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HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

FOCUS ON FACULTY



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Creating A Career Frame of Mind Through Language and Opportunity



Robin Mathis, Ph.D., interim Associate Director for Strategic Communication and Assistant Professor of Communication in the School of Communication and Media (SOCM) shares a moment of school spirit with Scrappy.

Robin Mathis, Ph.D., interim Associate Director for Strategic Communication and Assistant Professor of Communication in the School of Communication and Media (SOCM), brings together areas of expertise that, combined, offer a powerful approach to teaching and preparing students for life after college. Consider her undergraduate degree in communication, sprinkled with her theater studies, mix in a master's degree in instructional and organizational communication, and top it off with a Ph.D. in human resource development. Her students are not just being taught; they are being coached to a higher performance level that will help them succeed in their chosen field. What's more, this coaching approach is evident not only in the classroom but also in the way she engages her community and discipline.

Mathis' attentiveness to promoting career success by focusing on development is clear in the way she approaches the classroom. She described how her approach manifests with students saying "It was probably 10 plus years ago. I was telling a story about something that happened in the classroom to a family member, and I said, 'I think that's a colleague question, not a supervisor question.'" The family member stopped her to ask about her use of the term "colleague" rather than student or classmate. She went on to explain that her focus on helping students prepare for their careers meant approaching her classroom as a place where colleagues engage one another much as they would in their professional environments. She wanted her students to be ready for the types of conversations and issues they would experience in their day-to-day work environments.

Back then, she may have been ahead of her time with this mindset, but today she is right in step with her focus on career readiness. Ensuring students are career-ready and have the necessary skills to succeed in their chosen field after graduation has gained traction at KSU, in the University System of Georgia (USG), and nationally. As Mathis notes, "...the USG is saying that there's a reason why you're here and a reason why the organization wants you to have a degree. It's part of *our* job to communicate that, and so [it is] kind of the HR development approach to higher ed. I've always had [this approach] this is for the next step."

Mathis is very active outside the classroom, which opens other avenues for her to support her students. She is an active member of the Eastern Communication Association (ECA), which having been founded in 1910, and is according to their website the country's oldest professional communication association. During an ECA conference where Mathis presented on senior capstone projects. She recounted what one conference attendee said about her presentation, "Another faculty member said, 'I really like how you are not so much a teacher or facilitator. You move into a coaching model.' She used that language," Mathis added.



Robin Mathis, Ph.D., with her husband Chris Mathis, enjoy a day out at a KSU home football game.

Mathis received valuable guidance from her mentor, a Northwest Airlines executive who was instrumental in inviting her into the ECA. She credits him with helping her develop a foundation at ECA that "grew into a professional home," and has remained a constant through her move for her husband's job in 2014 From Texas to Atlanta. Today, she is on ECA's ballot as one of two candidates in this October's elections for the vice president elect position.

Her passion for theater, her organizational communications skills, and HR expertise have led her to a seat on the Board of the City of Sandy Springs Theater Company. It is this role, with connections to other Board members and within the organization itself, that she is constantly on the lookout for ways to connect students with internships and job opportunities.

"They've got their own costume shop and scene shop, the crew has jobs, and so I've said, 'What do you need help with?' We could use interns and PR and video production, all of these things. I work in the School of Communication and Media," says Mathis, suggesting SOCM as a pipeline for student engagement. The way she sees it, "we're solving people's problems through scholarship, and also student opportunities. I'm passionate about this and [the theater has] a need that creates an opportunity for our students."

For Mathis, this is more than just checking a box. As her students go on to careers and look ahead, she is excited to see when her students succeed. If she sees on LinkedIn that one of her students got a promotion, she'll reach out to congratulate them. According to Mathis, they are usually surprised that she remembers them, but she really does care. In fact, when asked what she would most want people to know about her personally or professionally it would be that "no matter what, I'm an educator. I think it comes into my parenting, everything." So, when she sees her students succeed after college, there is a certain sense of pride in having been part of their journey and development along the way.

