

Alumni Spotlights: Joan Volkmann

Q1. What is your favorite part about your current position, and how did you get to where you are now? I got to my current role after being in the fundraising profession for many years (30 this year!) I joined our College of Liberal Arts and Sciences here at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1995 as a major gift officer, then Senior Director of Development Operations, then Associate Dean for Advancement. Since 2010 I've been in charge of an office of 22 people who conduct fundraising, alumni relations, and special events for the College. I also continue to raise money from individual donors. The favorite part about my current position is the fact that I have a role in literally changing lives. I hire people who are new to the profession of fundraising and teach them how to become successful professionals, and I ask donors to support causes that are important to them and to our College. The results of my work allow faculty to achieve special honors that recognize their outstanding contributions and help keep them at Illinois, as well as allow students to attend Illinois who may not otherwise have access to a college education. It's the best job in the world, and I feel very fortunate.

Q2. What was the best class you took in the communication department and why? Two classes stand out to me to this day: Scott Poole's Small Group Communication class, and Research Methods with Ruth Anne Clark. Scott taught me about working with teams, about how we create meaning through our work in groups, and how best to lead members toward common purposes and goals. Ruth Anne taught me how to be a critical thinker; how to recognize bias in the media, how best to interpret information, and how to assess whether or not reported research findings are valid and/or generalizable. I continue to use the knowledge I learned in both of these classes every day.

Q3. What advice would you give to current communication students about utilizing their time here on campus? Communication is the best department on campus. One can do anything with a communication degree, and I feel it's very important to become involved in the department—to join the Communication Leaders or Association, to get to know professors, to take advantage of opportunities to do internships, and to network with alumni whenever possible. We alumni want to be helpful to current students, as most of us feel that our degrees were significantly important to helping us be where we are today. We are eager to share our experiences if asked.

