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Editorial

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Bridges and Fences

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For students at Northern Michigan University interested in electronic media, the good news is that Eric Smith, Director of Broadcasting and AV Services, is a builder of bridges, not fences. For them, this means that he and his WNMU Public Radio and Television staff have fashioned cooperative relationships with departments across campus that benefit programs and people. And the hallmark of these efforts has been opportunities for hands-on, project-oriented learning that reinforce course lectures and academic content.

One such relationship is with the Communication and Performance Studies Department (CAPS), where Media Production & New Technology, Public Relations, and Multimedia Journalism majors regularly find an entry point into the professional community. They are able to fulfill required Internship credits by working as production crew members for Public Eye News, Ask the Doctors, Ask the Lawyers, Media Meet, High School Bowl, and sports and public affairs coverage.

Public Eye News (PEN) is a daily newscast managed by students, where people can experience all the elements of news production, from scriptwriting to directing. These opportunities enable media majors to polish their craft, but student volunteers of any major or year of study can also gain experience with how the electronic media operates. In an age where anyone can make a cell phone video, PEN underscores the significance of media



literacy and emphasizes professional skills and codes of behavior.

Eric Smith and the Public Radio and Television staff have been instrumental in creating faculty-student-staff collaborations that are more than just dead-end class assignments. Rather, they result in opportunities for students to share their work with friends, family, and the community at large.

In Media and Politics, for instance, a course taught cooperatively in both Political Science and CAPS that focuses on the interdependent relationship between the media, candidates, and voters, students regularly create a series of recorded interview segments, called Poli-Sci on the Fly, about significant issues during each election cycle.

Audio production students have created an on-going series of music and interview shows for WNMU FM featuring local, national, and visiting international performers. In doing so, they have become eligible for openings in production work at Public Radio 90. During the 2015 fall semester, audio students have been working with a collection of Story Corps oral history recordings gathered in Marquette to create a series of on-air segments about local culture and history.

Dwight Brady's Sports and Special Events Programming class utilizes NMU's professional remote broadcast system to train students in the production of football, basketball and hockey games. These crews have not only worked with wildcat sports, but also with Olympic speed skaters, boxers, and Greco-Roman wrestlers covering competitions hosted by the Olympic Training Center. As a result, their work in this area has received multiple MAB student production awards. According to Brady, "Having the WNMU-TV facilities and staff accessible to our students is a tremendous asset for our majors."

Mikenzie Frost, a 2015 graduate, says, "Multimedia Journalism at NMU is very different compared to other, large schools. Here, students are able to get hands-on experience their freshman year, which is a huge advantage when it comes time to apply for internships and real world jobs." Frost asserts that her project-oriented experiences at Northern facilitated her successful internship application at the Voice of America and her current job with commercial television in Montana.

Eric Smith has not only contributed to the educational experiences of students at NMU, but he has also become a significant partner in undergraduate recruitment as well. Several times a year, he hosts meetings in the Public Broadcast Studios with parents and prospective students. There, he and the Communication & Performance Studies faculty discuss the unique character of the cooperative broadcast educational experience to be found at Northern Michigan University, which represents a bridge between academic life and the professional world. As a result of all these things, the folks at Northern were pleased, though not surprised, to learn that Eric Smith's hard work and creative thinking were recognized at the state level when he received a 2014 M.A.B. Professional Pioneer Award, which he richly deserved.