



Fall 2024 students marching the New Student Rally, passing through the Alumni Arch

HSS HIGHLIGHTS

COLLEGE-WIDE NEWS

Documentary About the Revival of the Maverick Machine

"The Return of the Machine" is a one-hour documentary that showcases the effort to bring back the Maverick Machine marching band at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The film highlights the determination, community support, and passion behind reviving a cherished campus tradition. With behind-the-scenes footage and firsthand accounts from those involved, it shows the challenges of rebuilding the band and the significant impact it had on campus life. More than just a story about music, the documentary celebrates the Maverick spirit, offering a look at the diverse perspectives within the community and the emotional highs and lows the team faces together.

[Watch the documentary >>](#)



HSS Insights: Nick Wayne "Making a Musical"



The second episode of the HSS Insights: Faculty Interview Series showcases Nick Wayne, a professor in the Department of Performing Arts and the Music Director for Minnesota State University, Mankato's Theatre and Dance program, as well as Highland Summer Theatre.



In the episode, Wayne offers a behind-the-scenes look at the process of bringing "Anastasia: The Musical" to life. He provides valuable insights into how he guides students through the complexities of a major production, from rehearsals to performance.

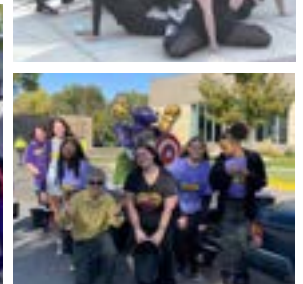


Wayne also shares his extensive experience in musical theatre, shedding light on his passion for teaching and the impact of his work on both students and audiences. This episode offers a unique opportunity to get to know the professor better while exploring his contributions to the vibrant arts community at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

[Watch the episode >>](#)

HSS Takes Part in Homecoming Parade and Mavericks on the Mall

The College of Humanities and Social Sciences kicked off Fall 2024 Homecoming, celebrating this year's theme, "End Game." Students and faculty from the Department of Creative Arts brought the theme to life with a spectacular Avengers-inspired float for the parade. The College, along with the Departments of Criminal Justice, English, and Sociology and Leadership Studies, set up their own booths to highlight their programs and engage with visitors with fun activities. The talented cast of the "Cabaret" musical from the Department of Performing Arts performed "Don't Tell Mama", and the Maverick Machine energized the crowd with an exciting performance.



ANTHROPOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

Geography Professor Addresses Climate and Water Security at International Forum in Nepal

Dr. Donald Friend, a professor of Geography at Minnesota State University, Mankato, recently returned from high mountain Asia, where he was invited by the Government of Nepal to participate in the International Expert Dialogue on Mountains, People, and Climate.

The conference addressed the water supply crisis caused by climate change in Nepal and other Asian countries. Dr. Friend was among a panel of experts discussing the biophysical and human impacts of the crisis. The event, opened by Nepal's Prime Minister, also featured remarks from Environment Ministers across Asia and United Nations officials.



Dr. Friend delivered the keynote presentation, "From Vulnerability to Building Resilience: The Mountain Water Security Crisis Requires Expanding Water Supply and Water Demand Management," during the opening scientific session.

Additionally, Dr. Friend presented at the U.S. Embassy and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission in Nepal. His presentation, "USAID Leading the Way to Water Security in Asia," summarized his recent USAID report, "Leading the Way to Water Security in Central Asia" (March 2024). This work is part of his role as a Jefferson Science Fellow of the National Academy of Sciences.

GIS/LIS Students Achievements at the 34th Minnesota GIS/LIS Conference



Benjamin Stolee

The 34th Minnesota GIS/LIS Consortium Annual Conference, held from Oct. 2-4, in Duluth, proved to be an enriching experience for attendees, featuring a dynamic lineup of keynote speakers, instructor-led workshops, technical sessions, and special events. This year's conference was tailored for GIS/LIS students and professionals eager to enhance their skills and explore the latest advancements in technology.



Elias Watson

Minnesota State University, Mankato, students earned top honors. Benjamin Stolee won first place in the GIS App Competition, taking home \$600. Elias Watson placed second in the GIS Undergraduate Student Competition, winning \$500, and Ethan Smith claimed first place in the GIS Graduate Student Competition, earning \$1,200.



Ethan Smith

The conference highlighted student achievements and facilitated connections between students and industry professionals. Next year's conference will be held in Mankato, offering students a chance to network with alumni and gain career insights.

Geography Graduate Students Showcase Research at National Science Foundation Frontier Research in Earth Science – Lake Superior Meeting

Dr. Phil Larson, Director of Earth Science Programs at Minnesota State University, Mankato has been awarded a \$2.8 million National Science Foundation Frontier Research in Earth Science (NSF FRES) grant, along with colleagues from University of Minnesota, University of Minnesota Duluth, Harvard University, University of Wisconsin, and UW–Superior.

Four graduate students – Hunter Delikowski, Abigail Fischer, Madeline Laaksonen, and Jayda Rowen – presented their research funded by this grant at the NSF FRES – Lake Superior meeting. They addressed an audience of academics from prestigious institutions along with members of the Wisconsin Geological Survey, Freshwater Society, and Superior Hiking Trail.

The students, all pursuing their master's degrees in Geography and members of MNiMORPH – a collaborative research group between UMN and MNSU – conducted their research within the EARTH Systems Lab at MNSU.



Students Present Research at 2024 Geological Society of America Conference

Dr. Phil Larson accompanied students from CSET and HSS to the 2024 Geological Society of America Connects Conference in Anaheim, California, from Sept. 22–25, where they presented their research and received positive feedback from dozens of scientists.

Students Henry England (BS Geology, BS Anthropology) and Jayda Rowen (BS Earth Science, now MS Geography) presented “Assessing Historical Planform Channel Change: Whitewater River Basin, Minnesota, USA.” Gabe Senf (BS Geology, future MS Geography) presented “Distribution, Chronology, and Paleoenvironmental Significance of Aeolian Sand Stringers Beyond the Ice Margin, Southeastern Minnesota and Western Wisconsin, USA.” Hunter Delikowski (MS Geography) presented “Evidence for an Outburst Flood Drainage of Glacial Lake Grantsburg and Its Role in the Formation of the St. Croix River Valley, WI/MN, USA.”

Daryl Ritchison was named State Climatologist for North Dakota



Daryl Ritchison, alumnus of Minnesota State University, Mankato with a bachelor's degree in Earth Science (1986), master's degree in Geography (1993) and an MBA (1994), was appointed by North Dakota State University to be state climatologist for North Dakota. With over 30 years of professional meteorological experience, including his role as director of NDSU's North Dakota Agriculture Weather Network (NDAWN), he is set to provide invaluable insights to the region's climate patterns and weather forecasts.

Geography Professor and Student Discuss St. Croix River Valley Research on Wisconsin Public Radio

Geography graduate student Hunter Delikowski and Earth Science professor Dr. Phil Larson, co-director of the EARTH Systems Lab, discussed Delikowski's research on the St. Croix River Valley during an appearance on the "Larry Meiller Show" on Wisconsin Public Radio on July 29. The research is part of the National Science Foundation Frontier Research in Earth Sciences (NSF FRES) project.



The two explored how the advances and retreats of glaciers have carved the St. Croix River Valley in innumerable ways and discussed about the geological forces that formed the Wisconsin-Minnesota border.

[Listen to the interview >>](#)

COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA

Communication Professor Leads Discussion on Reducing Political Polarization

Dr. Kristen Cvancara, Professor of Communication and Media, gave a presentation on "Political polarization and how to become a Braver Angel" as part of The Free Press Knowledge and Lecture Series on Nov. 19. As a volunteer ambassador for Braver Angels, Dr. Cvancara discussed the current political climate and ways to foster connection by focusing on shared values and concerns.

Braver Angels, a nonprofit organization, offers workshops designed to bridge political divides, with strategies for discussing politics with family members and navigating social media constructively. The organization encourages participants to explore the underlying reasons behind opposing viewpoints and to appreciate each other's humanity.

[Read more about her story >>](#)



Capstone Project on Sexual Offender Notification Systems Informs Community Meeting

Brad VanderVegt, a graduating MS Communication and Media student, recently collaborated with the Mankato Department of Public Safety on a community notification meeting related to his capstone project on Sexual Offender Registry and Notification systems. The session was recorded, and this project serves as an excellent example of the impactful work that graduate students at the university are doing with professional communities, informed by their academic studies.

[Watch the recording >>](#)

Communication Graduate Student Wins PRSA Award



Communication Studies graduate student and teaching assistant Adraina Adu received the American University Diversity and Inclusion Award from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Educators Academy at PRSA ICON 2024, held Oct. 15–17. Adu was recognized for her exceptional research on diversity and inclusion in public relations pedagogy, which has expanded best practices in the field.

Multidisciplinary Collaboration on Publication About Garden EngAGEment Program

Communication and Media professors, Dr. Anne Kerber, Dr. Ivana Guarrasi, and Dr. Sachi Sekimoto collaborated with College of Allied Health and Nursing faculty, Dr. Sheen Chiou, Dr. Sabrina Ehmke, and Dr. Kristi Oeding to co-author a new article in "Health Communication." The publication focuses on MSU's Garden EngAGEment program, a community initiative that pairs student volunteers with people living with dementia, creating social interaction and relationship-building opportunities that benefit both groups.

The Garden EngAGEment program, led by Dr. Chiou, Dr. Ehmke, and Dr. Oeding offers a model for rethinking how we attract and train future health professionals in aging care, and break down stereotypes around dementia. It offers a unique opportunity to collaborate across disciplines and build bridges across colleges. The program is currently seeking volunteers for the upcoming summer season.

[Read the article >>](#)

Public Relations Experts Share Key Career Insights

The Department of Communication and Media hosted a panel discussion on Oct. 5, titled "Navigating Careers in Public Relations & Strategic Communication: Insights from Industry Experts." The panel featured a diverse group of communication and marketing professionals: Amie Hoffner, Stephanie Lucas, Keith Negrin, MaDonna Flowers Sheehy, and Iris Cumberbatch, who shared their expertise and real-world experiences with students.

The event, organized in collaboration with the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), offered students a unique opportunity to engage directly with industry experts and gained valuable insights into the evolving landscape of public relations and communication.



*Amie Hoffner (left), Keith Negrin (center)
and MaDonna Flowers Sheehy (right)*

Communication Professor Reveals Long-Term Effects of Sibling Bullying



Dr. Kristen Cvancara’s article, “Trapped With No Escape: The Hidden Problem of Sibling Bullying,” published Nov. 25 in “Psyche,” examines how sibling bullying is often seen as normal conflict. Research shows that both bullies and victims are impacted by subtle forms of aggression, leading to long-term effects. Cvancara stresses the need for early intervention and open communication to promote healthier family dynamics.

[Read the article >>](#)

ECONOMICS, ETHNIC STUDIES, AND GOVERNMENT

Political Science Faculty and Students Launch New “Government 101” Podcast



The Minnesota State University, Mankato Political Science Program faculty have teamed up with the Politics & Policy Student Organization to launch the Government 101 podcast, aimed at making politics more accessible to a wide audience. Available on Apple Podcasts and Spotify, the podcast simplifies key political topics and ngovernment processes.

[Read the article >>](#)

HISTORY AND GENDER STUDIES

Gender Studies Professor Advocates for Felony Murder Law Reform in Ms. Magazine

Dr. Laura Harrison published an article, “‘Take Beauty from Ashes’: Advocating for Felony Murder Law Reform,” in Ms. Magazine on Nov. 23. The article discusses the racial disparities in the criminal justice system and the criminalization of survivors of gender-based violence, with a particular focus on felony murder law reform.

[Read the article here >>](#)



Social Studies Students Selected for Elite Educational Programs This Summer

Landis Parham and Nicole Bazinet, both Social Studies students, have received prestigious invitations to attend notable educational institutes this summer.

Parham was selected for the Colonial Williamsburg Education Teacher Institute and the Fort Ticonderoga Summer Teacher Institute. Colonial Williamsburg's program is a national initiative for grade 7-12 educators, while Fort Ticonderoga Teacher Institute features lecture-based discussions with visiting scholars, hands-on experiences related to the American Revolution, and documents and artifact analysis from the Fort Ticonderoga Collection.

Bazinet attended the St. Louis Federal Reserve Economic Foundations Institute, which was a two-day program offering resources for social studies teachers and includes panels on key economic concepts such as global trade, supply and demand, and government involvement. Participants received lesson plans and access to online resources to enhance their ability to teach economics to high school students.

Parham and Bazinet were the only college students in the nation selected for these programs, which usually admit professional educators through a competitive application process.



Landis Parham



Nicole Bazinet

PERFORMING ARTS

"Pie in the Park" Brings Music and Community Together

Sibley Park was filled with music and food on Sunday, Aug. 25, during the "Pie in the Park" event. The annual gathering featured a spectacular collaboration between the 77 Lancers and the Maverick Machine, with plans to return next year.

The evening kicked off with solo performances from just over 100 Lancers and 135 Mavericks. After showcasing their talents separately, the two groups came together for a captivating mass band performance that captivated the audience.



2024 Choral Invitational Concert at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church

Nearly 200 students and nine choral directors from Minnesota high schools participated in the 2024 Choral Invitational Concert at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church on Oct. 24. The event included warm-ups with Dr. Stephanie Thorpe, ensemble rehearsals with Dr. Cherland, and sectional practices with Prof. Nick Wayne, Dr. Cherland, and senior students Drew Burling and Billy Krager.



The evening concert featured performances by Chanhassen High School, directed by Sarah Gilbertson, and Tri-Cities United High School, directed by MSU Mankato alumnus John Sosa. The event concluded with a group performance by all students and MSU Mankato's Concert Choir and Chamber Singers.

Musical Theatre Student Wins First Place at Minnesota NATS Auditions



Dr. Stephanie Thorpe (left), Landon Hudson (center), and Ben Marti (right)

Landon Hudson, a student in the Musical Theatre BFA program, earned first place in the Upper College Musical Theatre TBB Division MT 8 at the Minnesota Chapter of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) Student Auditions, held Nov. 1-2 at Bethel University in St. Paul. Hudson advanced to the finals on Friday and secured the win on Saturday, performing alongside the department's pianist, Ben Marti.

Hudson studies under Dr. Nick Wayne and Dr. Stephanie Thorpe in the Department of Performing Arts at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He was one of many talented vocalists from across Minnesota to compete in the prestigious event.

Theatre Professor Partners with Theatre Novi Most for Touring Production of The Ukrainian Words Project

Professor Vladimir Rovinsky, in collaboration with Theatre Novi Most, brought their touring production of The Ukrainian Words Project to Minnesota State University, Mankato. This production featured four professional actors and two professional musicians who brought the stories to life and newly commissioned plays by Ukrainian playwrights written since the start of the war in February 2022.

This activity was funded in part by the Faculty Research Grant at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and by voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.



PHILOSOPHY, LANGUAGE AND CULTURES

Philosophy Professor Delivers Lectures at Kyungpook National University

Dr. Sun Kyeong Yu, a professor of Philosophy, delivered a lecture titled "Vicissitudes of the Species: Beyond Competition and Conflict, Towards Coexistence" at Kyungpook National University in Korea on Oct. 22. She also presented a talk on "Philosophical Issues in Cognitive Science" at the 3-Day Workshop on Buddhist Philosophy and Analytic Philosophy, hosted by the Institute of East-West Thought at Kyungpook National University on Oct. 24.



PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology Students Present at Midwest Psychological Association

From April 18–20, students and faculty from the Department of Psychology traveled to Chicago to attend the Midwest Psychological Association conference and presented their research on off-the-shelf electroencephalograms (EEGs) and their potential in detecting lies or hidden information.

Their study used a device called the Backyard Brains SpikerBox, which is an affordable and accessible tool that records brain activity using EEGs. An EEG measures electrical signals in the brain by placing sensors on the scalp. In the experiment, participants provided 15 personally meaningful dates, which then were mixed with 85 random dates in a slideshow. While participants viewed these slides, the SpikerBox recorded brain signals to see if it could detect when someone saw a date that was important to them.



The study focused on a brain signal called the P300, which appears when a person sees something significant. The results showed that the device could accurately detect these signals when participants saw their important dates, without even saying anything. This technology could one day be used in areas like education, criminal justice, ethics and even business.

Psychologists and Magicians Discuss How Magic Can Improve Scientific Thinking



Dr. Emily Stark (left), and Michael Callahan (right)

Dr. Emily Stark presented her research at the Science of Magic Association meeting in Las Vegas, Nov. 12-13. The research poster, created in collaboration with magician Michael Callahan of St. Peter, Minnesota, examined the impact of using a card trick to teach hypothesis testing and critical thinking skills in a psychology research methods course. Highlights of the conference included networking with psychologists and other scientists from around the world who incorporate magic into their research and teaching, as well as discussing their work with keynote speaker Teller.

Psychology Professor and Alumni Inspire Farmington High Students with Brain Science Outreach

Professor Adam Steiner, along with two recent graduates Haley Zinnel and MacKenzie Berg, conducted a successful brain awareness outreach at Farmington High School and drew more than 200 students from AP Psychology, Anatomy and Physiology, and other classes. Both alumni recommended their former school as they discovered their passion for psychology through the AP Psychology course.

The event featured interactive demonstrations such as electroencephalogram (EEG) brain wave analysis, muscle control through electromyography (EMG), electrocardiogram (ECG) heart rhythm assessment, taste test, perceptual shift bean bag toss and a "Brain Zoo" with 3D-printed animal brains. The outreach received enthusiastic feedback, and is set to return next year.

Dr. Steiner mentioned that this event was made possible by the support of their sponsors: Dana Foundation, International Brain Research Organization, and the Psychology Department. Their support provided over 150 gel electrodes, 5 pounds of Skittles, and several 9-volt batteries.



Psychology Students Lead STEM Sessions at Mankato YMCA and Summer ACES Program

Dr. Adam Steiner, along with students Hannah Radke-Scherping and Cecelia Anderson from the Department of Psychology, led STEM enrichment sessions for fifth-grade students in the Summer ACES program and for sixth- to eighth-grade students at the Mankato Family YMCA's Pathfinder Camp in July.



The sessions focused on exploring brain activity using EEG headsets, which measure electrical signals in the brain and can detect muscle movements. The data was relayed as auditory feedback, with high-pitched sounds indicating high activity and low-pitched sounds signaling low activity.

During the demonstration, students aimed to "quiet" the EEG by sitting still and limiting active thinking, a practice related to mindfulness and meditation. Later, they were challenged to increase the auditory feedback by generating more brain activity and facial movements.

SOCIOLOGY AND LEADERSHIP STUDIES

Research on Rohingya Genocide Accepted for 2025 Publication

Dr. Afroza Anwary, a professor of Sociology, has had her paper "Intersection of Political, Physical, and Cultural Techniques of Genocide of the Rohingyas of Myanmar" accepted for publication in International Journal of Human Rights. The paper will appear in Volume 29 of the journal in 2025.



College of Humanities & Social Sciences

THANK YOU FOR READING!

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