

Alumni using training in nontraditional ways

By Joan Solsman

The School's alumni are among the best in the business. One can follow the trail of graduates from the steps of Howell Hall, and now Carroll Hall, to *The New York Times*, *60 Minutes II*, The Smithsonian Institution and *Sports Illustrated*, to name a few prominent media outlets where alumni have succeeded. And today Carroll Hall hums with students' ambition to enter the competitive world of — fabric design?

"Yes, it's true. Journalism even gets you a job in fabric design," says alumna Christy Moffitt Rollins. And stand-up comedy. And investment banking. And late-night television.

Many School alumni apply their degrees to careers from Wall Street to Yankee Stadium. They credit the School with helping them succeed in diverse ways.

Rollins, a designer of multipurpose and window fabrics, says communication skills are a valuable supplement to other training. The 1989 Carolina graduate later earned a degree in fabric design, but her journalism-mass communication background strengthens her presentations and sales materials.

Luchina Fisher, a 1988 alumna, spent a year in England studying film and television after writing for *People* magazine and several newspapers. Now she is a documentary filmmaker whose projects include an *A&E Biography* episode about Gladys Knight. Fisher knows her journalism training sets her apart from other professionals in her field.

"You can see the difference between those trained as journalists and those that aren't," she says. Among the differences, she cites a respect for ethics, accuracy and good writing.

Tom Ward agrees. Ward is a 1977 School graduate who is now senior managing director at Bear Stearns & Company, the seventh-largest brokerage firm in the United States. He earned a master's degree in business administration to prepare for Wall Street, but he agrees with Fisher that his journalism training distinguishes him from his peers.

"It also allows me to communicate better than some of my more quantitative brethren, and anything you can do better in this very competitive world is helpful," Ward says.

Some alumni, such as 1995 graduate Doug Behar, intended to become journalists but translated their degrees to niches better suited to their passions. Although Behar's goal was to work as a sports writer, he found he didn't like the reporter-athlete relationship. He ended up as assistant director of stadium operations for the New York Yankees, where he applies his communication skills to negotiate agreements with labor unions.

Other alumni knew all along that their futures lay outside journalism and mass communication.

Molly Putman, a 2000 graduate, believed the School would help her develop versatile skills that could apply to many fields.

"I have also found that the J-School's reputation as being one of the best journalism schools in the country extends far beyond the journalism community," says Putman, now an investment banking analyst in Atlanta.



Photo courtesy of Luchina Fisher
Rebecca Michelman, left, executive producer of a biography about Gladys Knight, stands next to Knight and 1988 alumna Luchina Fisher, writer and producer of the documentary.

Alumna Wenne Davis always wanted to act, but the 1988 graduate studied in the School's advertising sequence at the request of her parents. After graduation, New York City lured her with advertising and sales jobs, but she returned to stand-up comedy and acting.

"Being an actor and a journalist have one major thing in common:

communicating," Davis says. "You both communicate to an audience, only as an actor it is with someone else's words. As a comedian, you're adding some punch lines."

Like Davis, 2002 alumna Lindsay Shookus found herself in New York City soon after graduation. She works at *Saturday Night Live* as an assistant producer. When she delved into job

interviews after graduation, she discovered that the School had given her knowledge and confidence she barely realized she had.

"I interviewed for an ad position," Shookus says. "I don't know why — I knew that's not what I wanted to do — but they were really impressed with some of the terminology I used. And I thought, 'What? That's just normal.' Because it's what's normal at the J-School. But that's not what's normal everywhere."

Though their careers range from finance to filmmaking, these alumni hold something in common. They all laud one lesson of the School above all others. Of course, it happens to be the lesson met with the loudest whines and groans from many students.

"Dean Cole once gave me an F only because I misspelled a person's name in a story for his editorial class," Ward remembers. "The point was made. I'm more aware of how much the little things matter."

He's not alone.

"J-53, I'll never forget it," Fisher says. "We all hated it at the time, but the attention to details and facts — those are crucial. I carry that with me today."

Joan Solsman is a junior in the news-editorial sequence.

Semonche's knowledge, experience support School's mission of research, education

By Tess Hussey

Librarian, teacher, Web developer, class speaker, mentor, art collector and owner of more than 400 cookbooks. Barbara Semonche wears many hats.

Semonche has been the School's library director since January 1990, but her relationship with the School goes back a little further than that. She met Dean Richard Cole during the 1980s and began consulting with the School about developing a library for news research. Before then, the School had a reading room in Howell Hall with a small collection of research materials. When Dorothy "Dot" Choate, the reading room manager, retired in December 1989, Semonche joined the School's staff full time. Then in 1999, when the School moved into its new home in Carroll Hall, Semonche oversaw the move of the library's collection into the Park Library.

Semonche said her role as librarian is to support the School's mission of research and education. She's responsible for maintaining the Park Library's collections and adding new materials. This means continuously cataloging books, multimedia materials and serials, and making sure they are easily available to students, faculty and staff members, and visitors. She also teaches students and faculty members about new services offered in the library.

It's a big job, and Semonche is the first to admit she couldn't do it alone. She credits the Park Library's part-time staff of three Park Fellows and the School's computer services staff, led by Fred Thomsen, for helping her keep



Barbara Semonche.

things running smoothly. She also acknowledged the help of Terry Hill, who oversees the multimedia room and tape-dubbing station.

"I can't emphasize how important these people are in helping me," Semonche said.

Semonche said the best part of her job is helping a student and hearing him or her say, "Ahh, that's the way you do it." She added that it's especially rewarding when students call or e-mail her after graduation to ask for help with a research project.

In addition to her job as the School's librarian, Semonche is the founder and list owner of NewsLib, an international mailing list on the Internet for news librarians and researchers. In the 10 years since NewsLib was launched, this resource for news research has gained 1,850 members and has expanded to include 30 countries.

If that isn't enough, she is also a mentor to library and information students.

"This semester, I'm mentoring two grad students from UNC-Chapel Hill School of Library and Information Science," she said. "One is doing an independent study with me; the other is volunteering to develop a guide to our library's business databases."

Born and raised in Iowa, Semonche

received a bachelor's degree in speech pathology from the University of Iowa in 1956. In 1962 she moved to North Carolina. She earned a master's degree in special education from UNC-Chapel Hill in 1967, and nine years later she added a master's of library science from the University's School of Information and Library Science. She then worked for 13 years as news librarian for *The Herald-Sun* in Durham before joining the School.

Semonche and her husband, John, a history professor at UNC-Chapel Hill, recently celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. She said they like to collect art — prints, oils, tapestries and sculpture. She also likes to visit lighthouses around the country and has seen several on the coasts of North Carolina and Maine and on the West Coast. Semonche said she also loves to read cookbooks — she owns more than 400.

Semonche has one daughter, Laura Semonche Jones, who lives with her husband, Rob, in Charlottesville, Va.

She said her daughter received her law degree from UNC-Chapel Hill "and is admitted to practice law in Georgia, Virginia and the U.S. Supreme Court."

Semonche said her mantra for news research is a quote by syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman: "In journalism there has always been a tension between getting it first and getting it right." It's an important idea for journalists, students and journalism educators to remember, and Semonche is helping pass it along to a new generation of students in the School.

Tess Hussey is a senior in the public relations sequence.