

**Salome Apkhazishvili**

EDMUND S. MUSKIE SUMMER INTERNSHIP ■ CLASS OF 2020

# MY PATH TO BECOME A MEDIA EDUCATOR



NORTHEAST MEDIA LITERACY CONFERENCE, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND, 2019

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# Searching for New Identity

My interest in media literacy education is rooted in reporting on media credibility, fake news, violent extremism, and social media. In 2016, while being a Vaclav Havel Journalism Fellow at **Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL)** headquartered in Prague, Czech Republic, U.S. citizens, so as Europeans, elected new political leaders. New political climate generated new vocabulary, such as 'fake news,' 'alternative news,' and 'disinformation.' As a young journalist, it was extremely disappointing to see how quickly the media was losing trust from audience. I was sure I would not be able to restore media credibility alone, still, I could empower myself through education. During professional fellowship in Prague, I finally decided to move to the USA for my graduate studies in the media literacy field. Moreover, I produced a documentary that targeted the challenges in media literacy education and its importance for developing critical thinking skills. You can watch my documentary "Digital Intelligence in Need" on RFE/RL official Youtube Channel.



The fellowship at RFE/RL ended in 2017. Two months after coming back home, I applied for the Fulbright scholarship. The **Fulbright committee** sent me to the University of Southern Indiana. Upon graduation with MA in Communication, I moved to Chicago, IL, where I joined the **Media Education Lab**, the collaborative community where everyone learns from everyone. Thanks to the huge financial and administrative support from **Edmund S. Muskie summer internship program**, I am finally able to say that I found my professional identity in media education.

# Media Education Lab



media education lab

**Media Education Lab** is a community of educators, media professionals, and researchers. Based in Kingston, Rhode Island and Chicago Illinois. This lab strives to be a leading provider of educational resources, public programs, multimedia curriculum resources and multidisciplinary research agenda. The research at the Media Education Lab intersects media studies, communication, and education. The mission of the Media Education Lab is to improve digital and media literacy education through scholarship and community service. It is founded and directed by Dr. Renee Hobbs, an internationally-recognized authority on digital and media literacy education.

## MY MENTORS

### Summer Internship at Media Education Lab

**Dates: 06/03/2020 - 08/10/2020**

"Once Labster, Always Labster" - that is how I describe my experience at the Media Education Lab. From the very first day of meeting my supervisors and lab members, I knew I found a family where there is no judgment about who you are, what is your background and what you do. Lab is a place where you learn and teach how to learn. Speaking on that, I am beyond honored to work under the supervision of Dr. Hobbs and Dr. Friesem, two leaders in media literacy education.



**DR. RENEE HOBBS**

**Dr. Hobbs** has written as many books as I have read since coronavirus pandemic started. She is a media literacy scholar, advocate, teacher, and media professional. She gave me generous guidance and hope during my internship. She made me believe that one day I can be like her. That is what good teachers do. They are modelling the best version of you.



**DR. YONTY (JONATHAN) FRIESEM**

**Dr. Friesem** is an associate director of Media Education Lab, also professor and director of Civic Media program at the Columbia College Chicago. He made me even more confident in my aspirations to become a PhD student. Other than supervising, he introduced me a large network of professionals based in Chicago. Dr. Friesem He listens carefully, asks great questions and tells you to act. I am grateful of him and his family for kind welcome in their house during my internship.

# ON DUTY

## NCTE MEDIA LITERACY TASK FORCE

I co-facilitated the group of experts to create the policy document for the U.S. English teachers. Other than attending the monthly meetings, I did some research on language arts and media literacy. More specifically, I reviewed the academic databases and selected recent scholarly literature on the topic. After creating the academic sources' digital collection, the facilitator shared the collection with the group experts who themselves used the academic sources for their final recommendations for the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). After working with Dr. Renee Hobbs, the expert-facilitator of the NCTE initiative, I learned how to plan and facilitate the task-force initiatives. Besides, this was great practice in white paper writing.

## PATHWRIGHT PROJECT

Pathwright is an all-in-one design, learning, and teaching platform where everyone is welcomed to design, learn, teach, and manage. Thanks to my internship at the Media Education Lab, I can state that I am one of the Pathwright contributors. More specifically, I helped my supervisor to design the online companion of teaching resources about media literacy and contemporary propaganda. Besides creating the courses through pathwright, I consulted K12 educators, librarians, and media literacy specialists on using the same tool in their work. During this process, I realized that the creative process is something I didn't pay enough attention to. Now I can certainly say that creativity becomes a compelling process once you are given the right tools. Pathwright, to me, was such tool.

## AUDITING CIVIC MEDIA PROGRAM AT COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO

Columbia College Chicago is a private college offering a distinctive curriculum that blends creative and media arts, liberal arts, and business for nearly 7,000 students in more than 60 undergraduate and graduate degree programs. I joined this place as a visiting scholar that enabled me to attend Dr. Jonathan (Yonty) Friesem's online classes in Information Visualization and Truth Lies and Accuracy in The Digital Age. I audited his teaching practice, as my goal is to become a media educator. Along with observation, I developed an understanding of personal branding through digital platforms, such as websites and portfolios. Thanks to these courses, I had an opportunity of meeting Black Lives Matter Chicago chapter representatives, job and internship advisers, and inspiring speakers.

## WHAT IS COMING...

Thanks to Edmund S. Muskie program support, I was able to collaborate with the best organizations and internationally known experts in media literacy. Working at the Media Education Lab ensured that I am a true researcher and a critical thinker who always seeks a big picture. Reflecting on my internship experience and conversations with educators and media literacy professionals, I am setting myself a new goal - applying for PhD program in media education. This is a big step that will grant me with the teaching expertise and enables me to empower others about digital well-being. What's most exciting is the feeling that media educators will be the essential workers in the next couple of decades. As my internship is approaching to end, what should be more exciting moment of getting ready for another chapter in life? I wish myself to keep the endurance and desire never to give up and stay passionate about life goals. As my favorite women leader, Michelle Obama beautifully said in her book, "Becoming is never giving up on the idea that there's more growing to be done."



**Collaboration? Questions? Comments?**

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