WPUNJ Professional Communication's

A DECADE IN DEDICATION

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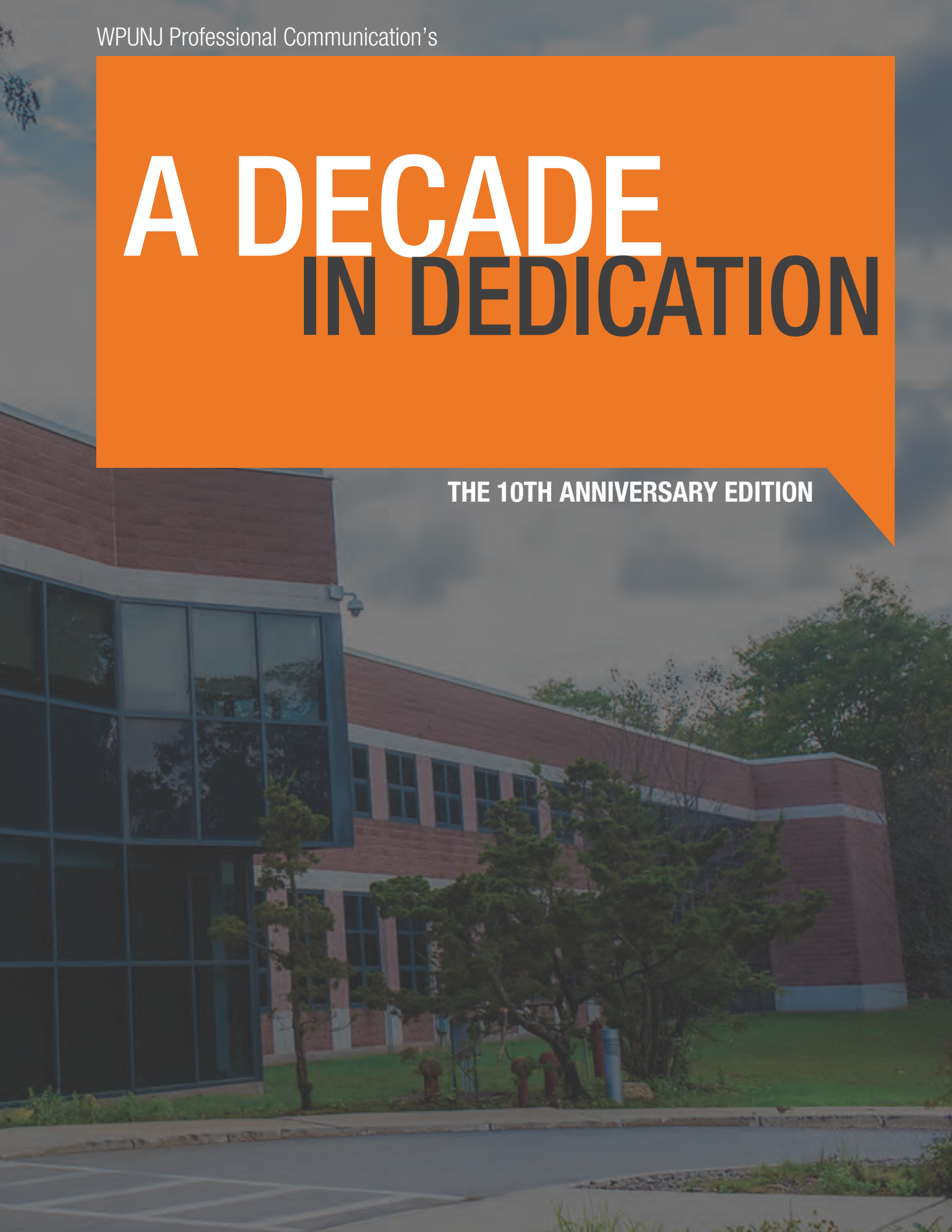

FOUNDERS

By Chris Trembath

Dr. Joann Lee has the exemplar resume for anyone in the news business: a correspondent for CNN, the founding director of a journalism program within the City University of New York, and the dean for the journalism school at the University of Nevada.

Those industry experiences factored into her development of the Professional Communication program at William Paterson University in 2010.

"I'd seen journalism from both sides, in the professional world and then in academia, and I wanted to build a program that would combine both disciplines to prepare students for this new media world," Dr. Lee said.

In creating the program, Dr. Lee (at right) saw the need for a curriculum that would bring together the tenets of scholarly research traditionally associated with graduate study with more applied concepts to reflect employers' demands in a changing communication industry.

"We were very tuned in to understanding what the marketplace demanded of graduate students," Dr. Lee said. "That meant in order to offer a certain kind of class, we had to be sure the students were being introduced to concepts that they could use in the industry."

One of those concepts was social media.

At the time, Facebook was only six years old, and Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram were just appearing on the horizon. Dr. Lee said she believed a new generation of students would need to know these emerging modes of communication.

With the help of Professor Lorra Brown (below), a former senior vice president at Ogilvy, one of the top advertising firms in New York City, the two created a curriculum that would help students adapt to the new web-based landscape.



"We decided that in order for us to help our students change their careers, to compete in their current career, or go on to doctoral programs, they needed to have the versatility to work within a newly digitized and ever-changing space that had multiple channels of communication," Professor Brown said.

Of course, newly acquired knowledge is only useful if it can be showcased to prospective employers, and the PCOM program prepares students with a portfolio of work to enhance their resumes.

"We have a great track record of alumni who have produced materials in our program that helped them obtain raises at their current profession or to change careers and be more marketable," Professor Brown said. "So students come out of the program with a portfolio of work ready to be used in a professional setting. That's something a lot of graduate programs don't necessarily do."

Another program originator, Dr. Casey Lum (at bottom right), who has experience creating networks between Asian and American cultures as an international education consultant, underlined the power of networking.

"When you come to the program, you will be with peers and professors who are currently working in the field," Dr. Lum said. "So, in addition to acquiring skill sets from the coursework and research, there is the opportunity to build a personal network in the professional field. We have professors who have been executive directors of major corporations, vice presidents for PR and marketing firms, and a host of working alumni who return to the program to teach and impart their knowledge."

But for all that a well-designed communications program can offer, it must be able to adapt to companies' future needs.

"We see a need for classes that address the advertising element of social media, so from that perspective we're looking at the e-commerce and marketing of social, as well as the ethics behind it," Professor Brown said. "We've successfully embedded those concepts into our current curriculum, but we're actively developing courses that can incorporate all those elements of social media evolution."



