CATCHING UP WITH…Communications Media Alumni Panel - Visions 2025 Part 1 (of 2)

[Catching Up With…theme pops in]

[Opens with Cold Open]

Benjamin Borodawka (cold open): From day one, networking should be front of mind with layoffs, with employment and everything. And it is about who you know and you want to be front of mind when when someone has a job posting and a job opening, if you're being thought of, and from that fellow classmate, you know, you'll get that LinkedIn message or that email.

Traci Bartlett (cold open): I was under the delusion that like, acting for film, you had to be beautiful. You had to be Cameron Diaz like, don't fight your type. Own your type. There's a place out there for anyone and everyone just own it.

Kris Camp (cold open): Try to have fun and try not to think too much about the destination and think more about the journey. I hope that makes sense.

Adam Fournier (Host): Welcome to Catching Up With, Where Fitchburg State Alumni reflect on their time here on campus, celebrate their accomplishments, and discuss how they got from here to where they are now.

I'm Adam Fournier, and it's that time of year again where Fitchburg State hosts their Annual Visions Exhibition, where students of the Communications Media department showcase their best original work, including works in photography graphic design, game design and film and video. The event kicks off with the alumni panel, where graduates are invited back to campus to talk about their careers and their path to success. You can also listen to last year's Vision's alumni panel in a previous two-part episode.

This year we welcome back Traci Bartlett, Wylder Tallman, Kris Camp. Erica Titus, and Benjamin Borodawka. In this first part of another special two part episode, they share their day-to-day experiences in their professions and what they have to do to pay the bills. They discuss the importance of networking and the different methods they use to grow their connections, and they reflect on their classes and projects during their time as college students and think about what they may have done differently if they were to do it all again.

Thank you all for joining me as we catch up with Traci, Wylder, Kris, Erica, and Benjamin.

[Catching Up With…theme fades out]

[audience chatter rises then fades out]

Jeff Warmouth: Hi everybody. Welcome to Visions 2025. For those of you that, that don't know you're here, so you probably know, but Visions is the Communications Media department, student honors festival, exhibition and game showcase. And alumni panel. So welcome to the first event of Visions, which is the alumni panel.

For those of you that don't know me, I'm Jeff Warmouth, the chair of the Communications Media Department. So welcome. We have a distinguished, not extinguished panel of of five graduates of our program from over the years. And I'm gonna let them introduce themselves because I think, honestly, they'll be more interesting than I am.

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Traci Bartlett: My name's Traci Bartlett. I graduated way back in 2003. I'm a SAG actor, experienced in background work and standin work. And I do a lot of theater whenever I can and ask me questions and I'll tell you more maybe.

Wylder Tallman: So I'm Wylder Tallman. I graduated class of 2021 and I was a film video major and I currently am employed at Boston Digital Productions as the senior editor, as well as the internship supervisor. And I recently concluded work on a three-part Nova documentary as the assistant editor.

Kris Camp: Hi everybody. My name is Kris Camp. I was a game design major and while I was here I started a company with a few of my friends called Iconic Arts. We're an indie game development studio. Last year we released our first game for all consoles, Steam, Epic Game Store. And before I pass the mic along, I just wanna say that a lot of people from Fitchburg State, made it possible for Iconic Arts to be a thing. So I quickly want to yell their names. Veronica Hazen. Fintan Neff. There was David Marshall, Ben Pielocik, and Alura Leet. I just want to let it be known that I would not be here if it weren't for them.

Erica Titus: Hi guys. I'm Erica Titus and I graduated in 2019. I was a graphic design major and also I think we call it PRSA now. Yeah, and I work for Joshua Allen Design. It's an interior design firm in Sterling, and I do all the marketing and the social media, basically all the graphics. Anything that's visual, it's me.

Benjamin Borodawka: Hi everyone. My name is Benjamin Borodawka. And in 2019 I graduated studying graphic design. And over the years I've moved between graphic design, UX design and now I'm mostly doing software development and web design at Polen Capital.

Jeff Warmouth: So the first thing I'm gonna ask you is tell us a little bit about your current job and maybe, and if you can talk even a little bit about what you do on a day-to-day basis. Like what's a typical day look like if there is such a thing.

Traci Bartlett: So my day to day how I make my money, I'll tell you that. I'll start off with that, is I'm a virtual billing agent for a telecommunications company because I've been there I have the tenure, I have a lot of vacation time, and then I use that vacation time for filming and for doing theater and stuff like that. Most recently I've worked on Dexter Fallout, Salem's Lot, the new Salem Lot on HBO Max Julia Godmothered, Spirited, a mixture of background work and stand-in work. Which if you don't know what stand-in work is, it can be very lucrative. Basically they'll use you to help set like the angles and stuff like that.
So especially if, you know, 'cause I didn't know this and I went to Fitchburg State, so if you know anyone like five one and under, I didn't know this, so I'll learn you. Anyone that you know that's in theater or film or whatever, under five one, look into stunts, look into stand-in work, look into photo doubling for kids. That's how I got my SAG card.

So definitely do that. But my day-to-day basis can be pretty boring. I answer calls get yelled at. I do that, but it makes it worth it. 'cause then that lets me go off and do at night or during the day or what have you. It lets me go off and do my film work and my theater work and whatever, it is I wanna do, it lets me do the fun stuff with allowing me to also be a grownup and be fiscally responsible and all that good stuff and have health insurance and all those things that you have to think about, especially as you get old. As I am. So there you go.

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Wylder Tallman: So my day to day is fun 'cause in October of 2023 Boston Digital Productions went remote, so I get to wake up when I feel like it now. Yay. But no. So my primary function is editor. What's really great about our company is, you know, starting out as the interns, you know, they really let us do the work. So I've been working on a handful of projects.

Most recently, I just finished working on an hour and a half long concert film for last year's American Idol winner. From her first, like big stadium show in Pasadena, California, I think it was. And yeah. So my, my day to day is hopping on Zoom calls, working with my bosses and my creative directors and chipping away at the projects.

And then in the evenings I get to dedicate my time towards trying to build a superhero universe with some other alumni that I'm working with. So, yeah, just keeping busy, trying to be as creative as possible and, you know, working on whatever technical difficulties come up in my way.

Kris Camp: My day-to-day, by day I am a teacher. I teach an afterschool program. I teach Python, game design, a lot of the stuff I'm interested in and hope that my students are too. And during the nights we started during COVID.

So from the beginning we were always remote. And that just how we know how to work. So I just get in a call with my friends and I do a little bit of everything. I make music, I make 3D models. I do animation, programming, whatever's needed. It takes a lot to make a game.

Erica Titus: My day-to-day, actually, it varies quite a bit. I'm a stay at home mom to an almost 4-year-old. So, when I'm not, you know, making snacks and doing all that fun stuff I work really on whatever we need for graphics.

I do, right now we're launching a brand new venture and it's called Sterling and Maple and it's furniture sales. And so I work on different graphics that we need, different promotional stuff that we need, and then social media posting. It just all depends on what we're doing at that time.

Benjamin Borodawka: So, my day to day is sitting in a tall building in Boston at a desk. It's not the most glamorous, but I sort of bridge the gap between marketing and applications teams. We found that, you know, tech focused people don't necessarily communicate the best with marketing focused people.

So I was kind of brought in as this unicorn to kind of make everyone happy and make sure everyone's communicating well and projects are getting done and you know, at my company we use the Agile methodology of work and a lot of software teams use that just to make sure things are flowing smoothly.

Jeff Warmouth: So all of you, of course, are alumni from our program. So, I would like you to think back to your time at school and were there any classes or projects or activities in school that had a real impact on you?

Kris Camp: I could speak first . I liked pretty much every game design class I had. Although I don't think that would be very helpful if I just mentioned that. Because that's obvious, I think for the fellow game designers in here, what I would suggest is actually taking some film classes and honestly take classes outside of game design.

Kris Camp: I'd highly suggest anything with music production, anything with sound design. If you could take a programming class, do it. But I got a lot out of film. With game design classes, we looked at a lot of mechanics and that could be one thing. But I think what the film department here really has is a lot of critical thinking about a lot of classic films and just seeing like the ways they played with aspect ratio, the ways they implemented music, how you can cinematically set a scene.

And kind of make art that people get lost in. I think that's something that like a lot of game designers need to know. I know we know games, we know mechanics. What we don't know is how to capture somebody's heart. And I think by getting into film or again, like music production, you can do that. But if you're not interested in capturing the heart, just go for programming.

[laughter]

It'll help you out so much. Trust me.

Erica Titus: I actually, while I was at Fitchburg State, I majored in graphic design. I said, but I dual concentrated in PRSA. And actually if anyone else in here is a graphic designer, one of my favorite classes that I took the entire time that I was here was , I don't know what they call it now, but it was called Document Design back then and we worked with the Fitchburg Art Museum.

And it was just, you know, my first experience with a real client, with a real document that I had to design, like, and we were all in it from start to finish. We designed, you know, all the elements. We had to organize all the exhibits on the page and everything like that. And just working back and forth with a client, like over the course of the semester just really taught me how to actually work with clients in real life.

And I'll tell you, I went on my portfolio review and my internship interviews, and that was the star piece of my portfolio.

Jeff Warmouth: Thank you, Erica. So that class does still exist. It's called Client Project Production. Dr. Carr teaches it and we definitely encourage everybody to take that.

Erica Titus: Yeah, it's an awesome class.

Jeff Warmouth: Awesome. Thanks.

Benjamin Borodawka: I want to actually branch off what you said. Answering the clients and client work was something I felt very prepared for at Fitchburg. I think a lot of the graphic design classes were designed around design reviews and going through different stages of designs and narrowing down and mocking what it would be like to do a client review.

And I think the first three and a half years of my career were spent in the design agency life. And I think that cutting your teeth in the early stages of your career in the agency life is really important. It helps you hone your skills in many different areas. And that's the thing that I think Fitchburg prepared me the most for all of the classes from Intro to Graphic Design to History of Graphic Design. All of them were designed around the agency way of thinking. And I'm happy for it. Yeah.

Traci Bartlett: I wouldn't be half the actor that I am today without the classes that I took with Kelly Morgan and Richard McElvain. Absolutely not. Like a hundred percent. I mean, I did the Nurse's Romeo and Juliet here.

I worked as a part of it used to be called the America Ultra Arts Festival where I did the Black Sheep Improv Troupe for two years was over at Slattery's during the festival. And I still do theater now. I mentioned a lot of film, but I still do theater to this day. I just did Piggy and Lord of the Flies.

I did was part of an ensemble in WIT. I'll be playing Edward Clark in the Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde playing Leominster City Hall in early June. So check it out. But yeah, I wouldn't have known anything if I hadn't taken those classes or voiced classes with James Levy.

No way. Or the networks that I, that the networks that I made through like my fellow, you know, students and. Because they would look out, they'd send me like all the postings and stuff like that. The connections that you make are gonna help you out in the real world. So keep in touch, you know, help each other out, be there for each other.

It's tough out there, you know.

Wylder Tallman: So coming into Fitchburg, I always knew that I wanted to be a video editor. That was always the plan. And while, I did a lot of awesome production courses and writing courses. The thing that's really helped me the most with where I'm at now has been Charlie Roberts' editing class and his VFX course that he hosts every now and then.

Those two have come in so handy through the last couple of years. Learning about metadata and the back end of AVID, just AVID in general, like it gets a bad rap, you know, with such a more Premier and Adobe focused environment, even DaVinci Resolve. But, you know, knowing AVID and knowing, you know, which software is the most important to use and how to transfer projects between them, it saved projects on a handful of occasions.

It really, like, if you're not, if you're more into like the production side of things, you know. I would definitely recommend still taking an editing course just so you know where your footage is going to end up, how it's gonna get manipulated, and giving you a slightly better understanding of, you know, how to shoot for the editor.

That's something that we focus a lot at Boston Digital Production, since we're all production and editor focused, you know, we really highlight that, you know, we're trying to shoot for the final edit and making sure we were feeding enough footage and enough, you know, good footage, not just throw away B-roll.

Trying to tell a story. And so I definitely think, like I said, knowing the technical and the backend of editing has been massive for me. And then, you know, shout out to all the writing courses as well. I tried for a writing minor, didn't quite make it, but I had a good time. You know, it was a lot of fun.

It helped to balance everything out a little bit. And take an editing course if that's not something you're interested in or if it is something you're interested in, take cinematography. I loved my cinematography course. Made a couple of good, really fun shorts out of it. And again, just met a lot of great contacts.

Jeff Warmouth: So several of you mentioned networking, the importance of networking. Can you share any practical tips or advice for starting and for maintaining professional networks? And do you belong to any professional organizations? Or do you make your own networks?

Benjamin Borodawka: I'm lucky that my company has employee resource groups for different topics and one of the most important pieces of networking for me recently has been out in finance.

And that's for people in the LGBTQ community in the finance industry to attend networking events in major metropolitan areas. And Boston has a really strong community for that. So that's been awesome. And I think networking in general is just, you get out what you put in and just sending simple messages to people on LinkedIn just to check in and maintain those connections is important.

But I think leveraging whatever systems your company has in place or your university has in place for networking is, you know the first step.

Traci Bartlett: I guess I have an answer. So for now a lot like on Facebook, like background actor groups and stuff like that. Like New England background actors, like any group that you can just search and join and just follow the posts. I follow like any casting agency that I can.

And also, yes, like network with each other, not just that but when you're on like a pro film set, or even in theater. You're gonna meet people like going up the same, that you're gonna meet, coming up and down. So mind, like how you act on theater sets and film sets and stuff like that.

Make those connections. Don't burn any bridges because that person that you're working with, that's just a PA. Well, he might be like the second assistant director or the director at some point, or maybe it's the director of photography next time. You don't know. So just keep yourself professional, keep those connections, and that's gonna be your key to success.

Wylder Tallman: And going off of that, you know, I wish I had a more legitimate strategy. You know, it's, LinkedIn for me is my primary one when it comes to reaching out to folks professionally, but maintaining it, I've actually found sites like Slack and Discord to be monumental in keeping those connections and keeping those, you know, not even just networks, but friendships alive.

You know, my circle's only grown and I've gotten a lot of opportunities because of that. And you know, if you're not part of one, I think, you know, start a Slack channel and put everyone you know in it or a Discord and put everyone you know in it.

You know, even if you're not talking business all the time, at least you're keeping the conversation alive. And then, you know, slowly it grows and grows. And you know, as soon as you know it, you've got plenty of people watching out for you and you're watching out for them. And that's kinda what I've got, you know?

The only other thing I can think of, and it's something that one of my bosses told me, and it's something that I keep to heart, is, you know, if someone gets you a gig, you should try to get them one as well. You know, it's a pass back and forth so you're not just kind of taking and then running with it.

Wylder Tallman: You know, if that client comes back to you trying to hire you, pitch your friend again, pitch the one who pitched you. And keep the ball rolling. Keep everyone working 'cause if everyone's working, then you know, that's a lot more opportunities to go around.

Traci Bartlett: That's true. I'm actually gonna join Discord shortly 'cause I'm gonna do the 48 hour film festival and we're meeting on Discord.

Wylder Tallman: Oh, awesome yeah.

Traci Bartlett: I'll be the newest Discord joiner in a few moments.

Kris Camp: Ditto. No I mean that's really it. I think it's tough because we are the game design major. We're the most socially awkward major. And our biggest problem is honestly talking to people. And I think another problem like, our community here in Massachusetts is so small.

We have the Meetup app where I think right now that's like our biggest way to know what's going around Boston and making sure that you have that Meetup app and you're aware of the Boston community. And that's how you kind of, you know, socialize and make connections here. I think the big problem that we are still trying to figure out is how do we go beyond this community?

How do we get outside of the Massachusetts area? How do we get people around the whole country to know that we exist? How do we get people around the world to know that we exist? I'm still trying to figure that out. If any of you have the answer, please let me know.

Erica Titus: I think, you know, as a professional who's out of college, there's a lot to be said for keeping your presence on LinkedIn alive.

I know everyone's like, ah, LinkedIn, like, yeah, we do it. But I mean, you don't have to message people either. You can just comment on a fellow student's post or a person that, you know, and just kind of get that back and forth going, 'cause people a lot of times will comment back on your things if you comment something on their posts.

And then also another thing I'll say is that for me, networking in this, like professions started in my classrooms when I was in school, in the classes. Like when we would meet for group projects and I would get to know the people who were in my projects with me. And then those friends, you know, became resources that I could call upon for internship or for if I need help professionally.

And I think something that I could have done better when I was at school too, is to maybe push a little harder for those kind of relationships. But you guys can.

Jeff Warmouth: Is there anything that you wish you had done differently? Any classes you wish you had taken, any programs you wish you had explored?

Erica Titus: I think one thing that I wish I would've done a little bit differently, I know I already plugged taking classes for PRSA because it just helped so much. But as a graphic designer, I think an area that I lacked in upon graduation was photography. And I definitely think if I would've focused a little bit more of my extra classes, which I didn't have that many because I was transferring in, but, I mean, I got there anyways, but I think it would've just made me, prepared me a little bit better and quicker for that aspect of graphic design.

Benjamin Borodawka: I'll speak on the graphic design front too. I think my shortcomings in graphic design were always around illustration, and I don't know if I ever took any classes on that.

I think taking some foundational courses on that would've been really helpful. I found that like logo design was always a little hard for me. While typography, layout, color, that all came really easily to me in the professional world. That was part of every class though. But also networking is super important.

I think that from day one, networking should be front of mind. You know, in the communications industry it can be sometimes a little bit difficult to with layoffs, with employment and everything, and it's, it is about who you know and you want to be front of mind when when someone has a job posting and a job opening, if you're being thought of and from that fellow classmate, you know, you'll get that LinkedIn message or that email.

Wylder Tallman: Better talk to my fellow film majors. I ended up falling in love with the choir and like the acapella and the improv side of things, the performance arts and, which are awesome and I loved it and I loved every second of it, but it did come at the detriment of making those contacts and making a lot of those connections that I should have, that it's honestly taking me two to three years post-graduation to reconnect with all those people and start building those relationships that I could have been building freshman year if I, you know, actually spoke up and actually, you know, talked with the people in my classes.

So, you know, at the very least, get people's names and numbers. Join a Discord, you know, 'cause you never know, especially with how tumultuous the industry is now. Those are the people who will have your back. Those are the people who will guarantee you work. And yeah, just make those connections Now. Don't wait till the last minute. Don't wait till senior year.

Start building those bonds. You know that that's what's gonna get you work. It's how I ended up with a gig with PBS was because of another alum who was in my VFX course. You know, it's who you know, it's good to know what you know, but it is a lot of times who you know and the people you know are the people in your classes.

So that's honestly one of my biggest piece of advice is just, you know, talk to people, do the thing, make those connections, you know?

Traci Bartlett: Definitely I would second that, well, first I'll say that being a theater major I wish that I had taken more like film classes pertaining to film that would've been very useful. I was under the delusion that like, acting for film, you had to be beautiful. You had to be Cameron Diaz like, so I focused more on theater. That's not true. That is not true. And also I will tell you, don't fight your type. Own your type. Don't get frustrated at like, ah, I'm not like the size two ingenue.

Like, no there's a place out there for anyone and everyone just own it.

Kris Camp: I think this one's gonna be a little bit hard for me to convey. Try to have fun while you can. A problem that I had while I was here is I started the company while I was a junior, and once I got into that mindset, it became like, oh, it'd be nice if we reached this goal. And it turned into we need to reach this goal in order to get to the next step at where we need to be as a company.

And I think there's a lot of good reasons to maybe start thinking about starting a company while you're young, while you don't have too many, like adult consequences, like paying

Kris Camp: taxes healthcare I'm hoping that you guys have the opportunity not to worry about that you, but treasure the time you have here.

[Catching Up With…theme fades in]

And try to have fun and try not to think too much about the destination and think more about the journey. I hope that makes sense.

[applause, replaced by audience chatter]

Adam Fournier (Host): Thanks for listening to part one of this two part episode of Catching Up With featuring the alumni panel of the 2025 Visions Exhibition. To find out more about Visions, to see previous works and to find out when you can attend the next one, go to fitchburg state.edu/visions. That's fitchburgstate.edu/visions.

As always, admission is free and so are the refreshments. Join us next time to hear the 2025 alumni panel talk about how they transitioned into the professional world, how each of them stay current in their fields and stay current with the growing world of technology, and how they feel about the uncertainty of job security.

I'm Adam Fournier, and we'll see you in the next episode.

[Catching Up With…theme fades out

[Perseverantia network theme fade in]

Henry Christiansen: My name is Henry. I'm a senior at Fitchburg State University and you are listening to Perseverantia, the Fitchburg State Podcast Network.

[Perseverantia network theme fade out]