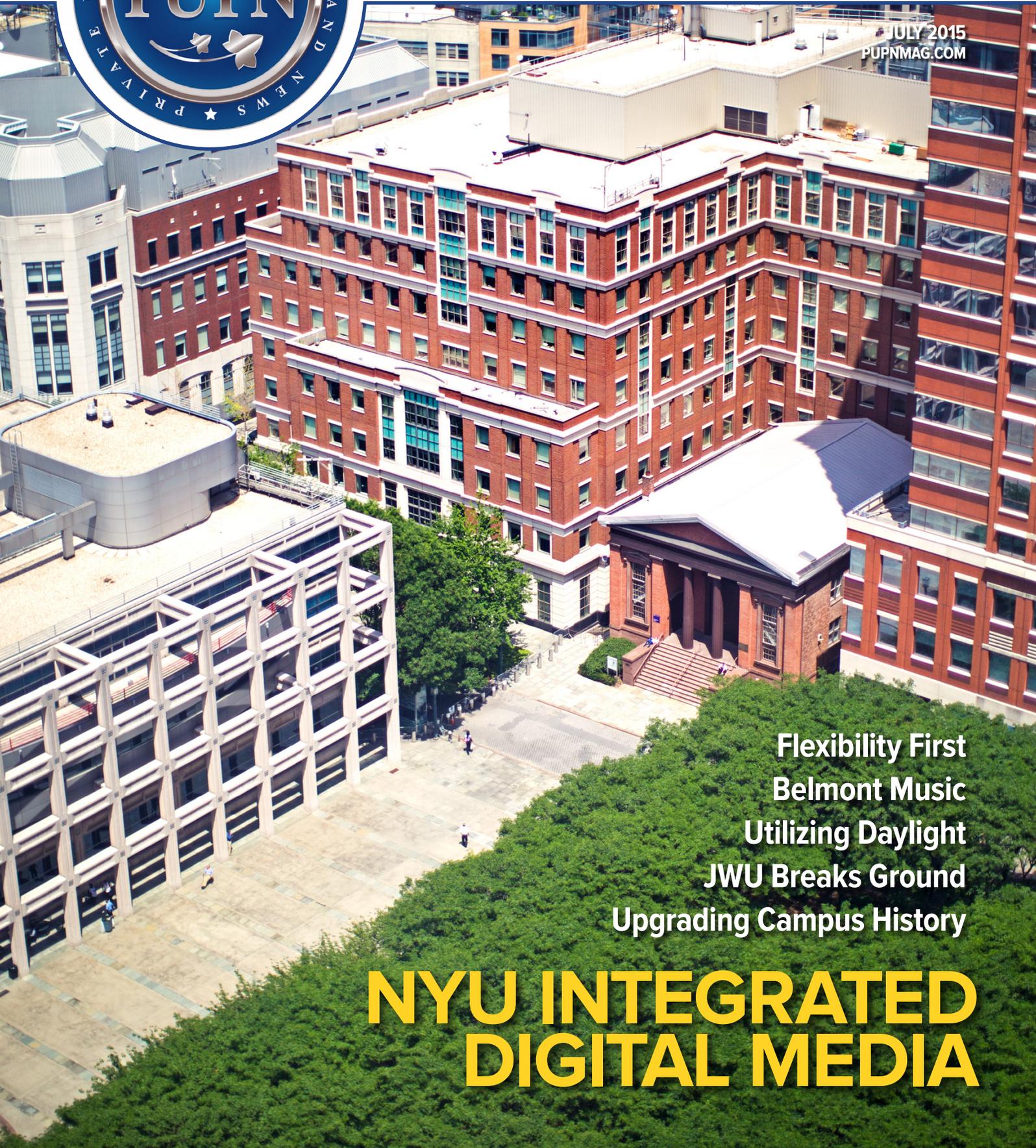




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Flexibility First
Belmont Music
Utilizing Daylight
JWU Breaks Ground
Upgrading Campus History

**NYU INTEGRATED
DIGITAL MEDIA**



28

FLEXIBILITY FIRST

by Wayne Hughes

Inclusion of multipurpose space is only the beginning. Anticipation of future program changes requires more nuanced design techniques and materials selection.



38

UTILIZING DAYLIGHT

by Mark Mitchell

Whether they're custom designed or pre-engineered and pre-assembled, skylights can be strategically placed to offer the highest level of comfort and occupant satisfaction.

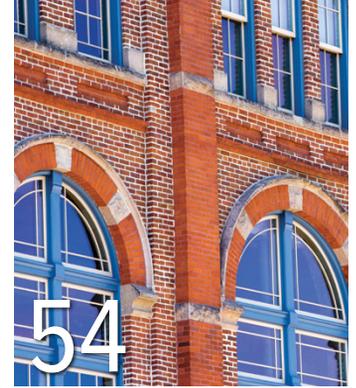


48

JOHNSON & WALES BREAKS GROUND

by Madeline Parmenter

The first shovelfuls of dirt marked the official start of construction on Johnson & Wales University's newest academic building, a \$40 million engineering and science academic center.



54

UPGRADING CAMPUS HISTORY

by Lance Premeau

Replacement of under-performing windows and doors can greatly reduce the operating costs of magnificent structures and assist in bringing back buildings' original architectural intent.



08

PROFESSOR SPOTLIGHT: NYU INTEGRATED DIGITAL MEDIA

by Rachel Clevenger

At New York University Polytechnic School of Engineering, the multi-talented De Angela Duff co-directs a powerful and popular interdisciplinary program in Integrated Digital Media.



14

FLUID-APPLIED ROOFING FOR REPAIR AND RENOVATION

by Rick Thomas

One option to consider for many roof problems is the installation of a fluid-applied roof, which offer systems for a variety of roof types: asphalt, single-ply membranes and even metal.



18

PROJECTING INTO THE FUTURE

by Edgar Jimenez

Like mobile phones and laptop computers, many projectors on the market today deliver quality, reliability and flexibility by being part of a connected and integrated network.



22

FUTURE OF THE MUSIC INDUSTRY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

by Peter Chaikin

Belmont University's audio facilities include the Robert E. Mulloy Student Studios on campus, which contain four professional-quality studios as well as two technical classrooms.

EDITOR'S LETTER

When I was growing up, there was no debate about if I would go to college, and it never occurred to me to imagine otherwise. The question was never if or even when; my group of 80s kids didn't "take a year" to backpack through Europe—you had a summer between high school and college, not an international adventure. The only questions were where I would go and what I would major in, things my parents left for me to decide.

Because I was raised to follow what I loved, rather than ensuring it would be profitable, I ultimately majored in English. My logic was that I could do any number of things with an English degree, and I loved the field. Why not study what I loved the most? This isn't the place to debate whether that would be the most financially responsible decision (it wasn't) or if that field would offer the most job security (it doesn't).

However, even with the hindsight afforded by two decades, I won't say I should have made another decision. I was the weirdo who enjoyed designing elaborate phrase marker trees in Advanced Grammar. I enjoyed all kinds of literature, even the ones I kind of hated at first but grew to appreciate because my professors loved it enough for both of us, until I could find something in it that touched or moved me, even when I had to work uncommonly hard to find that moment. (I'm looking at you, James Joyce.)

Today, I would never advise my daughter or any college-aged students to only follow what they love, though I would beg them not to go into any field just because they imagine it's lucrative. That's no way to live either. However, they have to be practical to some degree. They are going into a very different world than my generation faced, and they have to be able to make a living. That means finding work that offers a decent wage and, ideally, some stability. They also need to be in demand, and they need to be passionate about what they do because they are competing against more of their peers than even before for the coveted slots. It's not enough to just go through the motions—here's my degree, gimme a paycheck. They have to stand out among their contemporaries with their work ethic and originality. They also have to be forward thinkers who are self-motivated and driven.

The relevance of higher education is coming under scrutiny more often now that we are recognizing the absolutely harrowing levels of debt our recently graduated students are encountering. In the 90s, I was newly divorced and a young mother, but I looked at student loans the way anyone should look at student loans—something to help me further my education and get to the next step of my development. I wanted to earn my doctorate, and I didn't let the obvious difficulties seem overwhelming, because the system was set up to support my dreams if I would put in the work. If I had to make the same choices again, today, I would never have taken such an enormous risk.

What De Anglea Duff and others at NYU's program of Integrated Digital Media offer their students is what we all should aim to offer our students—individualized, focused instructional plans that help a student recognize his or her specific career goals. Imagine working in a program where top companies are trying to recruit your students before they even graduate, to know that what you are training them to do is setting them up for lifetimes of meaningful, creative, rewarding work that also offers a steady and reliable paycheck.

We should all be so lucky.

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At the NYU Polytechnic School of Engineering, De Angela L. Duff co-directs a powerful and popular interdisciplinary program in Integrated Digital Media. Before joining NYU, De Angela was the Program Director and an Associate Professor of Design, Art & Technology and Web Development & Interaction Design within the College of Art, Media & Design at The University of the Arts (UArts) in Philadelphia. In addition to her MFA in Studio Art (Photography) from the Maryland Institute of Art (MiCA), a BFA in Graphic Design from Georgia State University, and a BS in Textile Engineering from Georgia Tech, Duff is a designer, web developer, and photographer.

PROFESSOR SPOTLIGHT

by Rachel Clevenger

DE ANGELA DUFF AND NYU POLYTECHNIC SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING—INTEGRATED DIGITAL MEDIA

Intersection of Design, Art, and Technology

At the NYU Polytechnic School of Engineering, the Integrated Digital Media (IDM) academic programs explore digital media in a holistic way, as practices that range from computer programming for app development, software design, game development and interaction design to 2D and 3D graphics for human-computer interfaces, augmented reality and game design to photography, film, and audio

for media installations, performing arts research including motion capture, and integration with various mediums. IDM students are engineers, entrepreneurs, and artists who are training to work in fluid industries that need people who are technical, innovative, and creative.

At its core, IDM is “the intersection of design, art, and technology,” Duff explains. There are core building blocks for the program—Image (whether it is graphic design, photography, video, or 2D/3D animation), Sound, Interactivity (including programming or physical computing), and Narrative/Storytelling. Students are able to combine these four building blocks in whatever combination that supports their career goals, as the program is remarkably flexible and geared to the individual—thus, as Duff explains, each student’s education is individualized.

“My own background is reflective of that,” she adds, as she was drawn to each field that had elements of what she was passionate about exploring, and then she self-taught any elements that weren’t supplied by the program, such as web design and development. In the early 90s, for instance, when the early web browser Mosaic was released, there were no tutorials online, so she just reverse engineered the code, even though she had no prior experience with coding. “I basically just taught myself,” she admits.

Later, while going to school full-time and working full-time simultaneously, she created the first website for Georgia Tech’s College of Computing, and she took every opportunity that came her way to work with new media. Because many of her early professors at Georgia State’s Graphic Design program in the early nineties were unfamiliar with computers, they instructed their students to go “figure it out” in the lab down the hall. Because she could indeed figure it out, this was incredibly empowering for a young student. She is quick to add, though, that she believes her story “isn’t really unique.”

Ultimately, she made the transition from the industry to being a professor, and she acknowledges things are trickier now because there are so many resources and the changes are practically instantaneous,





which means some might want the learning process to be equally fast.

Part of her job is to emphasize for this generation that learning requires “a commitment and a curiosity,” as well as the hours and hours of work to master any worthwhile skill. This is the same drive that makes her conscious of never “watering down” fundamentals just to teach a new and fashionable technology.

Keeping the Core Strong

In the IDM program, students are trained in the foundation classes, and then they choose electives from anywhere on campus or studio electives, which are offered by IDM. They are able to keep a variety of courses offered every semester, so students are able to satisfy their requirements and build a body of work that is personalized to the student and geared to forward the individual student’s goals and long-term life plans. They offer a variety of Special Topics, especially to students in the graduate program, and there are standard studio electives in everything from Sound Design and Documentary Film

IDM students are engineers, entrepreneurs, and artists who are training to work in fluid industries that need people who are technical, innovative, and creative.

to Augmented Reality and Native Mobile App Development. Then, there are ongoing Special Topics in areas like Experimental Game Narratives, Data Visualization, and Wearable Technologies. Another common Special Topics area is found in Ability Labs—for instance, a “Mind’s Eye Redux” course is focused on helping visually impaired individuals use technology to explore MOMA art.

Clearly, this is not a field that stays still for even a moment, and that requires a tremendous amount of curriculum design and redesign, a task many educators would find daunting. Duff, however, has always found constant revision of the curriculum to be something she enjoyed and was drawn too, so staying on the cutting edge of technology isn’t a burden for her—it’s a passion.

Helping Students Evolve

Mark L Skwarek, Lecturer in the IDM program, describes Duff as an amazing coworker. He notes, “She brings great passion and energy to anything she does.” He also mentions that NYU School of Engineering professors are the best in NYC, offering the most cutting-edge courses. Dana Karwas is also a Lecturer in the IDM program. Also praising Duff’s seemingly endless amount of energy and dedication, she finds Duff to be a wonderful leader and mentor whose direct and honest feedback offers countless benefits to students as they “evolve into young professionals living and working in NYC.”

R. Luke DuBois is the other Co-Director of Integrated Digital Media. “De Angela is a terrific colleague,” he explains, “and we’d be completely lost without her.” He praises Duff

for her tremendous focus and commitment to the IDM program's mission and her powerful mentorship of students. He adds, "One of my favorite things about De Angela's engagement with education is that she pushes the students to make, to do, and to engage, as a way to learn to think creatively and critically in the world."

DuBois explains that Duff's efforts go far

beyond "by-the-book, project-based learning"; instead she knows each student's aspirations and astutely reminds them each "where they've come from and where they're going." DuBois finds this ability to keep students on track as they continue through college and onto a graduate degree a rare gift, as students so often struggle to do that for themselves. "De Angela talks often about wanting our students to be

T-shaped individuals," DuBois explains, "in that they have breadth of experience as well as depth of knowledge." He notes that this stance inspires him and all of their colleagues, as something he finds himself checking against to ensure he designs his own classes to stay aligned with those goals.

DuBois adds that many undergraduates are "secretly fascinated" by how Duff manages to stay organized and calm throughout the chaos of the day. He notes that he's the more "typical" example—running around a few minutes late, perhaps forgetting things, looking for items in a "wreck at all times" office. Duff just has a different energy. He is inspired by the way their students can come to Duff's office at any time of the day and unload their stress—just to have her take it in and look at them to say, "I got this with you, and we're gonna figure this out."

Curriculum as a Living Document

DuBois mentions a point of pride for the program (that Duff is the "main architect" for crafting) is their curriculum. Though there may be some fields of study where the same syllabus can get the job done for a few years in a row, this field is not one of them. It is broad and fast moving. He explains you can easily find yourself out of date or—just as problematic—get lost in short-term trends that leave you skimping on fundamentals only because they aren't "hot" in the marketplace culture at the moment.

"That's the challenge with the curriculum," DuBois explains, "to treat it as a living document." He believes this is one of Duff's greatest strengths—her ability to abstract core themes and ideas that need to be covered in IDM from the specific technologies you would use to work in those spaces. This move allows them to protect the core of the curriculum while giving them agility in swapping out new methodologies, technologies, techniques, and workflows.

Another strength of the program, he believes, comes from polling their industry partners—the companies that hire their students—to know the specific tech those students will need to be successful. Though that sounds straightforward and even simple, DuBois explains, "The hard part is keeping the eye on the ball in terms of more abstract knowledge...problem solving, design, critical thinking, creativity. Those are things to be passionate about."

DuBois finds the IDM program to be "at the intersection of engineering and creative practice," meaning students get the best of two worlds: research-active inquiry woven with a mandate to push creative boundaries

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of any technology. “It’s interdisciplinary, complicated stuff, but every civilization uses the maximum level of technology available to it to make art, and creative thinkers are vitally important as drivers and agents of social and technological change,” he explains. “We are creating an environment that offers students a chance to excel and succeed in that space.” At its core, DuBois believes the undergraduate program takes a “holistic, 50,000 foot view look at digital media as a field of interconnected disciplines that are changing under your feet all the time.” As such, their best students are the ones who quickly master navigating that space and learn to “collaborate early and often” as well as “specialize but not over-specialize.”

Creating Creative Citizens

Katherine Bennett is an Adjunct faculty member of Integrated Digital Media and a former colleague of Duff’s from The University of the Arts in Philadelphia, where they worked together for six years. “De Angela is phenomenal,” Bennett raves. “She is someone I really look up to. She holds a hard

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line for her students; she expects a lot out of them. She is creating creative citizens.”

Bennett explains that Duff’s students experience “less of shell shock when they get out there” because Duff works with them as individuals, always helping them stay “wired in to their own educational plan.” She also has trained them repeatedly in how to be productive, how to be creative, and how to find resources—skills that will enable them to succeed regardless of their chosen fields. They are ready for “all the tech and all the creative individual work.” In fact, Bennett recalls that it was hard to keep their students in school sometimes—not because of problems at home but because “they were being recruited at the undergraduate level.”

Bennett adds that Duff is constantly attuned to the success of the students after they graduate and stays heavily involved with the alumni. Because she is a passionate educator who is constantly “seeking insight and resource for self-improvement,” she uses student feedback to alter the program. Bennett mentions that Duff is able to find the time to be reflective and pro-active in adjusting the program on a regular basis because Duff is more than just a

curriculum expert—she made herself a time-management expert as well.

When her friend and colleague grew interested in time management as a practice a while back, Bennett recalls Duff often surrounded with a slew of books on the field, as she worked to put all those practices into effect. Once Duff saw for herself what worked best, she made quick work of training her students in those same practices, something Bennett finds incredibly refreshing in a colleague and an educator. “Everything De Angela does,” Bennett adds, “she thinks about how to share it with others.”

Praising Duff for her selfless nature and endless work, Bennett also stresses that Duff is “incredibly empowering and incredibly demanding.” She shares that when she looks at one of Duff’s thirty-page syllabi, she finds herself learning a lot, even as a professional. She also considers it a testament to her colleague’s skill and motivation that students who fared poorly in the class, even if there were no chance to retake the course, would ask Duff for another copy of the syllabus years later—because they quickly realized there were essential skills missing that were expertly

explained and detailed on the syllabus Duff had provided semesters earlier.

Bennett admits that this is the kind of work that calls for constant energy, devotion, and evolution. Students and educators have to hold themselves to this high standard constantly. In a program like this, she adds, “You don’t just roll in, do your thing, and roll out.” Every year, Duff reverse engineers the program to ensure that students are leaving the program with exactly what future employers will expect them to know. “She’s looking at where students are and figuring out how to get them there,” Bennett explains, “teaching students to be independent and resourceful on their own.”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Rachel James Clevenger, editor of PUPN MAG, earned her B.A and M.Ed. degrees from Mississippi College. After finishing her PhD in Composition and Rhetoric, she taught and served as the University Writing Center Director for Birmingham Southern College and University of Alabama at Birmingham.

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