

Jacob Pillis Interview:

How would you describe your area of study to a novice?

In the very broad sense, the Corporate and Professional Communication program represents an area of study and research in public relations and related communication fields. As the definition and responsibilities of a public relations practitioner and researcher seem to change on a daily basis, it can be difficult to pinpoint specific careers and topics involved in this area of study. Our program does an excellent job of preparing students for a career in this ever-changing field, as well as preparing individuals for furthering their academic pursuits with many hands-on research opportunities.

What is your primary motivation for persevering through graduate school?

My primary motivation for persevering through graduate school is the belief that the skills and knowledge I have gained in our program will provide me with the opportunity to make a difference in this world. In particular areas such as crisis communication and issues management, public relations practitioners are often responsible for leading their communities or organizations through trying and difficult times. Additionally, practitioners are also responsible for letting the world know when something good or worthy is happening and worth noticing. Simply knowing that at some point in the future that I may be in a position to give something back to society is all the motivation I need to push on.

Do you think there is any value in social networking with other graduate students in non-related fields?

I think there is massive value in social networking with other graduate students. I myself did not come from a communications background when I started the program, as my undergraduate concentration was in Sociology. I was happy to hear and see many similar ideas and practices discussed and used in this area of study, and I truly feel that the things I have learned in both fields have given me an advantage moving forward. Having a diverse educational background can only be seen as an advantage in modern society, and collaborating with a colleague from outside of your field can lead to new ideas and better practices. Looking at theories and research from a different perspective definitely helps broaden your understanding, so I certainly think diverse networking is a great idea.

What is your favorite stress-reduction technique?

I'm probably the wrong person to talk to when it comes to stress-reduction, as I often use my mounting stress as motivation to get whatever is bothering me over with! However, I do often find that taking regular "brain-breaks" helps me relax whenever I am feeling particularly overwhelmed. Whether it be for 30 minutes or even a few hours, finding something mindless or physical to do can really help calm your nerves. I often find that after stepping away for a little time, I gain a greater focus and perspective on whatever it was that caused stress in the first place.

What is the last book you read strictly for pleasure and how long ago was it?

Although I should probably read for personal enjoyment on a much more regular basis, I did finish *Blood Meridian* by Cormac McCarthy last spring. It is a pretty dark read with a plethora of historical accuracy, but it is a beautifully written novel and I would recommend it to just about anyone.

Please describe your most meaningful academic relationship.

Honestly my entire experience here at Radford has been the most meaningful two years in academia that I have ever had. I really have taken away something extremely insightful and new from every professor I have worked with both in and out of the classroom. The amount of support and opportunities you are given within the program are absolutely tremendous, so I can't say enough about how great my experience has been. Additionally, the support and guidance I have received from other students in the program has been invaluable to me during my time here.

What surprised you the most about graduate school?

The amount of reading required in class really was not that shocking to me when I first started, but the depth of those weekly readings and discussions was a big surprise. Instead of doing work just because I was "supposed" to as in undergrad, I now was working towards developing a deeper understanding of the material because that is what is expected of you. Another and even greater surprise to me however, was how involved and closely tied I became to everyone in the program. I truly felt like I was a part of the school, and not simply a student like I did in my previous studies. In my experience so far, everything about graduate school has been a wonderful surprise.

If travel to Mars happens in your lifetime, would you want to be one of the scientists on board? If yes, what would you contribute to the mission?

I would give a hard no on being a scientist on board a Mars mission as I'm a pretty big fan of the planet Earth as of this moment. However if one of the thousands of sci-fi disaster movie scenarios occurs and I'm chosen for a mission, I suppose I would hop on a shuttle! With my background I'm guessing I would be some kind of social scientist, and that my communication background would certainly come in handy. I am pretty prone to motion sickness however, so my fellow crew may not be my biggest fan no matter how well I communicate with them!

What is your favorite comfort food and why? How often do you consume it?

My favorite comfort food at the moment is spaghetti with my mother's special meat sauce. She leaves it cooking throughout most of the day filling the house with this great smell, which makes dinner even more satisfying because you are looking forward to it all day. We probably eat it once every few months, but I could really eat it once a week if I had my way!

If you hadn't been admitted to graduate school, what do you think you would be doing right now?

At this point I can't really even imagine what I would be doing if I wasn't in school, as I truly feel like this was the direction I needed to take. However, I imagine that I would either still be working in banking, or at my father's auto repair shop like I was before coming to Radford.

When do you expect to complete your degree?

I expect to receive my Master's of Science in Corporate and Professional Communication this December 2015.