Porter Still Enjoys “One of the Best Jobs Around”

Michael Porter is the master of finesse. Rather than abruptly jerking his students toward a different view of the world through the media, he gently nudges and guides them to new connections and realizations.

In his 25 years in MU’s communication department, Porter has helped students learn about the medium, the messages and themselves. He is known for his lively large lecture classes, personal attention to student needs and active involvement in myriad campus committees.

Porter’s is one of the most familiar faces on campus, and he likes it that way. “I like to think I have one of the best jobs around,” he says.

Porter began teaching college students while pursuing his master’s degree at the University of Iowa. “I started teaching at Iowa, and I found it so refreshing,” Porter says. “I thought, ‘This is wonderful! This is for me.’ ”

After receiving his doctorate from the University of Iowa in 1975, he and his wife, Rose, now dean of MU’s nursing school, went to the University of Houston where Michael taught for four years. Rose’s pursuit of her doctorate and the fact they had two young sons approaching school age brought them to Columbia in 1979.

The first class Porter taught at MU was Radio and Television in Modern Society. With a research interest in media literacy, Porter later introduced to Mizzou the television criticism class he pioneered in Houston. Cable was in its infancy, and the choices for viewers were just starting to increase. Porter thought students should understand how the messages bombarding them were put together and ultimately received.

“They are quite sophisticated, but there are issues they had never thought of in terms of how these messages are created and how the audience is manipulated,” Porter says. “I use that word on purpose because I think we’re always being manipulated by the media. In order to be a good citizen, we have to be aware of that.”

Watching Porter in the classroom is inspiring. Although teaching 300 students in two 50-minute sessions plus a discussion group each week may seem daunting to some, Porter thrives on it. He masterfully blends power point, media presentations and lecture material with discussions and even debate. “It’s a little razzle dazzle,” Porter says. “I like to break it up. I have been very lucky to get some good discussions going with 300 people.”

(Continues on Page 2)
Former students such as MU junior Matthew Mitchell, journalism advertising major from Rochester, N.Y., are impressed with the energy Porter puts into each class. “Dr. Porter’s lecture was, and remains, the most entertaining class I’ve ever enrolled in,” Mitchell says. “Dr. Porter's outgoing, energetic style and communicative atmosphere reminded me much more of the best teachers at my high school or the classes my friends rave about at their small private colleges. It's a shame everyone can't have the chance to experience him as a professor before they graduate.”

Chicago area native Zach Ottenstein graduated this spring with a broadcasting degree and calls Porter a “can't-miss prof.”

“Dr. P keeps his classes current and maintains a good balance between reality and theory,” Ottenstein says. “You’re not just reading out of a text. You’re learning about what happened yesterday, what’s happening today and what could happen tomorrow.”

Rose Porter says her husband continually works to improve the teaching and learning in his classes. He views every student who comes to see him as a friend of their sons and addresses a student’s needs as he would a friend of the family.

“We never eat out in Columbia without someone coming over to say they had him for class and he was one of their favorite teachers,” Rose says. “This makes me very proud of all the time he puts into his teaching.”

Porter has been honored many times for his work. He was the first recipient of NCA’s Outstanding Teaching Award from the Mass Communication Division (1998), won MU’s prestigious William T. Kemper Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1997 and the ultra-prestigious Maxine Christopher Shutz Award for Distinguished Teaching in 2002.

“I like the whole process, really,” Porter says. “I get to talk to students about things I’m interested in, about theories that are near and dear to my heart, and I try to get them excited about the same things. I love the interaction with the students, and I like it when the light bulb goes on in their heads. You can see them making connections that maybe they haven’t made before.”

As a Kemper Fellow, Porter feels compelled to help other teachers who are seeking to improve. For 15 years he has been involved with Wakonse, a sort of summer camp for teachers where he and Rose serve as team leaders. “We are all people who love teaching, who want to talk about it and find out how we can do it better,” Porter says.

As the director of special degree programs, Porter assists students outside the classroom as they pursue degrees in such areas as interdisciplinary and international studies. He advises students to learn to look at the world through other lenses.

“When they graduate, they will have more skills than they know what to do with,” Porter says. “I tell them, ‘Your job in college is to make the most of who you are; your job is to create a new product – the new and improved you.’ ”

The Porter sons are grown and the “R” word, “retirement,” is sometimes mentioned. Porter laughs about a future dream job of playing piano at a posh resort. Don’t look for that anytime soon. “Teaching is so much a part of my identity,” he says. “When I retire I want to totally retire. But I’m not sure what I’d do with myself.”

Until then, Michael Porter is working on the next 25 years at Mizzou.

---

New Faculty Member

The department keeps growing

Continuing the growth trend of recent years, another new faculty member will be joining the communication department this fall. After a national search, the department hired Jennifer Becker, who received a doctorate from the University of Oklahoma in 2005.

One of Becker's main responsibilities will be to serve as director for the public-speaking course. She will teach in the areas of relational communication and research methods.

Her dissertation focused on conflicts as turning points in the development of romantic relationships. In addition to relationship development and deterioration, she has interests in communication and burnout in the workplace and impression management in chat rooms.
Let’s Talk
By Michael Kramer
Department Chair

It has been an exciting year for the Department of Communication, as the stories in this issue of Communiqué illustrate. This year we were awarded the MU Outstanding Department Contribution to Graduate Education Award. Michael Porter celebrated 25 years of excellence in teaching at MU. Junior Venita Cooper won the Chancellor’s Award for Undergraduate Research. The Chronicle of Higher Education named doctoral student Maria Dixon one of the top graduate students in any discipline in the country. We began giving out grants to graduate students because of the money raised in previous years.

Next fall, the department will have the largest tenure-track faculty in its history when Jennifer Becker joins us. And of course, there are the usual exciting things, including more than a hundred new undergraduates with their degrees in hand and graduate students beginning their careers.

We hope that you will join in the celebration. Please use the enclosed envelope to add your congratulations. We will collect letters of thanks and congratulations to give to Michael Porter and Loren Reid. We will use your business cards to show undergraduate majors about possible careers. Donations will be used to support either the undergraduate or graduate endowments.

As I am writing this, the warm weather of summer is taking hold. The department is warming up, too. The future is bright as we continue to expand and maintain the quality of our program.

Chronicle of Higher Education Recognizes Graduate Student

Maria Dixon, PhD ’05, accomplished a great deal in her four years as a graduate student in the Department of Communication. She completed the long list of required and elective courses, passed 15 hours of comprehensive exams and wrote a dissertation on changes in leadership in the Southern Baptist Convention.

She taught sections of public speaking, taught in the religious studies department and participated in the Freshman Interest Groups and student life. She wrote and presented conference papers and submitted manuscripts for publication. It was a full plate of activity.

However, a highlight of her career occurred when The Chronicle of Higher Education recognized Dixon’s accomplishments and potential by naming her a “rising star” among graduate students nationwide. In the Sept. 3, 2004 edition, the Chronicle described Dixon as “among the best of this year’s crop of new professors.”

MU Chancellor Brady Deaton frequently refers to winning this award as the equivalent of winning the Heisman Trophy in graduate education. Because it covers all graduate programs across all disciplines, it is even more selective.

Dixon, degree and award in hand, is now an assistant professor of corporate communications and public affairs at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. There, she continues her busy pace of accomplishments: teaching classes in organizational communication and conducting research.
Faculty Kudos

Jennifer Aubrey just finished her first year in the department and enjoyed teaching several courses on the media to undergraduate students. She recently presented her current research on the effects of media on body image, some of which is forthcoming in the *Journal of Communication*, at the International Communication Association in New York. She gave several print and broadcast interviews, and her comments appeared in such diverse publications as *Christianity Today* and *Ms. Magazine*.

William Benoit is completing his term as editor of the *Journal of Communication*, the flagship journal of the International Communication Association. He published journal articles and book chapters this year, mostly concerning political campaigns. He has written a book on political campaigns, and he and several graduate students are finishing a book on the 2004 presidential campaign. He was quoted over 950 times in print and broadcast media outlets such as *USA Today, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, The Atlantic Monthly*, NPR, CNN’s *Crossfire* and *Fox News Live*. His Web page on presidential campaigns (http://presidentialcampaign2004.coas.missouri.edu/) was accessed over 10,000 times during the 2004 presidential campaign. In January 2006, he will begin three months of research with faculty at Hong Kong Baptist University.

Pam Benoit was recently appointed interim dean of the Graduate School. As such, she oversees all graduate programs at the University, post-doctorate programs and the Preparing Future Faculty program. She’s so busy that if it weren’t for Bill, we’d probably never see her in the department.

Melissa Click has spent the past year following the Martha Stewart scandal and examining its impact on Stewart’s fans and persona. She even auditioned for *The Apprentice: Martha Stewart* in Kansas City to observe the casting process and interview others who were auditioning. Her response to the experience was published in the online journal *Flow*. Melissa enjoyed collaborating this year with Michael Kramer on a research project about gender in popular song and video. She recently received funding from MU to participate in the National Conference for Media Reform. Melissa also has been kept busy in the classroom, adding the capstone class to her regular offerings in media criticism.

Debbie Dougherty continues her research on organizational power. She is most intrigued by her research on the sexual harassment of nurses by patients and her collaborative work with Michael Kramer on the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Her recent articles appear in *Journal of Applied Communication Research* and *Human Communication Research*. She was the winner of the 2004 Norman K. Denzin Qualitative Research Award for her manuscript on ethical communities and qualitative inquiry. She enjoys spending time with her children, Fionna, 7, and Finnian, 2 1/2.

In his first year since moving to MU from Mainz, Germany, Frank Esser is working on several cross-national projects with the aim of generalizing and contextualizing theories in mass communication and political communication. His studies on U.S. and European election campaigns, mediatization processes and coverage of the Iraq war led to several scholarly convention papers, articles in the *Journal of Political Marketing* and *American Behavioral Scientist*, and the publication of his fifth book, *Comparing Political Communication*. He received a development grant from the University of Missouri for internationalizing the communication curriculum. His year’s biggest communication challenge proved to be teaching his 2-year-old daughter two languages at the same time. So far the confused girl doesn’t speak either.

In addition to writing two scholarly book chapters and an article, Jon Hess served as both the department’s basic course director and director of graduate studies. In May, he served as a dialogue group leader at the Wakonse Conference on College Teaching. Back by popular demand, he once again facilitated a conference call among 15 public health officials in East Coast states in a discussion of the ethics of truthfulness and lying in public health communication during a biological or chemical terrorist attack. His quality of scholarship was recognized by a top-4 award for a paper, on which he was co-author, at the Western States Communication Association convention.

Michael Kramer continues in his second year as chair of the department. He took to the MU stage this spring, appearing in *Fool for Love* at the Corner Playhouse, and claims he was doing research at the same time. He was promoted from associate professor to professor in recognition of his scholarship, teaching and service. This year he is co-editor with Debbie Dougherty of a special issue of the *Journal of Applied Communication* that focuses on conducting research using human subjects. You can read about one of his marathon experiences in an article in the May 2005 *Journal of Communication*. In addition to the usual summertime activities, he will be busy this summer when his son gets married.
M paycheck ame McKinney has stayed busy with his
political communication teaching and research.
During the 2004 presidential election, he taught a
new honors course for young citizens who partici-
pated in their first presidential election. His fourth
book, Communicating Politics: Engaging the Public
in Democratic Life, was published by Peter Lang in
the spring. His research on various aspects of presi-
dential and campaign debates will appear this year
in Journalism Studies, Communication Studies and
American Behavioral Scientist. McKinney is currently
chair of the National Communication Association’s
Political Communication Division.

Loren Olson began the school year settling into a
new home and community after moving from
Cleveland in May 2004. In addition to publishing
numerous academic articles and book chapters on
intimate aggression and family dynamics, she was
interviewed by various news agencies about a theo-
ry she’s developed on Relational Control-Motivated
Aggression. A detailed description of the theory,
which focuses on aggression between intimates,
appeared in the Journal of Family Communication.
She also joined the editorial board of the journal
Communication Studies this past year. In addition to
her scholarship, Olson has enjoyed teaching courses
in interpersonal communication, relational communi-
cation, and language and discourse. She finds that
these classes have been “an exciting way to get to
know the Mizzou community of students.”

Michael Porter remains busy in his position as
director of special (multidisciplinary) degree pro-
grams for the College of Arts and Science. This
position is supposed to account for 75 percent of his
ergies, leaving only 25 percent for the depart-
ment. Porter thinks the math is wrong because he
always seems to spend more than 100 percent of
his time between his two jobs. This past year he
has taught the Media in Society class in the fall and
TV Criticism in the winter semesters. He successful-
ly advised several dissertations this past year, includ-
ing David Tschida and David Silverman, along with
Denise Gates and John McGuire. He has three or
four other doctoral candidates he’s hoping to get into
the “completed” column before the year is up. His
research interests remain on the back burner until
he’s able to return to the department full time.

From Seattle to Savannah, with assorted stops at
way stations as diverse as Oxford, New York City,
the Institute for Irish Studies in London, and
Chicago, it has been a peripatetic year for Mary-
Jeanette Smythe, who has always endorsed the
credo that “a moving target is much harder to hit.”
The year brought unique challenges, the most excru-
ciating of which was the new course-numbering sys-
tem, which for some reason (no old dog/new trick
remarks, please) this particular director of undergrad-
uate studies has been utterly unable to commit to
memory. On the scholarly front, colleague Jon Hess
and MJ continue to wage a righteous battle on the
“immediacy construct” project, which has served as
a vivid object lesson for all those inclined to chal-
lenge entrenched positions in academic literatures.
Between debates on who gets to play Don Quixote
and who plays Sancho, they continue to pursue new
data and advance the argument.

Lens Bikes for MS

Last year, Jodie Lenser, longtime administrative assistant
in the Department of Communication, decided to help the
fight against multiple sclerosis by riding in the MS 150
bike tour to raise money to fight the disease.

Lens, who spends her days at MU processing gradu-
ate program materials and answering questions about com-
munication courses and registration, had been thinking
about joining the 75-mile ride for several years, but ulti-
mately it was a last minute decision to go for it. With only
two weeks to raise the minimum $200, she didn’t need to
worry. The department’s faculty, graduate students and
staff, as well as her husband, pledged a total that exceeded
the requirement.

Lens joined other riders for a pre-daylight breakfast
that Saturday in September as she prepared to start the
longest bike ride she’d ever attempted. The route wound
north along county roads, with riders taking a somewhat
different course each day of the two-day event.

Lens used to think of mid-Missouri as having rela-
tively flat terrain, but she has revised that perspective since
the MS 150. After conquering the final hill each day, she
found it gratifying to be greeted by a cheering crowd and
unlimited cold beverages.

Only slightly sore and more than slightly worn out,
Lens says she was “pleased and somewhat surprised for
having made this journey. Keeping in mind why we were
all riding was a key motivation factor. Many thanks to
communication personnel for helping to make this experi-
ence possible for me while supporting a most worthwhile
endeavor.”
Alumni Achievements

Blaine Barcus, BA ’87, is vice president of artistry and repertoire for Word Records in Nashville, Tenn.

Jessica Burbridge, BA ’01, is the Parents as Teachers coordinator for the Harrisburg, Mo., R-VIII school district.

Jill (Busalacchi) Laux, BA ’97, of St. Louis is an account executive for KMOV-TV.

Mindy Coronado, BA ’04, of Bellevue, Wash., is a territory sales manager for Philip Morris USA.

Bob Derryberry, PhD ’73, is completing his 41st year of teaching at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., and his 47th year of teaching overall. SBU recently named his department the Bob Derryberry School of Communication Arts in his honor. He writes that he has “such special and treasured memories of all my study and association with the Department of Communication (Speech and Dramatic Art in my day).”

Gregg Goodman, BA ’85, of Gurnee, III., is executive vice president for the Mills Corporation.

Gina (George) Shaer, BA ’98, is a change management consultant for Deloitte in Dallas, Texas.

Sarah (Heimburger) Haas, BA ’92, is the public information director for Mineral Area College in Farmington, Mo.

Laura Hudson, PhD ’05, is moving to Chicago where she will begin teaching at Concordia University, River Forest.

Diane Tobin Johnson, PhD ’05, a professor at Truman State University, recently took charge of Truman’s Washington, D.C., internship program.

Frances Kendall, PhD ’89, a professor at Salisbury University in Maryland, recently received the top award in the visual arts category from the Alliance for Community Media, a not-for-profit organization.

Lisa (Merrill) Schubert Hickok, MA ’84, is the director of marketing for the Kansas City Ballet.

Carrie Prentice, PhD ’05, has taken a faculty position at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion. In addition to pursuing her career, she is now able to resume raising horses.

Simon Rose, BA ’90, is a recognized Columbia, Mo., radio broadcaster. He works primarily for KBXR and news/talk radio station KFRU. Rose used his media connections to help plug the department’s 24 Hours on the Quad fund raiser last fall.

Nancy Spaeder, PhD ’00, a puppeteer and storyteller, teaches in the University of Missouri evening program.

Tammy Shutters, BA ’98, of Des Moines, Iowa, is marketing coordinator for Iowa Network Services Inc.

Jennifer Sloop, BA ’95, manages legal recruiting for Bryan Cave LLP in St. Louis, Mo.

Kelly Tompсон, BA ’92, is communication director for the American Heart Association in Springfield, Mo.

Malinda (Utterback) Hanegraaf, BA ’01, works in sales and communication for Quikedit, a Web site design company, in Noosa, Australia.

Ateya Wilson, BA ’00, of Dututh, Ga., is an events coordinator for AH! Event.

Mellodie Wilson, MA ’04, works for the Missouri Department of Revenue.

Steve Wujek, BA ’91, is a senior account executive for Boasberg Wheeler Communications Inc. in Kansas City, Mo.

McNair Scholar Earns Chancellor’s Award

Venita Cooper, a junior communication major, won the Chancellor’s Award for Undergraduate Research at the MU campuswide conference in April. This award recognizes her research and presentation as the best at the conference.

The native of Lawton, Okla., is a McNair Scholar, one of a group of select undergraduates who explore careers as professors and researchers. She has spent the past year with Bill Benoit as her mentor.

Cooper’s project investigated the shifts in issue ownership, a gauge of which political party is believed by most voters to be better able to handle a particular problem over time. For example, most voters believe Democrats are better able to deal with issues such as education, health care and Social Security. Likewise, most voters believe Republicans are better able to handle crime, inflation and national defense.

As part of the program, Cooper met weekly with Benoit. She also attended the National Communication Association conference in Chicago and the Central State Communication Association conference in Kansas City. She says that the experience taught her a lot about graduate school and that she now feels equipped to select and apply for graduate school.

While Cooper finishes her degree at MU, she continues to work with Benoit and hopes to publish her study. Before heading to graduate school, she plans to join Teach for America for a few years in Houston or St. Louis.
Walk on the Quad a Success

Last fall members of the Department of Communication walked for 24 Hours on the Quad as faculty, alumni and other supporters helped the department raise approximately $5,000 for projects through donations and T-shirt sales.

Walkers included undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, staff and alumni. Pictures of the event, including the chili celebration at the end, are available at www.missouri.edu/~commwww.

“We were honored to have University of Missouri President Elson Floyd, MU Chancellor Brady Deaton, MU Chancellor Emeritus Richard Wallace and Interim Provost Lori Franz show their support by joining us,” says department Chair Michael Kramer.

The 24 Hours on the Quad event will help fund the new Opportunities for Excellence in Undergraduate Education Endowment. This type of effort on behalf of the department increases support for the undergraduate programs and its faculty members.

Communication Wins Graduate School Award

The Department of Communication received the Graduate School’s Outstanding Contribution to Graduate Education Award on April 5. Only one department on campus receives this award each year.

In giving the award, Suzanne Ortega, vice provost for advanced studies and dean of the Graduate School, noted these departmental accomplishments:

- Recent studies rank the department among the top programs in the nation. A 1999 survey of department chairs ranked the program 12th nationally among communication programs offering a doctoral degree.
- The highest overall satisfaction of any communication doctoral program in the nation, and the highest overall satisfaction of any graduate program at the University of Missouri, according to a 2002 poll by the National Association of Graduate and Professional Students.
- Ninety-six percent of doctoral students who completed their coursework graduated from the program over the last decade, compared to 50 percent for the average program.
- In the past three years, 44 percent of doctoral graduates have taken tenure-track jobs in departments with master’s or doctoral programs. During the last three years, 87 percent of graduates have accepted a tenure-track position as their first job after graduation, with the other 13 percent taking adjunct positions.
- A 2003 study ranked the program fourth for research productivity over the last five years. A 2004 study ranked the program 16th in active scholarship over the last 75 years.
- During the past five years, MU graduate students have been listed as authors or co-authors on papers in the discipline presented at regional, national and international conferences an average of 53 times per year.
- During the past five years, graduate students have been listed 48 times as authors or co-authors of refereed journal articles, and six have been co-authors of academic books with department professors.
- In 2004 The Chronicle of Higher Education selected former graduate student Maria Dixon as one of four doctoral graduates out of approximately 45,000 from across all disciplines and universities nationwide to be described as a “rising star” in the academy.
Professor Emeritus Loren Reid, who taught in the department from the 1940s to the 1970s, celebrated his 100th birthday in August. As if a 100th birthday weren’t enough reason for cutting a decorated cake, consider this: Loren and his wife, Gus, celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary at the same time.

Alumni who would like to send congratulatory messages are encouraged to use the enclosed envelope. The department will pass along messages to the centenarian and the happy couple, who still live in Columbia and only a few years ago stopped water skiing at the Lake of the Ozarks.

In the 1940s, Reid taught a course on British and American Oratory that initially attracted a dozen or more students. The class title later changed to the more appealing name of Great Speakers, and soon Reid’s class was drawing more than 200 students. It wasn’t just the change of name that attracted students; it was Reid’s engaging style and knowledge of the subject.

As times changed, Reid realized that the great speakers he featured in class were all white males, so he began an update. He removed a couple of English prime ministers and American senators and substituted such speakers as Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr. and Eleanor Roosevelt. He admits to striking gold with the new speakers and even was able to encourage students to hear them in person. Roosevelt spoke twice on campus to a packed Jesse Auditorium.

One of Reid’s favorite speakers was Missouri’s Harry S. Truman, whom Reid once heard at MU. For an oratory expert, that experience was what Reid called “five minutes of pure eloquence.”

Reid retired in 1975. In the Reids’ typical style of keeping up with trends, they have become adept at using computers and continue to be active communicators by e-mail.

For years, even after retirement, Reid has wondered how many of his estimated 9,000 students felt in later life when they heard a great speech.

This is the time to tell him.