

2025 AEJMC Emerging Scholar Projects

Two Emerging Scholar Projects were awarded.

Project 1

Alison Burns, Maryland

“Digital Storytelling as Service Learning in an Undergraduate Media Literacy Course: A Case Study of the Harriet Tubman Byway Project”

Burns is receiving a grant of \$3,500.00



Alison Burns is an award-winning teacher at the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism, directing the Media, Self and Society Scholars program. A former journalist, Burns earned her Ph.D. in 2023 and is researching ways to improve journalism education. Her work promoting media literacy and service learning has been recognized with numerous awards, including the Provost's Do Good Innovator Award and AEJMC's Best Practices in Teaching Award.

Abstract: This proposal outlines a service-learning project designed to integrate digital storytelling into an undergraduate media literacy course. The project aims to provide students with a hands-on opportunity to apply their media literacy skills to address social justice issues and contribute to the preservation of historical heritage. Through a series of immersive experiences related to Harriet Tubman's legacy, students will deepen their understanding of racial justice, history and the power of storytelling. The project will involve two- and three-day trips to Maryland's Eastern Shore, where students in the College Park Scholars Media, Self and Society program will visit historical sites related to Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. On the trip, students will use digital storytelling skills to document their experiences and create media content in collaboration with the local organization, The Harriet Tubman Freedom Center. Through this hands-on experience, students will not only develop practical skills but also cultivate a sense of civic responsibility and learn to use their voices to promote social justice. The project will also include a research component to explore the effectiveness of digital storytelling service-learning projects in promoting media literacy, civic engagement, and social justice. By conducting pre- and post-project surveys, focus groups, and content analysis, the project will gather data on students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills before and after their participation. Grant funding will support guest instructor fees, student travel expenses, and a research assistant to assist with data collection and analysis. The anticipated outcomes of the project include increased understanding of media literacy, enhanced civic engagement, development of digital storytelling skills, and a deeper understanding of historical and contemporary issues of racial justice in the United States.

Project 2

Sisi Hu and Ginger Blackstone, Arkansas, Fayetteville

“Breaking the Stigma: How TikTokers Frame and De-stigmatize Childless Women”

Hu and Blackstone are receiving a grant of \$3,150.00.



Sisi Hu is an assistant professor at the University of Arkansas School of Journalism and Strategic Media. Her research centers on strategic health and science communication using quantitative methods. Topics she has recently examined include narrative persuasion strategies to promote prosocial and collective behaviors, such as organ donation and clinical trial participation. Her research has been published in *Health Communication*, *Science Communication*, *Journal of Health Communication*, *PLOS ONE*, *Health Education Research*, and *Journal of Medical Internet Research*.



Ginger Blackstone is an associate professor of broadcast news and multimedia storytelling and production at the University of Arkansas School of Journalism and Strategic Media. She is a former supervising executive producer for CNN. Her research focuses on news media framing and information acceptance/belief patterns of the public. Her research has been published in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, *Visual Communication Quarterly*, and *Social Media + Society*.

Abstract: Childlessness, whether by choice or by chance, is often stigmatized in a pronatalist society like the United States. This stigma especially impacts women, as normatively, being a woman equates to being a mother (Letherby, 2002). The number of childless women is rising in the United States, yet this group is often underserved in healthcare, medical attention, research, and funding, largely due to the stigma and silencing surrounding them (e.g., Hintz & Brown, 2019). To begin addressing this research gap, this project proposes to explore how TikTok can challenge the stigma against childless women by analyzing its content and its impact on audience perceptions. Guided by framing theory, Study 1 will conduct a content analysis of TikTok videos that discuss childless women. Study 2 will then test the identified frames in a controlled experiment to assess their influence on public attitudes and supportive behaviors toward childless women. Grant funding will afford us the ability to address the urgent need for more research support for childless women by: 1) enhancing our understanding of effective framing of childless women on TikTok and 2) developing frame-based messaging strategies for health professionals to reduce stigma and empower childless women.