When Gary Phillips told his sixth-grade students at Legion Park Elementary School in Houma he was planning to start a school newspaper, John Gravois (Summer 1980) begged to be on the staff.

When he started classes at Terrebonne High School B (later to be known as Houma Junior High), the school didn’t have a paper. So as a member of the Student Council he started one.

He did not know at the time that he was preparing for a life as a newspaper journalist, enjoying the glamour and enduring the hard work of employment and deadlines at metropolitan dailies, covering national presidential conventions, campaigns and debates, to say nothing of two White Houses and, through the years, overseeing dozens of reporters.

Although in his early years he was a general assignments reporter, political journalism was always his top choice at metropolitan dailies, such as the Houston Post, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram and, since May, the Houston Chronicle with a Sunday circulation of about 360,000. His new job requires him to direct political coverage of its Washington and Austin bureaus, not from the paper’s Houston headquarters but from Austin.

When the debt-free Chronicle offered him a better job with more security, he resigned from the Star-Telegram in May.

He has come far from his part-time reporting job at the Houma Courier, which paid him 10 cents per column inch but a dollar for each of the many photos he took for the paper. He started at age 16 as a high school junior and continued to work long hours at the Courier through his senior year at Nicholls. Before long he told his editors that he wanted to cover only stories likely to be published on Page One, partly because those earned him 25 cents an inch. And he “loved the thrill of having a front-page byline.”

Gravois’ front-page stories about a “pyramid” scam exploded a lot of illegal, sand-dollar dreams. Some people threatened to show up at his home to kill him, so he spent several nights sleeping at the home of his armed future father-in-law. Eventually death threats became simply threats to “beat me up.”

“That indeed was a stressful time,” he recalls.

Gravois early on was considered primarily a sports writer and statistician, but after covering a school board meeting, he decided he preferred public affairs to sports. Of the many awards he helped the Courier earn, the one he prizes most was a Freedom of Information Award for which every paper in Louisiana could compete, including the Times-Picayune. Most of the copy in the Courier winning entry was by him.

While a full-time student at Nicholls, he worked about 40 or more hours a week for the Courier. When Clarence “Bumpy” Doucet, Courier managing editor and a good friend, died unexpectedly at about age 40, Gravois in 1981 established a Doucet prize for the best reporting in an annual Nicholls contest; initially it paid $100, but for each of the past 25 years or so $200.

Infrequently, Gravois would cut his college classes to cover a story that strongly interested him. He even sold three features to New Orleans magazine to the point that its masthead listed him as a contributing writer. When his faculty adviser warned him about cutting classes to cover Courier stories, he responded by making all As in his senior year.

When Ricardo “Ricky” Wilson (fall 1998), who served two terms as student body president and was elected as “Mr. Nicholls” in 1998, died May 7, 2017, in Dallas. He was a 41-year-old resident of Arlington, Texas.

He was the first African-American to serve as student body president, and one of seven students to serve two terms during the SGA’s first fifty years. He was on the Homecoming Court in 1997. He was vice president before being elected student body president. Ironically, as SGA president, he was entitled to his own free parking space near his office— but he had no car. He was the first football player to become SGA president.

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**SEE WILSON, page 5**
Chiasson retires after 40 years in higher education, will learn fishing

In May Dr. Lloyd Chiasson Jr. retired after 26 years of service to the Mass Communication Department and 40 years in higher education.

“I plan to learn how to be a fisherman,” he says of his post-retirement schedule, adding that he also plans to spend time in the Rec Center.

Chiasson arrived at Nicholls State University in Fall 1991 as a professor of Mass Communication after three years on the faculty at the University of Southwest Louisiana (later to become the University of Louisiana at Lafayette). In 2011, Chiasson was named a Distinguished Service Professor.

During his stay at Nicholls, he was twice selected to be a Fulbright Scholar. In 2008, he taught in Java, Indonesia, at the University of Diponogoro under the program; and in 1999 he taught at the University of Latvia and Stradina University in Riga, Latvia.

In 2001, he was one of four academics selected for a UNESCO-sponsored series of media seminars in Nairobi, Kenya, and Lagos, Nigeria.

Closer to home, he helped the department through four visits by visiting teams from the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications. In Spring 2017, he wrote one section for the self-study under preparation for the visit scheduled for Fall 2017.

He served as chair of the print sequence at Nicholls from 1989 (which was merged into the Journalism sequence with the 2013-2015 Catalog) until his retirement.

He began his reporting career as a sports writer for the New Orleans States-Item covering the Saints in 1970. He worked for other papers in Louisiana and Vermont throughout the 1970s.

Chiasson continued to be a frequent columnist for area papers, including the Nicholls Worth, during his time at Nicholls.

His first teaching position was as an instructor of mass communication at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg.

Chiasson says the most surprising moment of his teaching career came in the Spring of 1990. As he was teaching an intro mass communications course at USL, the vice president of the school walked into the room carrying a plaque.

The students had petitioned the school administration to name Chiasson “Teacher of The Year.” But he adds that anytime a former student recounts a story of how he helped them, “You can’t beat that.”

In a 1995 interview with The Nicholls Worth, Chiasson said he would like to be remembered “as a good teacher; the kind who cared about this students, who wanted them to succeed, and who made a difference in the way they looked at life and themselves.”

Nicki Boudreaux, a Spring 1998 graduate and current faculty member, worked with Chiasson both as a student and later as a colleague.

“As a teacher, he pushed me beyond limits I didn’t even know I had” she said. “As a colleague, he provided encouragement, guidance and humor when I needed it, all delivered with that typical Chiasson charm.”

“Yes, sometimes infuriating and sometimes uplifting, he was always unapologetically Lloyd. I miss him already,” she added.

He received his Ph.D from the Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, in 1982; and his M.A. from The University of Arizona in 1976. He earned his B.A. in Journalism from Louisiana State University in 1970.

He wrote/edited four books on journalism, three on journalism history and one on reporting techniques. That book, which included interactive computer simulations for reporting, was the first of its kind to be marketed nationally.

He published six refereed journal articles and more than 25 book chapters and made more than 20 presentations at regional and national conferences.

Stewart elected to national ASJMC post

James Stewart was elected vice president of the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication this spring. He will move through the leadership ladder of president-elect in 2018-19, then president in 2019-2020.

The ASJMC, founded in 1917, has 190 member mass communication programs at colleges and universities. Its mission is to promote “excellence in journalism and mass communication education.” Stewart has served as editor of the ASMC’s national publication Insights since 2008. He was a member of the ASJMC’s Executive committee from 2004 to 2007.

He was president of the Southwest Education Council for Journalism and Mass Communication in 2006-2007 and chair of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication’s Small Programs Special Interest Group in 1997-1998.
Ray Peters, who completed degree requirements in fall 1977 in what is today known as mass communication, will tell you that he has had a wonderful life and owes a lot of credit to Nicholls State University.

The New Orleanian met his future wife, Diane Sykes of New Orleans, at a Tau Kappa Epsilon spaghetti supper and asked someone to introduce her to him. On the 40th anniversary of their first date, the married couple left their home in Alexandria to celebrate, with the assistance of Alumni Director Monique Crochet, the day that included, among other things, a special meal in a private room in the Nicholls cafeteria.

They married on May 14, 1976, while they were still students. Ahead was a lifelong career for him as director of personnel and human resources for major companies, often with “senior” or “vice president” as part of his job title. He started with Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical in Chalmette while merely accompanying a friend. After an informal conversation with a Kaiser official, he soon found himself on a plane to Oakland for a series of successful job interviews.

In 2000, he joined the RoyOMartin giant timber firm, headquartered in Alexandria, with a workforce of nearly 1,200. Today his title is vice president of Human Resources and Marketing. Between Kaiser and Martin employments, he has had several impressive jobs.

In December 1989 he became director of Human Resources for Copolymer Rubber & Chemical Corp. in Baton Rouge. In July 1992 he became a corporate management officer for the parent company of Copolymer in Harleen, the Netherlands. The Peters family, including son Ryan and daughter Katherine, spent two years in Holland. (Katherine would later become a Nicholls soccer team member, but never got to use the soccer complex, because years passed between its start and completion; she graduated in May 1977 in elementary education.)

At a cocktail party in Holland, Peters, when asked what college he had attended, told of a small, regional University “that you probably never heard of.” “Try me,” his questioner responded. When Peters said Nicholls, the inquirer, presumably a Missourian, said he had heard of Nicholls from Al Delahaye.

After Holland came a stint in Reading, Pa., as senior vice president for human resources with United Companies Financial Corp. During his career he received personal recognition for leadership and pioneering roles in a wide range of professional and civic activities. Not until 2000 did he join the Martin firm and begin working for the timber industrialist and philanthropist.

“Number 13,” as Peters identifies himself with mass communication personnel (he was the 13th graduate when communication arts was a relatively new degree). As an undergraduate, he served on the publications and athletic committees and was a sports announcer for Thibodaux station KXOR and part-time reporter. In 1975 he was a walk-on defensive halfback when the Colonels won the Gulf South conference championship.

He served on the Louisiana Board of Trustees Blue Print Louisiana. He chaired the United Way of Central Louisiana in the year of Katrina. The letters behind his full formal name indicate that he is completely certified in his profession. In fall 1974 as a walk-on he played defensive halfback in a season when the Colonels won the Gulf South Conference championship.

Ever active, Peters received an M.S. degree from LSU in 2016 in human resource education and leadership development. He also co-authored a research article that appeared in a scholarly publication.

Obviously anticipating a career change, he has announced to his organizational leaders his plans to exit RoyOMartin at the end of 2018.
GRAVOIS, continued from page 1

Based on his record and a faculty recommendation from Nicholls, the University of Missouri awarded him a graduate assistantship to pursue his master’s degree.

When the veteran professor to whom Gravois was assigned developed a serious illness, Missouri officials turned to Gravois to take over his classes and workshops. While at Missouri, Gravois attended the school’s Washington, D.C., program and so was not required to write a thesis. There he won the respect of the Post’s Washington, D.C., bureau chief, and that is how the Houman established a beachhead at the Post.

He became the first Missouri journalism student to complete the master’s program in one year. Because the rules have changed, he is also the last.

Shortly after completing his Missouri degree, he married the former Suzanne Roy, whom he had met when both worked at the Courier.

At Missouri Gravois indirectly precipitated a U.S. Supreme Court decision.

As a Missouri Scholastic Press Association judge, he denied the Hazelwood High School student newspaper a top rating because it published few in-depth relevant articles. The next year the staff got so relevant that the principal censored the paper, and the students went to court. Years later the top U.S. court sided with the principal.

At the Post, Gravois covered a broad variety of stories and ultimately outperformed every reporter in the Houston area on a big, big story.

When the Houston Fire Chief dropped out of sight, no one could locate him or explain his absence. Gravois broke the story after Post editors told him to do whatever it takes.

So he went to Seattle where the chief had a home. He soon made friends there with the chief and got an exclusive interview in which the chief “blasted the mayor.”

When the Post assigned him full time to Austin to cover state government, he got yet another scoop: a gubernatorial candidate during an interview told him about having patronized “cat” houses as a young man. “That caused quite a stir,” Gravois remembers.

In time, Gravois persuaded the Post to assign him to its Washington bureau. He covered the last two years of the George H.W. Bush Administration and the first two of Bill Clinton’s.

Soon after his return to Houston he was named Post city editor by the executive editor, who called him “fair and aggressive.”

As a Washington journalist, Gravois witnessed a lot of history as it occurred and the top-level officials who were making it.

The night Bush launched the bombing involving Kuwait, Gravois had to squeeze through anti-war demonstrators to get to the White House gate.

“I was one of the first people to get the specifics of what was taking place,” he says. “It was neat being there.”

Gravois traveled with Bush to Moscow and such far-flung places as France, the Middle East and Egypt. Covering national politics meant reporting on primaries, national conventions, debates and dealing with political press aides and the Secret Service.

He was always on the lookout for stories with Texas and Houston angles. Most of his travels with Clinton were domestic, such as a 1,000-mile bus tour Clinton made to kick off his first presidential campaign.

About once a month he was pressed into serving on press pools, small groups who would be at, say, the president’s side and then report to the overall press corps exactly what had taken place.

Once press-pool member Gravois was with Clinton when he was Christmas shopping at Union Station – and the Secret Service and D.C. police were furious because they had no knowledge that the president was in a dangerous place unprotected.

Pool duty could be interesting or boring or even bizarre, the former Houman says.

Gravois was on pool duty when Bush and Gorbachev signed a nuclear weapons treaty in the Kremlin in Moscow.

The Texas correspondent learned that if he was not careful a “senior administrative source” would use him and others to launch “trial balloons” that, once in print, would collapse with the public unaware that the source had unethically used the press.

In contrast, there were times for fun and no story to write, such as when “I put on a tux and Suzanne a formal gown for the White House Correspondents’ Association dinner” attended by hundreds of famous people, ranging from Candace Bergen to Henry Kissinger.

After covering Washington for four years, during which the number of paid correspondents declined, Gravois was ready to return to Houston.

At age 36 in late 1994 he was named Post city editor.

Some time before the Post folded in April 1995, Gravois got feelers from the Fort Worth Star-Telegram to which he said no.

When the Post went under he was promptly hired by the Star-Telegram.

He started as government and politics editor, later working his way up to deputy managing editor.

After arriving at the Star-Telegram, Gravois’ plan was to remain until his daughter Joy and son Nick were fully grown.

Raising a family while working in bureaus and on late-night desks was always a challenge, but Gravois made the most of it and arranged for family members to tag along to witness history. Joy and Suzanne, for example, were there when he covered Clinton’s inauguration, riding in the presidential motorcade.

While at the paper, Gravois managed an award-winning Austin bureau that featured celebrated columnist Molly Ivins for several years. He also ran the newspaper’s Washington bureau and state desk.

His biggest disappointment during his tenure there came when the Bush-Gore election was in doubt, and the very first copies of the paper to go out gave the nod to Gore.

During his journalism career he also dabbled in book writing, writing “Cajun Family Cookbook” now sold in Buc-ee’s and Cracker Barrel stores in Texas and Louisiana.

Interview subjects may find the soft-spoken, bespectacled Gravois pleasant and harmless. But he describes himself as a cynical reporter, slow to trust a source “and always questioning everything.” •

MACO ’88 alumnus dies


After graduation Thibodeaux, who was born in Houma in 1958, worked for many years as a sports reporter for The Daily Comet in Thibodaux. He earned multiple awards during that time, including being named the 1997 Louisiana Sports Writers Association’s writer of the year.

He was a Bayou Blue resident at the time of his death. He is survived by three sons—Thad Nathan Thibodeaux, Tanner John Thibodeaux and Tommy Austin Thibodeaux—and wife Chelsea Thibodeaux. •
After graduation from St. Augustine High School in 1994, the New Orleans native entered Nicholls on an athletic scholarship as a tight end for the Colonels. Later he dropped out of football because its practice times interfered with his SGA duties.

As a mass communication major, he concentrated on the broadcasting sequence. He served two broadcasting internships, one at WWL. He also worked at campus radio station KNSU. In completing a departmental form, he listed the following as his career goal: “To help change people’s lives positively through the use of the media.”

Soon after he graduated from Nicholls, he worked for First Choice Lending & Mortgage as a loan officer on the West Bank. Ultimately he earned a Master’s degree in education from Concordia University, a private institution in Portland, Ore.

Vice President of Student Affairs Dr. Eugene Dial, who knew Wilson well and worked with him often, recalled him as “a pro-active leader for change who was passionate and persistent about his presidential responsibilities.”

Dr. James Stewart, department head and one of Wilson’s MACO instructors, said, “I always found Ricardo to be a person with strong convictions and the courage to defend them.”

Wilson was generally firm in his policy actions.

During the University’s drive to celebrate its 50th Anniversary, Wilson and the Student Senate complained of anniversary-monument fundraisers, which entailed approaching many student organizations with overlapping memberships.

While Wilson supported the celebration, he so opposed the emphasis on a costly quadrangle monument that when the Senate appropriated $1,000 for the anniversary observance, he vetoed the measure.

The veto stood.

Wilson and the Senate favored an anniversary oak tree. When a university official decided that the tree would be planted near a dormitory, Wilson insisted that the tree had to be planted where the maximum number of students would see it.

Ultimately, Wilson and then-president Donald Ayo would ceremoniously plant a sapling in the quadrangle and unveil a brass plaque explaining in detail what the tree and all its components symbolize.

Years later on a visit to campus Wilson would visit the oak and fondly note its growth in the heart of campus.

Among his survivors are his mother, daughter and fraternal twins. Wilson’s funeral was on May 20 at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church in New Orleans.

Spring 2017 Kappa Tau Alpha inductees

- Amber Burton
- Jenna Quick
- Sarah Zeringue
- Taylor Gautreaux

MACO graduates combined for four awards in the Mississippi-Louisiana competition

Awards winners were: Kelly McElroy (fall 2003), two third place Sports Enterprise/Feature for his stories “Local man in running to grace front of national magazine” and “Game Changer: Local Coaches Offer Insight into Pat Summitt’s Life, Impact;” and Bridget Mires (spring 2013), two second place Investigative/Public Service for “Deadly Standoff” and “Stuck in Jail” (both with Maki Somosot).

2017 MACO Award Winners

- Sara Zeringue
- Katelyn Smith
- Paige Thomas

Pictured above are the MACO award winners from the Arts and Sciences banquet in April. From left are Sara Zeringue, winner of the Outstanding Public Relations Graduate Award; Deanté Baham, Delahaye Award winner as Outstanding MACO Graduate; and Ana Pizzolio, who received the award for Outstanding Journalism and Clarence Doucet Reporting Award. Zeringue also received recognition as a Nicholls Hall of Fame inductee. Nine MACO students—Amber Burton, Angelie Gaspard, Tatum Gehbauer, Rachel Klaus, Caroline Marcello, Ana Pizzolio, Erica Reed, Katelyn Smith and Paige Thomas—were recognized for selection in Who’s Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges.
Departmental snap shots

Pictured from left above are Dr. Linda Martin, assistant professor of Mass Communication; Mark Plaisance, a Nicholls Communication Arts graduate who successfully argued Miller Montgomery v. State of Louisiana before the U.S. Supreme Court in 2015; Bruce Simpson, retired Louisiana district court judge; Joseph “Rusty” Thysell Jr., government professor; and Nicki Boudreaux, instructor of Mass Communication. They served on a panel entitled “Free Expression and the Constitution” Sept. 18 in honor of Constitution Week.

Mass Communication Assistant Professor Lance Arnold (left) and departmental Administrative Assistant Marnya Forbes (center) greet students in the lobby of Talbot Hall at the September Majors and Minors Fair.

Mass Communication Assistant Professor Lance Arnold (right) gives students a tour of newly renovated green-screen television set in the Bob Blazier TV Studio during the Majors and Minors Fair.
What Maco Alumni Are Doing

JEREMY PERQUE, spring 2003, has been elected partner in the financial, estate and retirement planning firm of Altus Wealth Management. He is a former national Foundation Board member of Phi Kappa Theta. He is a member of the Sunrise Rotary Club of Baton Rouge. He and his wife, Lindsay, and their two children live in Baton Rouge.

DANNY BARRETT JR., spring 2004, since 2015 has been employed by Hinds Community College in Raymond, Miss., as a communication specialist. He is responsible for writing press releases, interviewing outstanding students and examining exemplary programs for longer press releases and helping copy edit college publications, among other duties. For 10 years prior to that he had been a reporter for The Vicksburg Post in Mississippi covering county government and business. He earned eight awards from the Mississippi Press Association and the Associated Press Managing Editors Association of Louisiana and Mississippi. For five years (including during his time as a student at Nicholls) he was a contributing writer for the Times-Picayune West Bank Bureau. He is engaged to Laura Sparks. They live in Bram, Miss.

STEPHANIE (DETILLIER) VERDIN, spring 2006, in May joined the staff of the National WWII Museum in New Orleans as senior communications assistant to the president and CEO (Nicholls business graduate Stephen Watson). Her duties include researching, writing and editing correspondence, presentations, reports, publications and other projects. She is the granddaughter of two WWII veterans.

ERIC HAYDEL, spring 2008, owns his own interior design firm in Boston.

CLYDE VERDIN, spring 2008, in June was named the sports social media producer for NOLA Media Group, which operates NOLA.com and The Times-Picayune.

LAUREN MYERS LEGER (RIDINGER), fall 2009, has been working as a paralegal for a partner at Seale, Smith, Zuber and Barnette law firm in Baton Rouge since December.

PHILLIP BOUDREAUX, spring 2012, had been a multimedia journalist with News 15 (a Fox and NBC affiliate) in Lafayette since 2015.

SARABETH THERIOT, fall 2014, is a photographer for Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla.

MACO high school Journalism Workshop held Oct. 17

Damon Robinson, a 1999 MACO graduate (center), stands with his St. James High School students. Robinson, who is a coach and media adviser at the school, brought 12 to the MACO high School Journalism Workshop Oct. 17, which had 82 total participants.
What’s new?

Please clip and mail to Department of Mass Communication
P. O. Box 2031, Nicholls State University, Thibodaux, LA 70310
or email james.stewart@nicholls.edu

We, and your fellow alumni, would like to know what’s new. Please let us hear about address changes, promotions, new jobs, awards and any other news which you may wish to share. In addition to news about you, we also invite your suggestions and recommendations as to how we might improve. We particularly want to report marriages and births.