

By Jack Milko

St. Bonaventure University

M.A. Sports Journalism, '23

Storytelling has mesmerized Dr. Tammy Rae Matthews for as long as she can recall.

The Jandoli School of Communication hired Matthews in 2022 to teach digital and sports journalism through SBU's online master's programs.

In her newfound position, Matthews has already impacted her students. Her lesson plans incorporate journalism practice and research-based content, in-depth analysis and essential readings that resonate and help us better understand our diversified world. After each Masterclass, Matthews answers any questions and offers further insight. I spoke to some of her students who gave the native Chicagoan rave reviews.

Matthews' journalism career origin story began her sophomore year when she was a feature writer for her high school student newspaper. A Chicago Sun-Times south side subsidiary first published an article by Matthews in 2000, her senior year.

She freelanced for Sun-Times publications and worked for the university's Freedom of Information Center while pursuing a Bachelor of Journalism degree from the Missouri School of Journalism at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Her magazine editing concentration bolstered her career. She served as chamber editor for the Chicago Southland Business magazine as well as the director of marketing and communications for the magazine's publisher, the Chicago Southland Chamber of Commerce.

In 2007, the Pioneer Press, the Sun-Times north side subsidiary, hired Matthews to develop community magazines, and she seamlessly undertook an assistant editor role for the paper's Niche Publications department.

Promoted to special sections editor within a year, Matthews supervised the production, editorial, layout and web posting of more than 40 annual publications, sections and magazines. She soon managed the city of Chicago's special section properties and took on the web editor role.

Graduate school enthused her affinity for storytelling and promoting inclusive journalism practices. While freelancing for the Sun-Times, Matthews moved to Colorado and earned her Master of Science degree in Public Communication and Technology from the Department of Journalism and Media Communication at Colorado State University. In her award-winning master's thesis, "Decolonizing Transness in Sport Media: The Frames and Depictions of Transgender Athletes in Sports Illustrated," Matthews examined the historical representations of transgender sport figures and reflected on their implications in sport discourse, sporting organizations and society.

Matthews uses sport's relatable framework as a lens to explore social justice. Her reflection on sport's power expands into international spaces.

To complete her Doctor of Philosophy in Media Research and Practice, with a concentration in Journalism Studies, from the College of Media, Communication and Information at the University of Colorado-Boulder, Matthews wrote her dissertation, “Queering Namibian Sport: An Oral History,” on the lived experiences of and narrated accounts about LGBTI in Namibia, Africa. The oral histories navigated the intersection of media, sport, gender, sexuality, race, community, history and power.

In her research, Matthews promotes globally inclusive sports. In her teaching, Matthews strives to cultivate globally minded students. In both virtual and in-person environments, domestically and abroad, Matthews views classes as newsrooms and students as teammates becoming partners in their collective success.

On the first day of her doctoral school orientation, Matthews had lunch with fellow Ph.D. student, Dr. Tara Grace Walker. Now an assistant professor of communication at St. Bonaventure University, Walker introduced Matthews to this small Franciscan school tucked away in the Enchanted Mountains in the Southern Tier of Western New York.

When Matthews discovered the job opening in the Jandoli School, she enthusiastically applied. Thankfully for us all, she nailed her interview and accepted the position.

Matthews believes that compelling storytelling breeds connection. In journalism, connection breeds novel, valuable and timely story ideas as well as endless job-seeking opportunities. Connection is an essential lesson for students. She encourages her students striving to succeed in modern media to keep their minds tuned into potential content and employers.

“Take advantage of every opportunity,” she said. “You never know where it will go.”

(Jack Milko wrote this in November 2022 for Innovation, the Jandoli School of Communication magazine. At the time, Milko was a Jandoli School graduate assistant and in Matthews’ class, pursuing a master’s in sports journalism.)