Professor’s New Book Connects Geo-social Media to a New Global Middle Class
by Emily Kintigh

Since 2011, Erika Polson, associate professor of media, film and journalism studies (MFJS), has been teaching students to plug into the wider world around them.

Polson’s research deals with connections, highlighting the use of social media to create and reinforce communities of diverse groups of mobile professionals in global cities. Her book, *Privileged Mobilities: Professional Migration, Geo-Social Media, and a New Global Middle Class*, introduces readers to a new generation of expatriates, who – unlike counterparts in previous generations – use digital media to access local social scenes in global cities, building a “global network” that Polson argues is key to social mobility within a new global middle class.

Groups using meetup.com and similar websites organize get-togethers all over the world, and the book shows how participants use these social networks to recreate themselves as “international people” rather than simply living as strangers in a new place—they then use such identities to their benefit both socially and professionally.

Although the digital media landscape changes quickly, Polson believes her book is about much more than a new technology.

The book grew out of Polson’s doctoral dissertation, which began with an ethnographic study of expats in Paris, but grew in scope in later years to include research in Singapore and Bangalore.

“Digital media is so contemporary,” she says, discussing the influx of new research on a topic that was mostly unexplored when she began writing her dissertation. “But my goal is to explore aspects of it that are enduring; to look past what’s new and place things in a larger societal context, and a historical context as well.”

Where journalistic coverage tends to focus on the latest in digital media, about what’s happening now, Polson asserts that scholarship “can put things in a bigger perspective.”

Polson will be on sabbatical during winter and spring quarters. She spent time in Cuba in December 2015, researching cultural changes in relation to the new and growing access to Wi-Fi, and plans to return during her sabbatical. She is also working on an edited book with DU Professor Lynn Schofield Clark entitled *Media and Class in the 21st Century*.

Polson’s focus on connections extends past her research. She also works closely with MFJS students as internship director. Polson seeks to provide students with opportunities for mentorship, encouraging them to be proactive and to explore bridges to a meaningful career. Under her direction, MFJS students are placed in nearly 100 internships every year.

“The fields that students specialize in through our department work well for finding internships,” she said. For journalism and strategic communications majors as well as all MFJS
graduate students who do not write a thesis, this bodes well: serving in an internship is a requirement.

Polson enjoys connecting students with potential internships and mentors: “It’s nice to see them thrive outside of the classroom,” she said.