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Fall 2021 Newsletter

Inside The Issue:

- [A Year of \(Creative\) Opportunities](#)
- [DEI, EDI, IDEA](#)
- [Two Teaching Contest Opportunities](#)
- [Spotlight](#)
- [VisComm Member Spotlight: T.J. Mesyn](#)
- [Logo Contest: AEJMC 2023 in Washington, D.C.](#)

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From the Officers

A Year of (Creative) Opportunities



Division Chair

Tara Mortensen
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Visual Communications is a division of numerous contests and awards. We have the logo competition, Creative Research, Best of Digital, Innovative Teaching Award and most recently, the 2021 Best of Design contest. These opportunities for the celebration of visuals are valuable for a group comprised of creatives as well as researchers. One of my goals as Division Head is to assess and update all of our contests, and potentially

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resources well and encouraging as many entries and judges as possible. I want to be sure we are both inclusive and efficient. I have developed a working committee to begin this process, but I also am interested in your feedback. What are your ideas for our contests? What's working, and what isn't? Please reach out to me! Also if you'd like to be involved in the committee, let me know.



The most exciting thing about being Head for the 2021-2022 academic year is that we (*knock on wood*) get to be back in person in August. I look forward to seeing you all in Detroit! As the leader of the division, I am interested in continuing to foster diversity, encourage memberships, and continuously improve and streamline our communications. Former Head of the Division, Gabriel Tait, and I are working with Taylor & Francis to AEJMC Headquarters to make exciting improvements to our journal. This was primarily Dr. Tait's project, and we will have more news on that soon.

What ideas do you have for the division?

I think this is going to be a great year, Vis Comm!

Tara Mortensen
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Photo Credit: Michaela Baker

DEI, EDI, IDEA



Vice-Chair
Michael Fagans



Co-Vice Head & Program Chair
Shannon Zenner

This issue's column is from Michael Fagans, Vice-Chair.

I have been fortunate that throughout my professional and academic careers to have had a host of mentors who led by example, encouraged me, pulled me aside, listened to me when needed, and called me on my behavior. I am thankful for them and their insight, especially when they help me get a better sense of where my blind spots are. I have also had to apologize to a colleague this fall, own my mistake, and ask for forgiveness. And I know that I will have to do so again in the future. That is part and parcel of doing the work.

During my second year at Ole Miss we had an incident happen online that caused ripple effects that resonate through our campus and school today. I will never forget the observation one my football-playing students made in class a day or two after the event, "I don't care about the [Facebook] post. I care about those two students." He was absolutely right. We needed to recenter our thoughts and efforts on the students who had been affected. Wisdom, compassion and empathy, voiced by a remarkable young man.

All too often I think that we get caught up in crafting guiding statements, polishing language, and attending meetings. Please do not hear me dismissing this work: It is important to have diversity statements for our syllabuses and to guide our work. That caveat made, I found a recent meeting where we talked about the language in our statement in a small group so much more helpful. Everyone was heard, we could find out what professional and or academic experience informed our use of particular language and most importantly, we could discuss how this would inform our pedagogy and how it could positively impact our students and their work.

One of my current colleagues, Assistant Dean for Graduate Programs Marquita Smith, gave a powerful presentation on "Remixing a DEI Culture" in our Student Union this fall. Two of her statements resonate with me and my continued efforts in this arena. "Culturally responsive service is how you serve others across differences" (Smith, 2021). All too often we seem to expect our students to read and digest the syllabus and then the semester starts to roll. As I get to know the students in my charge (I suspect this is the case for all of us) I get to know them as people, as human beings, and as learners with their particular foibles and strengths. Dean Smith's statement will keep pushing me to work on my own cultural competency so that I can meet and teach my students more effectively.

Her second statement is probably just good life advice: "In order to serve effectively you must embrace your authentic self" (Smith, 2021). The balance for me is being my authentic self AND being culturally responsive AND aware of the politics and culture that permeate our school, our university and our state. There are times I get out "over my skis" or I let some of my California- and New York-informed behaviors get frustrated with Southern processes. I am learning.

I know that this is my season to be a teacher and professional mentor. Now I am working on preparing and maintaining a classroom where ALL of my students can grow and achieve their goals. But that starts with internal and personal growth so that I can see and meet them where they are. Thank you to those of you working in this area of the academy. I would happily welcome comments, constructive feedback and/or new places to look for growth.

Sincerely,

Two Teaching Contest Opportunities



Teaching Chair

Natalia Mielczarek
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Contest deadlines at-a-glance:

Innovations in Teaching: **Friday, January 7, 2022.**

Teaching Excellence Award: **Friday, February 25, 2022**

As most of us headed back to the classroom in person in August, we tweaked and tinkered with our syllabi to accommodate yet another change. Some of us are still teaching online; others have transitioned into a hybrid model. Whatever your modality this year, what has worked particularly well for you in the classroom? Was there an assignment that was a huge success? Have you developed an innovative way in teaching a skill or a concept? What about a fresh approach to group work or class discussion?

Here's your chance to share your expertise and take part in one of the favorite panels at the AEJMC annual conference: **The Innovations in Teaching** (formerly Teaching Marathon) panel. Once again, the VISCOM Division and the Magazine Division are teaming up to host this panel at the 2022 AEJMC conference.

If you have a teaching technique, innovation or exercise that can be shared in about 5 minutes, please answer the following prompts and return them to VisCom Division's teaching chair Natalia Mielczarek by **Friday, January 7, 2022**. Natalia's email is nmiel@vt.edu. Please put "Innovation in Teaching" in the subject line to streamline the submission process.

PROMPTS:

Your name // Your affiliation // Teaching tip title // Technology/AV needs // Teaching tip description:

Entries will be reviewed by the end of January. Those selected to present at the AEJMC conference will be notified shortly thereafter. Questions? Contact Natalia at nmiel@vt.edu.

When I asked my students in news reporting class about qualities that make an excellent teacher, they

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What wasn't, they said, was the teacher's ability to convey the knowledge and/or be kind while doing so.

One student recalled a painful experience that left him feeling inadequate, even though he was just learning some new skills.

"The instructor knew that I couldn't get on their level," he said. "Instead of coming down to my level, they used their arrogance as a tool for fear and control." Needless to say, the class didn't go well.

Another student echoed the sentiment and framed his definition of a good teacher in terms of mutual respect.

"Having a teacher that respects you regardless of your identify has been one of the most rewarding and appreciated experiences that I've had over the past several years," he said. "In an academic position it is easy to create an inequitable and authoritarian relationship with students, but having teachers and professors that understand we are all human, regardless of age difference and educational experience, has allowed me to drive with not only pursuing my degree but also in my journey of self-discovery."

We have scores of compassionate, engaging, respectful and inspiring teachers among us. Please consider applying for the **2022 Teaching Excellence Award** that celebrates not only your knowledge but also your teaching skills, your passion for the field, your engagement with students and colleagues and your innovative skills in the classroom.

The competition has two categories: tenured and non-tenured. I'd like to especially invite graduate teaching assistants to participate!

Winners in both categories will be recognized during the Innovation in Teaching panel at the 2022 AEJMC annual conference.

[Here are the application requirements:](#)

- * Membership in the VisCom Division of AEJMC in the year you're applying
- * A cover letter (two pages max) that highlights accomplishments contained in the package
- * Your CV emphasizing visual communication accomplishments
- * A one-page letter from a colleague or a student supporting the application
- * One syllabus highlighting excellence or innovative practices in visual communication. The winner's syllabus will be posted on the division website.
- * Examples of student work from an assignment in the syllabus.

[Deadline:](#)

Please send all submissions by **February 25, 2022** to VisCom Division's teaching chair Natalia Mielczarek at nmiel@vt.edu. Please include "Teaching Excellence Award" in the subject line to help with the process.

[Judging:](#)

A judging committee consisting of the VisCom Division's teaching chair, head, and vice-head will review and rank the applications and contact the applicants approximately one month after the application date.

Spotlight

VisComm Member Spotlight: T.J. Mesyn

*This edition's Member Spotlight features VisComm's new graduate student liaison, **T.J. Mesyn**. You can submit nominations and self-nominations using this [Google Form](#) or by emailing ivyashe@utexas.edu. We're interested in your research, creative works and teaching tips in an effort to better show off the innovative works of our division. We'd love to publicize what you're up to, so please reach out!*

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Education—past & present

My academic career began “on the banks of the Red Cedar” at Michigan State University with my B.A. in journalism. I love MSU and learning so much I pursued my Post B.A. Teaching Certification in journalism, history, social studies, and English, my M.A. in journalism, and am currently chipping away at my dual doctoral degree in Information & Media and Curriculum, Instruction, & Teacher Education.

SPARTANS WILL

go to school for all the things

Current research & creative scholarship

I’m working on a self-documentary about life with multiple, chronic, invisible illnesses called “Clinically (in)Significant” which will ideally, someday, become an installation exhibition. On the research front I’m working on a visual textual analysis, but I don’t want to say too much...conference submissions will be here before we know it! What I will say is broadly speaking, my research interests center on how visual communication is used in the context of education, but more specifically on visual literacy and history education.



“FIXATION SCREWED”

Teaching experience

I am one lucky grad student and happy educator. The School of Journalism provides me a wealth of teaching experience, including teaching my own section of Writing & Reporting News, and acting as the instructor of record for News Media Law & Ethics, Journalism History, Layout & Design, and this academic year I’m back to teaching Photojournalism—thank you J-School!

I just LIKE to TEACH. Teaching is my FAVORITE

Advice for (other) graduate students pursuing visual communication research

If your research interests and creative scholarship aren’t the “mainstream” in your program, it can feel a little lonely at times. But working outside dominant circles is just as important as operating within them. It’s a great big world out there with room for all of us—do not lose sight of your passions and why you do what you do. Seek out the people who will support and guide you on your journey, be open-minded, trust your gut, and for goodness’ sakes try to get some damn sleep.

What’s wrong with WIERD?
The world NEEDS weird
-Wendy, Walter’s Mom
Spies in Disguise, 2019

Fun fact about yourself

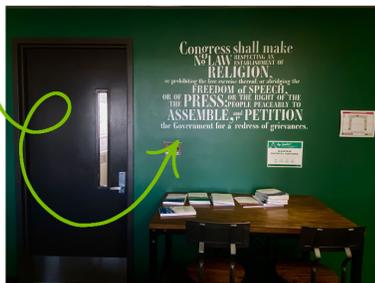
I began a (short-lived) competitive archery career in my mid-30s when I came back to school for my master’s degree. I also earned a spot in a target shooting (rifle) regional qualifier for a TV show on the Outdoor Channel, American Marksman, but couldn’t compete and had to kiss those potential 15-minutes of fame goodbye.

And I have a slight obsession with crafting.



This image DEFINITELY does not tell the WHOLE story ☺

J-SCHOOL LOBBY



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We will once again have a student logo design competition for the 2023 AEJMC Conference in Washington, D.C. The winning student will receive \$100 and their logo will appear on various conference and promotional materials. **The deadline for submitting entries is Friday, April 8, 2022.** [Details are available in the full call for entries.](#)

A logo entered in the contest should represent the diversity of AEJMC and visually suggest “Washington, D.C.” The logo should communicate the conference date and location (*AEJMC, August 2023, Washington, D.C.*) and be legible when scaled for various uses in both print and digital products.

If you have any questions contact Bob Wertz (wertzr@mailbox.sc.edu), this year’s logo competition chair. We can’t wait to see what your students create.

Bob Wertz
wertzr@mailbox.sc.edu

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