

FORMER NBC EXEC LEADS BU LA PROGRAMS

Charisse McGhee-Lazarou introduces students to the ways of Hollywood

CHARISSA MCGHEE-Lazarou rose to vice president of primetime programs at NBC as hits like *ER*, *The Cosby Show*, and *Seinfeld* made the peacock proud night after night. Now, as the new director of Boston University's Los Angeles Programs, she will be introducing BU students to the industry, where they hope to find similar success.

"This isn't like becoming a doctor or lawyer," McGhee-Lazarou says. "There is no one way to do it. It is serendipitous, and you need to be willing to talk to everybody about everything. First be good, and then be fearless."

She worked at NBC from 1986 to 2003, and among the people she met was BU trustee Nina Tassler (CFA'79, Hon.'16), who was then a Warner Brothers executive and later chair of CBS Entertainment. The two women worked together on *ER*.

"Charisse's vast experience in the television business affords her a unique perspective on how things really work," Tassler says. "She knows firsthand how to inspire and motivate creative thought and discussion."

McGhee-Lazarou worked with producers to make sure the shows she was responsible for had the best possible storylines, casting, and visuals. She advocated with the studios and the network on budget, promotion, and scheduling, and for pushing content boundaries. Among her favorite shows, she says, are the critically acclaimed *Homicide: Life on the Street* and *In the Heat of the Night* with Carroll O'Connor; she also enjoyed working with Gene Wilder on the short-lived comedy *Something Wilder*.

She worked at Lifetime for two years as a vice president of scripted television, and she spent



Charisse McGhee-Lazarou tells BU students hoping to work in Hollywood, "This isn't like becoming a doctor or a lawyer. There is no one way to do it."

six years in independent production. During that time she took a last-minute offer to teach a class at California State University Northridge. There, she found a new calling—sharing her industry knowledge.

McGhee-Lazarou comes to BU from High Point University, in High Point, N.C., where she was director of the Media Fellows Program and an assistant professor of the practice of communication for more than six years. The job included classroom teaching and gave her a chance to run the fellows program, which regularly sent university students to Hollywood. "I really enjoy having that relationship with students, helping them launch their career and giving them real insight into what the business is like," she says.

BU's Los Angeles Programs provide internship-based experiences in the entertainment industry for students from all of the University's schools and colleges.

The programs have historically attracted students from the College of Communication, but in recent years they've seen increases in students from the Questrom School of Business, the College of Fine Arts, and others. About 200 students a year are spread across the three semesters, 90 percent or more of them undergraduates.

McGhee-Lazarou says she knew of the BU LA Programs and considered them a role model for High Point fellowships. She succeeds longtime program director William Linsman, a COM associate professor of film and television, who died in December 2016.

She is already opening the programs to students from other colleges, and looking forward to making the Los Angeles Programs an integral part of the BU Hub general education program (see page 12). **JB Connor Lenahan (COM'17,'19) contributed to this story.**