

**SCRIPT FOR THE WPSPJ CHAPTER OF THE YEAR CELEBRATION  
ON FEBRUARY 8, 2021**

**7:30 PM**

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: Welcome**

**SPEAKERS: Nicholas Hirshon, journalism professor at William Paterson University**

Good evening, everyone. I am Nick Hirshon, and I'm a journalism professor here at William Paterson University, and the founder and advisor of our campus chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. Thank you so much to all the WPSPJ members and alumni who are attending tonight, as well as our faculty from the Communication Department, our Chair Kara Rabbitt, our Assistant Chairs Dr. Rob Quicke, Dr. Keith Obadike, and Dr. Angie Yoo, our Dean Loretta Mc Laughlin-Vignier, and our Provost Joshua Powers. I also want to thank Brian Gorski for serving as our Zoom tech host!

I arrived at William Paterson in 2016, and as a longtime member of the Society of Professional Journalists, I thought one of the best ways to strengthen the journalism culture on campus was by starting a chapter. Our association with SPJ lends us credibility, and I've used that platform to call upon journalists from some of the biggest news organizations in the country -- CBS, ESPN, the New York Times, ProPublica, the Associated Press -- to speak to our students and let us shadow them at work. I'm very grateful to have spent these past three years working with all those generous journalists and our journalism students.

I never imagined that only three years after our chapter formed, we would be here tonight celebrating our selection as the national campus chapter of the year. I want to put this achievement in context. WPSPJ beat out almost 100 chapters across the United States, including prestigious journalism programs at universities more than triple the size of ours, programs like the University of Minnesota, the University of Oklahoma, and the University of Louisiana. We're on a list of previous honorees that have included the likes of DePaul University, the University of Florida, and the University of Maryland. And we dethroned the chapter at my alma mater, Ohio University's E.W. Scripps School of Journalism, which had been named National Campus Chapter for four straight years.

In other words, this is an award that journalism programs of our size and resources simply don't win. Tonight we are joined by the president of the Society of Professional Journalists, Matthew Hall, who is our keynote speaker, coming to us from San Diego. I want to thank him and all the SPJ board members responsible for recognizing our chapter.

We have a full program tonight, so I won't speak for long. Just one note before we move on: I want to encourage you to stick around till the end of tonight's ceremony, because if you leave early, you're going to miss something very special. I'll let that be a surprise.

For now, I'd like to introduce the president of our campus chapter, John Conlow. John, take it away.

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: OPENING REMARKS**

**SPEAKER: John Conlow, president of the William Paterson Society of Professional Journalists**

Thank you, Dr. Hirshon, and thank you to everyone who's here with us tonight! I'd like to explain why WPSPJ means so much to me.

Ever since I was a kid, I've loved watching Phillies baseball with my dad. He always loved listening to Harry Kalas on the radio each game. I think it was nostalgic for him. Kalas had such a distinct delivery. I still remember his classic call of the Phillies winning the World Series in 2008. I remember trying to imitate him when I was younger. I loved sports and wanted to be a broadcaster. In high school, I was a sideline reporter at the football games and I realized how hard it is to be successful in journalism.

Fast-forward to the spring of 2019. I had been hearing a lot about the William Paterson Society of Professional Journalists, this new organization on campus that was doing all sorts of exciting things, like touring newsrooms and bringing journalists from big-name news outlets to campus. I still wanted to be the next Harry Kalas, so I decided I'd join WPSPJ and see how it could help me toward my career goals. On one special night, WPSPJ traveled to the Prudential Center to watch a New Jersey Devils game from the press box – thanks to the Devils' organist, Pete Cannarozzi, who also works at our university. We also sat alongside journalists at the post-game press conference with the coach. It felt invigorating seeing them do their job made me think that I too could do this one day – just like my dad and I had seen Harry Kalas do countless times. Without WPSPJ, I would have never had experienced this potentially career-altering moment.

I was so grateful for the opportunities that WPSPJ had afforded me, more than any other organization on campus, and so last spring I decided to run for president. I knew that leading the chapter would be difficult. Being on the e-board has made me more responsible and kept me organized. In November, WPSPJ won the National Campus Chapter of the Year, and I was beyond excited. I was so happy that our small state school in New Jersey beat out huge schools across the country. All of the work we had put in --- the discussion series with journalists, field trips to newsrooms, and workshops on interviewing --- had been recognized on the national level.

What I love the most about journalism is how I can share the stories of the people I meet with my audience. I started at our school newspaper, the Beacon, writing about the Pioneers football team. I was so nervous about my postgame interview with the coach. I didn't know what to expect. But I knew I had to do my job to inform the public on something important. It has been such an adventure to learn about journalism because it incorporates many different subjects that you can just learn through reporting and interviewing people.

I'm so grateful that I attended William Paterson at a time when WPSPJ has strengthened the journalism culture on our campus. WPSPJ has prepared me for the real world. I experienced so much that I would've never had in my classes. I'm inspired by every journalist who shares their advice through the Reality Check discussion series. I'm so glad I got to tour the New York City newsroom of ProPublica, an investigative journalism organization.

Being a part of WPSPJ has revealed to me the true purpose of a journalist --- to inform the public of something important. The one person I want to thank the most is Dr. Hirshon. I don't think I would be the same journalist or person without him. He has helped me learn to be more diligent and make sure we all get our work done.

I still think about those nights listening to Harry Kalas with my dad, and my dad encouraging me to get into journalism. As I graduate this year, I know I will never forget the impact that WPSPJ has made on my life. Thank you so much to the Society of Professional Journalists for honoring us with national campus chapter of the year!

[John pauses momentarily for applause]

Now, I'd like to play a video with some special messages from journalists who have worked closely with our chapter in the past few years.

#### **TITLE OF SEGMENT: CONGRATULATIONS**

**[John will share his screen and play a video that presents the speakers in this order: Gilda Rogers, vice president of the T. Thomas Fortune Foundation; and Denis Gorman, sportswriter; Ruth Ross, theater critic.]**

#### **TITLE OF SEGMENT: Transition**

**SPEAKER: Nicholas Hirshon, journalism professor at William Paterson University**

**[Hirshon will call on Passaic County Freeholder John Bartlett to deliver extemporaneous remarks and then he will introduce Christin Rodriguez.]**

#### **TITLE OF SEGMENT: Remarks**

**SPEAKER: Christin Rodriguez, Vice President of WPSPJ**

Thank you, Dr. Hirshon! Good evening, everyone. My name is Christin Rodriguez, and I am the Vice President of WPSPJ. Thanks to all of you for being here tonight to celebrate this accomplishment with us. And a special thanks to Dr. Hirshon and my fellow e-board members. It's been a rough couple of months and things have had to change because of the pandemic, but I'm honored to be part of such an amazing organization and hardworking chapter. I joined WPSPJ a year ago, and I didn't know what to expect. I joined because I had a newfound wealth of time on my hands amid the pandemic, and I felt like I needed to do something with it.

Journalism was always an interest of mine. But seeing journalists in action, with the pandemic and all that has been going on politically and socially, journalism took on added importance for me. I realized that journalism isn't just another profession. It's more than that. Journalism is a vital part of our world and of our American democracy. It's a way to inform those who wouldn't otherwise have access to information. It's a way to learn, to grow, and to protect. It's something that I felt was incredibly important and I wanted to be a part of in a more meaningful way, which is why I joined WPSPJ.

Recently, I wrote a column for the Communication Department's newspaper, the Pioneer Times, which detailed how I felt when we won this national designation, and why it meant so much to me. I hope you don't mind but I'm going to get a little bit personal. Because in my opinion, some of the best journalism is.

For much of my life, I took care of my little sister who has down syndrome and is 7 years younger than I am. Unfortunately, my parents didn't have the money to afford childcare, especially child care for someone who was disabled. My older siblings were involved in after-school activities and so I was tasked with the responsibility of watching my little sister, which occupied a lot of my time. Growing up I didn't really have the opportunity to do very much or be part of anything for very long. All of this is to say that being a part of WPSPJ means a lot to me because I wasn't really able to be part of a team growing up, and I certainly was not any kind of leader. So, to work alongside Dr. Hirshon and my fellow e-board members has honestly been one of the most rewarding things I've ever done. And seeing WPSPJ being recognized nationally, to put it simply, is amazing. I've learned so much about not just journalism, although we do learn a lot about journalism which is incredible, but also about teamwork and leadership, what that looks like and what it can mean. So, again I just want to thank everyone for being here today to celebrate WPSPJ's accomplishment. We are all so honored and so proud.

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: Transition**

**SPEAKER: Nicholas Hirshon, journalism professor at William Paterson University**

[Hirshon thanks Christin and throws to John.]

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: Alumni Messages**

**SPEAKER: John Conlow, president of WPSPJ**

Thank you. As Christin said, we are so proud to be part of WPSPJ. Being part of this tight-knit organization almost feels like a second family. And so this next segment feels a bit like a family reunion! Many students who were involved in our chapter in its early years have since graduated, but tonight many of them are in the Zoom room with us. Let's take a look at some

special messages that our WPSPJ alumni have recorded.

**[Conlow will share his screen and play the video.]**

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: Transition**

**SPEAKER: Nicholas Hirshon, journalism professor at William Paterson University**

[Hirshon thanks John and throws to the Dean.]

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: Remarks**

**SPEAKER: Loretta Mc Laughlin-Vignier, Dean of the College of the Arts and Communication**

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: Transition**

**SPEAKER: Nicholas Hirshon, journalism professor at William Paterson University**

[Hirshon thanks the Dean and throws to the Provost.]

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: Remarks**

**SPEAKER: Joshua Powers, Provost**

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: Transition**

**SPEAKER: Nicholas Hirshon, journalism professor at William Paterson University**

[Hirshon thanks the Provost and throws to Lana.]

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: Announcement of WPSPJ Programs**

**SPEAKER: Lana Scheurle, Publicity Chair of WPSPJ**

Thank you so much, Dean Mc Laughlin-Vignier and Provost Powers. We appreciate all of your support for our journalism program. My name is Lana Scheurle, and I am the publicity chair for WPSPJ. I manage our Twitter and Instagram accounts. We are very excited about winning the Campus Chapter of the Year, but we're not done yet. We're hard at work planning events for the spring semester, and I'd like to talk tonight about some of those programs.

For all the students here tonight who are interested in joining WPSPJ, please join us on Monday, Feb. 15, at 12:30 p.m., for our first general meeting of the semester. Check your inboxes in the next few days for a Zoom link for the meeting!

On Tuesday, Feb. 16, at 8 p.m., WPSPJ will be taking a virtual tour of News 12 New Jersey with anchor Kurt Siegelin, one of our journalism professors here at William Paterson.

And of course we will be continuing our signature events: our Reality Check discussion series with professional journalists. We have been holding these discussions since our very first

semester in Fall 2017, first on campus and now on Zoom, and I'm honored tonight to introduce the slate of distinguished speakers we will be welcoming in Spring 2021.

On March 4 at 6 p.m., we will welcome Christina Carrega, who is a crime and justice reporter and producer for CNN.

On April 7 at 6 p.m., we have Anthony O'Reilly, who is a former editor at Muscle & Fitness. And on April 27 at 6 p.m., we have Will Cruz, who is an executive editor at ABC News.

John is going to share his screen now and have the speakers address you! I hope you all are as excited as we are to hear from them!

[Projection: John will share his screen and play videos of future Reality Check speakers. Play videos in this order: CNN reporter and producer Christina Carrega, former Muscle & Fitness editor Anthony O'Reilly, and ABC editor Wil Cruz.]

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: Transition**

**SPEAKER: Nicholas Hirshon, journalism professor at William Paterson University**

[Hirshon thanks Lana and throws to Matt Hall.]

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: Keynote Address**

**SPEAKER: Matthew T. Hall, president of the Society of Professional Journalists**

[Hirshon thanks Matt and throws to Lismery.]

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: WSPJ Trivia**

**SPEAKER: Lismery Luna, treasurer of the William Paterson Society of Professional Journalists**

Hello everyone, my name is Lismery Luna and I am treasurer of WSPJ. One thing that I love about journalism is the opportunities it has given me to combine my creative talents to report on current events and other topics I'm interested in. I love journalism because I can learn about new things that happen all over the world in a few short paragraphs. But the best thing about journalism for me, is telling stories in another style and editing them.

Journalism has also given me the opportunity to make great connections with industry professionals. I've been able to learn so much from them on what they have done as journalists. Seeing WSPJ grow as a campus chapter and be recognized for its accomplishments as the national chapter of the year is incredible. As a treasurer of WSPJ, I am now a part of a chapter that dedicates itself to help shape and grow the next generation of journalists. Thank you so much WSPJ!

**TITLE OF SEGMENT: Concluding Remarks**

**SPEAKER: Nicholas Hirshon, journalism professor at William Paterson University**

[Extemporaneous remarks to follow.]

Thank you all for coming out tonight, and I look forward to leading WPSPJ to new successes and accomplishments next year.

Have a good night.

**CEREMONY CONCLUDES**