to figure out how she’d make ends meet doing an unpaid internship in New York City. Once again, Hebert was there with encouragement and more suggestions, advising her to apply for the Elaine Nord Internship Fund, made available through the generous donation of Elaine E. Nord ’81. The scholarship is designed to offset expenses related to a summer internship in production or creative communications. With the scholarship, Starks had all the help she needed to spend a summer in the city, gaining insight and experience for her career.

- Summer Tuman ’18 contributed to this story
INSIDE COMMUNICATION

Here’s a sampling of some of the events and awards inside Communication:

Mike Alvarez, a Ph.D. candidate and recipient of the Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans, served as visiting scholar at the fall 2017 residency of Goddard Graduate Institute at Goddard College.

Ph.D. candidate Jen Zenovich received the Heldt Award from the Association for Women in Slavic Studies at the annual Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) Convention in Chicago.

We welcomed world renowned guests such as educator, filmmaker, and activist Jackson Katz, Ph.D., who spoke about “Power & Choice in Heterosexual Relationships,” and “Men & MeToo.” In addition, alumnus Matt Nagler ’99 held a series of career workshops, and Lynn Comella, P.h.D. ’04, whose latest book Vibrator Nation has garnered significant press coverage, presented on her research.

Leda Cooks received a Marion and Jasper Whiting Foundation Fellowship for sabbatical research travel to South Africa for 2018-2019.

Alena Vasilyeva, assistant professor of Communication, has been selected as one of the 2018-19 Lilly Fellows for Teaching Excellence at the University of Massachusetts. She plans to use the fellowship to redesign a course she is teaching currently, COMM397AV, which explores what Vasilyeva describes as “how language and culture (broadly defined) are implicated in our everyday communication.”

We also held the 7th annual Comm Student Showcase Awards in April, which is funded by alumni contributions and gives undergraduates the opportunity to be rewarded for their projects in the areas of audio-visual, civic engagement/ community-based work, original research, speech/rhetoric/performance, and writing. Students Samantha Zaino, Carly LaCross, and Joseph Egitto received the Elaine E. Nord scholarship, through generous donations from Nord ‘81, which will help offset the students’ summer internship expenses.

SELECTED FACULTY PUBLICATIONS

EXAMINING FAKE NEWS

Jonathan Corpus Ong, associate professor of communication, and researchers at the University of Leeds (U.K.) have released a new research report that sheds light on the network of digital workers designing political disinformation campaigns, authoring fake news and fanning the flames of public discontent in the Philippines.

The report, “Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scenes of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines,” outlines the motivations and strategies of people it labels “the chief architects of networked disinformation”—a professionalized hierarchy of political operators who maintain day jobs as advertising and public relations executives, computer programmers and political administrative staff.

POPULAR CULTURE AT UMASS

Professor Marty Norden was the host and program chair for the Northeast Popular Culture Association (NEPCA) annual conference, held at UMass Amherst on October 27-28, 2017. About 180 professors, graduate students, and independent scholars from around the world participated in the conference, which was supported in part by the Department of Communication, the College of Social & Behavioral Sciences, the College of Humanities & Fine Arts, the Graduate School, and the Interdisciplinary Studies Institute. Panels addressed numerous sub-areas of popular culture, including film, television, digital media, music, literature, and sports, and their intersections with such issues as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. A highlight of the conference was a plenary presentation by Communication Professor Sut Jhally, the founder and executive director of the Media Education Foundation (MEF). Conference participants filled the Communication Hub in the Integrative Learning Center to attend Jhally’s illustrated talk on the history of MEF, which recently celebrated its 25th anniversary.

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Your time, effort, or gift will help us remain a vibrant, respected center of intellectual productivity and interdisciplinary teaching and research. It’s contributions from you and your peers that let us, among other things, offer scholarships and host visits by internationally renowned scholars.

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We’re passionate about study abroad opportunities and helping our students manage internships vital to their learning and future careers. (umass.edu/sbs/give)

- Mari Castañeda, Chair, Department of Communication

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