



Jeremy Cowen, '97 and '18
Senior Vice President/Communications, Oklahoma
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Starting his career as a sports reporter before moving into a public relations role with the Oklahoma Bankers Association, Jeremy Cowen has seen different aspects of working as a mass communicator. The two-time University of Oklahoma graduate, who earned a bachelor's degree in journalism in 1997 and his master's degree in strategic communication in 2018, also impacts current Gaylord College students by teaching a section of JMC 2033 Writing for Mass Communications. Cowen recently reflected on some memories from his time at OU, talked about his career path, shared what he does during his free time and more.

What is your favorite memory from your time at Gaylord College?

At the time, it wasn't my favorite nor at all fun, but looking back, it was something I'll always remember: trying desperately to survive Professor Bill Loving's infamous Mass

communicator by being a sports reporter and now a PR specialist. When I was a sports reporter, being promoted to cover the women's basketball team for Texas Tech was a big moment as it was considered a major beat at the newspaper at the time -- the women's team regularly outdrew the men's squad, and the interest level in it was second only to football in Lubbock. So, knowing your stories were going to be read, dissected, argued about and become fodder for everything from families' morning breakfast tables to sports radio hosts and callers around the area was interesting. The other two significant moments involved my time at the Oklahoma Bankers Association: one, when I was promoted to head the communications department in 2006, and the other being during the early weeks of the pandemic last year. With businesses closing, and the world coming to a stop, my bosses with the Association leaned heavily upon my

Class, along with my fellow students. Loving's class was probably the toughest class in the J-school at the time (pre-Gaylord College) and it took a massive combined effort by students to survive. Some of us would group up in class, and when Loving would inevitably call on us for an answer, we all worked our ventriloquism skills to help the poor targeted soul with whispered help to avoid the notorious biting sarcasm of Professor Bill.

Do you have a favorite faculty/staff member at Gaylord?

As much as he scared me in class, I also enjoyed puncturing the seemingly iron-plated Professor Bill Loving with funny asides and jokes at his expense when we were outside of class. Getting an icy side-eye or a sarcastic response from him was always a highlight of my day -- he was a nicer guy than he'd ever likely admit and I enjoyed seeing him drop his guard. I also would be remiss in not mentioning David Goodloe, Mary Marcus, Andy Rieger, David Dary and Jack Willis as notable faculty members during my undergrad years. Of current professors, I would have never decided to come back for my master's degree after more than 20 years if it wasn't for the encouragement of Dr. Peter Gade, and I would have never, ever survived if Dr. Meta Carstarphen and Dr. Melanie Wilderman hadn't babysat me through some truly terrifying high and lows of getting the degree.

How did your career path lead you to the Oklahoma Bankers Association?

I was led to the OBA absolutely courtesy of the connections I made while in the J-school as an undergrad! Before I came to the Association in 2002, I was only focused on being a sports writer, working first at the Lawton (Okla.) Constitution and then the Lubbock (Texas) Avalanche-Journal newspapers. The constant travel needed to cover college and high school sports wore on me, though, and I began looking at opportunities, even those outside of sports writing and newspapers altogether. One of my closest friends from my college days, Lori Brooks, put me in contact with another colleague from my time in the J-school, Tiffany Wilken, who was looking for a trade newspaper editor and webmaster to work in her communications department at the Association. A couple of interviews later, I ended up with the job, and,

department to keep the lines of communication open between bankers, the Association and government officials. I feel we knocked it out of the park in keeping the communication flowing, whether it was an afternoon during the work week, or 7 a.m. on a Saturday.

How did Gaylord College prepare you for your future career?

There were the obvious ways, such as writing, editing, etc. The less obvious ways -- and probably as important -- were the anecdotes and experience passed down from not just the faculty and staff, but also from the older students.

What advice would you give to current students aspiring to a career in mass communication?

Easy: go find actual work outside the classrooms! I can't emphasize enough the importance of internships and part-time jobs in the mass communications world as a student. While getting an "A" in any JMC class is a wonderful achievement, future employers will likely be even more impressed by the fact you held a part-time job writing obits at the local newspaper, or helped run mics and wiring for the local TV station. Go talk to the faculty and staff at Gaylord as they can be a big assistance on this, and do it NOW rather than later!

What do you do for fun outside of work?

I'm an avid hiker, having just traipsed through Big Bend and Guadalupe Mountains national parks both since January. In the past few years, I've had some interesting - and literal - highs and lows as I've made it to the top of Mt. Elbert in Colorado, and also found myself having to belly crawl out of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. It seems every time I go, nothing unfolds according to plan: sometimes for better, some for worse, but always interesting. Besides hiking, I am a completely unabashed beer snob, and find myself constantly searching out craft breweries to try different, exotic brews. More than anything else, however, I enjoy getting together to watch OU football with my "patio family" of friends during the autumn.

Are there any other organizations or projects you're involved with outside of your full-time job that you want to highlight?

eventually 19-plus years of service here at the OBA.

Describe your role at the Oklahoma Bankers Association.

After four-plus years as trade newspaper editor and webmaster, I took over for Tiffany Wilken as communications director in 2006 and was named vice president/communications, eventually being promoted to senior vice president/communications in 2019. I'm currently in charge of all aspects of communications at the OBA, including our trade newspaper, website, social media accounts, news releases, being a liaison for the media and training bankers in communications skills.

What do you consider to be the most significant moments of your career so far?

There's been a couple, considering I've essentially lived "two lives" as a mass

In the past, I've always kept busy with various projects or organizations, such as coaching little league football or joining some professional organization or another. I have also taught a JMC 2033 Writing for Mass Communications section in Gaylord since 2006, which allows me to help out current students and keep my own journalistic skills sharpened and up to date. In 2014, I dove into working toward my master's degree, for no other purpose but to prove I could do it and excel at it, so it was an interesting time from then until I got my degree where I was working a full-time job, teaching an evening class and also taking three to six hours of graduate classes each semester. After I graduated with my master's, I've slowed things down and learned to cherish my personal time and realize the importance of sitting in my chair watching an Atlanta Braves game with my wife, or introducing my kids to one of my favorite movies or TV shows of my youth.



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