

Our Community

The Community Journalism Interest Group Newsletter

Winter 2022

COMJIG hits 100-member milestone, gears up for exciting 2022

By Dr. Christina Smith

As cliché as it might sound, the Community Journalism Interest Group is gearing up for another exciting year. And I am here for all of it.

Hello! I am Christina Smith, and I am serving as Head Chair of AEJMC's Community Journalism Interest Group for 2021-22.

I'm an associate professor of communication at Georgia College in Milledgeville, Georgia, where I've been a full-time faculty member since August 2015. I call Southeast Nebraska home as it's where my people are and where I began my journalism career, writing and reporting for the small-town daily, now weekly, newspaper.



Dr. Christina Smith

While there seems to be constant uncertainty in higher education these days, one thing is for sure – I am thrilled to be the new Head Chair of COMJIG. Beginning in August, the COMJIG council of chairs hit the ground running in planning for the current AEJMC cycle, which concludes at the Detroit 2022 conference. We are particularly enthusiastic about the following current and future initiatives:

COMJIG is now granting free membership to AEJMC-membered graduate students. I am pleased to announce that as of August 2021, COMJIG now registers 100 due-paying members, which allowed us to reach one of our last year's goals. We are grateful to all of our past and present members, and we look forward to welcoming new members, including graduate students.

Vice Head Burton Speakman worked diligently in the fall to attract a variety panel submissions for AEJMC Detroit 2022. I think he succeeded, and the group will host an eclectic slate of discussion topics, including co-partnered panels, ranging from teaching tips on students building communities off campus to students building communities on campus.

At the present, our Research Chair, Aaron Atkins, is preparing for COMJIG's annual conference paper competition. Similar to last year's goal, the group is working hard to solicit at least 25 research paper submission. For the past

few years, we've ranged from 15 to 18 papers, which has kept us to only two traditional refereed sessions. If we can get at least 25 papers submissions, and maintain our 50% acceptance rate, we would be able to return to our tradition of two refereed sessions and a poster session. As you think about conferencing in 2022, we hope you consider submitting, or maybe encourage others to submit, a community journalism-oriented scholarly paper to COMJIG's paper competition.

Social Media Chair, Kyle Miller, is continuing his efforts to revamp the group's social media presence. Upon accepting his new role, Kyle immediately went to work launching an Instagram account for COMJIG as well as rejuvenated the group's Twitter and Facebook pages. We hope you follow us on our socials.

After a year of successful Virtual Brown Bag Lunches, Teaching Chair, Mimi Perreault, is continuing the monthly discussions in order to bring community-journalism enthusiasts together. In the fall, Mimi coordinated a variety of lively discussions on community journalism research, teaching, and industry-related topics. This spring, Mimi will continue hosting the series of virtual brown bag events, and you can learn more about the topics, times and dates in an article within this newsletter.

While COMJIG officers continue to work hard in order to reach goals and promote community journalism scholarship, there are always ideas on the table for the group to consider. In the coming months, the group will discuss adding new award opportunities, including creating a community journalism teaching award that would be presented at the annual conference as well as establishing new awards for presentation at AEJMC's Mid-Winter Conference. Of course, the group realizes there are other ways to build upon the past and current successes of COMJIG, and if you have ideas, please share them with us.

If you have ideas for or questions about COMJIG, please email me at christina.smith1@gcsu.edu. I look forward to hearing from past, present and current COMJIG members, and I confidently speak for COMJIG's Council of Chairs when I say: We hope you join us in Detroit!

COMJIG OFFICERS

Head Chair

Christina Smith

Georgia College and State University

christina.smith1@gcsu.edu

Vice-Head/Programming Chair

Burton Speakman

Kennesaw State

bspeakman@yahoo.com

Research Chair

Aaron Atkins

Weber State University

datkins@weber.edu

PF&R Chair

Joy Jenkins

University of Tennessee-Knoxville

jjenki56@utk.edu

Teaching Chair

Mimi Perreault

East Tennessee State

perreault@etsu.edu

Newsletter Editor

Jeffrey Riley

Georgia Southern University

jriley@georgiasouthern.edu

Newsletter Producer

Holly Cowart

Georgia Southern University

hcowart@georgiasouthern.edu

Webmaster/Social Media Chair

Kyle Miller

University of South Dakota

kyle.j.miller@usd.edu

Midwinter Liaison

Jessica Walsh

University of Nebraska

jessica.walsh@unl.edu

Graduate Student Liaison

Jessie Roark

Ohio University

jroark@ballstate.basu.edu

Letter from the editor

By Dr. Jeffrey Riley

Hey there folks,

This is Jeff Riley. You might remember me from such roles as COMJ head chair and vice chair. While my time at the top has come to an end, I've managed to stick around. For the next year, I'll be serving as the editor for the interest group's newsletter, Our Community, which I'm willing to bet you're reading right now.

We launched this newsletter last year as a way to have a consistent method of keeping in touch with all our members. We managed to publish three editions last year, which we're very proud of. However, now the newsletter is in its second year, and it's time to start thinking about how we can go above and beyond, and how we can allow for more voices to be heard.

One thing you'll notice in this issue is a column from Dewayne Grice, founder of Grice Connect, an experimental digital community news outlet in Statesboro, Georgia. That column represents a new section we're hoping to keep going called "Community Thriving," which will allow folks out there working in the community journalism world to share their stories with us. I knew about Grice Connect because I read it every week to learn more about what's going on around my little south Georgia town. But I don't know what's going on in your neck of the woods (or desert, or plains, or lakes). So here's how you can help: If there's a thriving community news outlet in your area, please tell me about them. You can email me about them (jriley@georgiasouthern.edu) or send me a message on Twitter (@DrRiley_Writes). Once I know about them, I can reach out and see if they'd be interested in sharing their story with us.

Another thing we'd love, moving forward, is a guest column spot. You'll probably notice that there is no guest column in this issue, and that's because I needed to announce it first. So where you see this column from boring ol' me, in the future, I hope that will be filled with the more-interesting y'all. The guest column spot will rotate from issue to issue, with the goal being to allow our own members a space to have their voice heard. If you have an idea for a column – maybe it's pedagogical advice, maybe it's a lingering question you've had in regards to community news research, maybe it's something specific to our place in AEJMC – whatever it is, please let me know by getting in touch via the aforementioned email or Twitter. Let me know what you'd like to write, and I'll make sure to save you space in the next issue.

I'm excited to hear from you – let's stay in touch, yeah?



Dr. Jeffrey Riley

Community Thriving: Grice Connect addresses needs

Grice Connect Supporting Sponsorships

Grice Connect's mission is to be more than just another online media site. The vision of Grice Connect began by identifying community needs our founders discovered in helping lead our community through one of its worst disasters in decades, Hurricane Matthew. This devastating storm brought our community to our knees. Over the course of a week, Grice Connect founders Lori and DeWayne Grice, used their personal online presence to help identify the immediate needs of our community and connect community resources to help meet those needs.

By simply identifying the immediate needs of our citizens and connecting resources to help meet those needs, we all witnessed our community at its absolute best. Since that moment, the Grice's have devoted much of their efforts to building organizations like the Bulloch VOA that brings like-minded businesses, organizations, and individuals together rapidly to meet the needs of our community.

The one area that continued to be a challenge, was identifying a singular, unifying medium locally that would be the one-stop for information and news during a crisis.

From this, Grice Connect was born. It was the vision of the Grice's to have a resource to Connect our community in times of need and to celebrate the community in times of bounty. COVID-19 dramatically changed the focus of Grice Connect. Combined with other local media outlets scaling back operations and resources, Grice Connect became the source of critical health information, with the daily COVID-19 report and other critical news and information. This labor of love and gift to the community has quickly outgrown the duo and the time has come to determine the next steps.

Become A Beacon for Positivity and Connectivity

From the beginning, the goal of Grice Connect was to be a catalyst for positivity and connectivity in our community. Grice Connect does not want to simply share the stories, but to have the ability to impact the stories. By identifying and focusing on our community's weakest parts, together we can connect resources, talent, and attention to these areas and make a phenomenal difference.

There is so much about Statesboro and Bulloch County that make it unique and special. We want to build on this culture of success, leadership and community that defines us.

We see Grice Connect not as the medium, but the tool to help us collaborate and push our community forward. With the proper partners and resources, we will show our community at its best. While providing timely, fact-based, hyperlocal news and information that keeps our citizens



informed and motivated to make a difference.

Not Another Click Bait Online News Model

Traditional news models are focused first on revenue and profit. Because of this, they are pushed constantly to achieve unrealistic growth in a sector that has been badly impacted by its own greed. This revenue-focused model is driven by numbers which include followers, reach, and clicks. In the constant race to increase these we have seen sensationalized, click-bait styles of journalism taking over. This numbers driven model, becomes a model that becomes a place where bad news reigns. It is what we all despise about the current media model. This model also often includes pay wall protected content. This frustrating way of gaining revenue by holding critical community information hostage provides even more frustration to viewers and followers.

Partnerships with Like-Minded Businesses

We understand the traditional news model is broken. That is why we are choosing to do it differently.

Identifying opportunities and challenges in our community as a whole and figuring out ways to make a difference is our focus and mission.

However, we know to be successful and build the operation we need, we must partner with like-minded businesses, organizations and individuals who are philanthropic-minded. Our sponsor partners are the dominate players in their respective field.

They share our vision of connecting, encouraging, and building our community by highlighting our strengths and working together to help improve our weakest links. They understand the importance of investing in their employees and our community.

A model where sponsors are not simply advertisers, but partners in our mission of connectivity and growth. They are not as concerned with immediate return on their advertising investment, as they are in the long-term opportunities our focused mission will provide a collaboration of resources.

See GRICE page 4

COMJIG announces panels for AEJMC Detroit

By Dr. Burton Speakman

As we move closer to seeing each other (probably, almost assuredly?) in Detroit, I'm glad to announce the four programs and partnerships we have for this year's AEJMC conference.

The first panel is Creating an "ace" publication: Serving a niche community through magazine production. We're partnering with the Magazine Division on this PF&R panel and Kyle Miller will be overseeing the panel for us.

The next panel is Reporting the "Real World": Encouraging Journalism Students Toward Off-Campus Stories and Sources. This is a teaching panel we're doing with the Participatory Journalism Interest Group. Marcus Funk is heading up this panel.

The third panel is Relational Journalism at Work in Detroit. This is a PF&R panel that we're conducting with the Minorities and Communication Division. Paul Voakes will be organizing this panel for us.

Finally, we have "If you build it, they will come: Restructuring student media to create a multiplatform collaboration "Field of Dreams." This teaching panel is being headed up by Christina Smith and Kyle Miller. We're partnership with Small Programs Interest Group on this one.

In the next newsletter the hope is to be able to provide more information on some of the panelists for the conference as we get closer to firming everything up and getting our copy to the main office for the program. But it looks to be interesting programming and a good start for the conference planning.

COMJIG is on social media!

Follow our accounts for the latest in division and industry news and information.



Facebook at "Community Journalism Interest Group at AEJMC"



Twitter @AEJMCComJIG



Instagram @comjaejmc

You can also follow the Community Journalism blog at <https://comjig.blogspot.com/>

All of our social media will follow AEJMC organizational social media guidelines.

Hiring announcement

Santa Ana College's Department of Communications and Media Studies is seeking a full-time professor of journalism.

The Department of Communications and Media Studies is home to one of the top two-year community college journalism programs in the country, including the nationally recognized student-run news media organization.

The department is seeking a new faculty member to teach foundational media studies and journalism courses in an innovative program that blends academic preparation with hands-on production.

<https://www.higheredjobs.com/search/details.cfm?JobCode=177750656&Title=Assistant%20Professor%20of%20Journalism>

GRICE continued from page 3

They also understand the value of having a credible information medium in place that can address and lead the community in times of bounty, crisis, or disaster. A medium that does not restrict or discourage viewership, but one that provides information and content in a clean, precise, and easy to use format. A medium not cluttered with ads that distract the reader and does not build frustration that pushes them away.

With our partners support, we will focus annually on three critical community weaknesses and help identify ways we can come together to make a difference.

This year we have adopted three main areas we want to help impact in Bulloch County:

COVID Vaccination/Path Forward

Food Insufficiency

Affordable Housing

With your partnership through sponsorships, together, we will make a tremendous impact on the area we call home.

About DeWayne Grice

DeWayne Grice, a Georgia Southern Alum and native of Claxton, is the founder of Grice Connect an online news and information company in Statesboro, Georgia. DeWayne has been active in the media for over three decades. He began his media career in radio before founding Northland Cable News and Cable Ad Concepts. For nearly a decade he served as Business Editor for the Statesboro Herald. DeWayne brings a unique insight to living and operating a business on Main Street in rural America.

Brown Bag sessions, collaborations roll into new year

By Dr. Mimi Perreault

Thanks so much for all your participation and engagement with the past brown bags this fall. Here are our upcoming Brown bags and topics for next semester. I am still looking for participants to guide these brown bags. Please keep an eye out for more information or feel free to reach out to me- perreault@etsu.edu to get involved.

Community Journalism Collaborations between Universities and practitioners with ISWNE

Jan. 21 at 12:30-1:30 p.m.

Learn about opportunities for practical partnerships and awards with the International Society of Newspaper Editors (<https://www.iswne.org/>)

Registration Link: <https://etsu.zoom.us/join/92856861378?pwd=T3M5ekdVUxPaFJaakdYSjJvdkNldz09>

COMJIG on news-academic partnerships –addressing regional news gaps, integrating practical work into the classroom

Friday, Feb 25, 12:30-1:30 p.m.

Richard Watts will bring together scholars who are addressing news gaps with community-based reporting initiatives. Christina Smith and Lara Salahi will share their recent research.

Registration Link:

<https://etsu.zoom.us/join/92856861378?pwd=T3M5ekdVUxPaFJaakdYSjJvdkNldz09>

The Job Market, for Community Journalism Scholars- Teaching Research and Service

March 25, 2022- 12:30-1:30 p.m.

Scholars will share their experiences on the job market and search committees we will talk about how to prepare. Graduate students are encouraged to attend.

Registration Link:

<https://etsu.zoom.us/join/92856861378?pwd=T3M5ekdVUxPaFJaakdYSjJvdkNldz09>

Applying for Grants to Support Community Journalism Research and Initiatives

April 22, 2022 12:30-1:30 pm.

Learn from scholars who have received grants and about other opportunities for funding. The Institute for Nonprofit News strengthens and supports more than 350 independent news organizations in a new kind of media network: nonprofit, nonpartisan, and dedicated to public service. From local news to in-depth reporting on pressing global issues, INN's members tell stories that otherwise would go untold – connecting communities, holding the powerful accountable, and strengthening democracy. INN programs help these news organizations develop revenue and business models to support strong reporting, collaborate on editorial and business innovation, share services and advance the diverse leaders who are forging a new future for news. Jonathan Kealing strengthens collaboration among INN's network of nonprofit newsrooms and develops partnerships and services that help them meet their missions and increase the reach and impact of their journalism. Jonathan oversees the Amplify News Project among Midwest newsrooms piloting news sharing and distribution models

Registration Link:

<https://etsu.zoom.us/j/92856861378?pwd=T3M5ekdVUxPaFJaakdYSjJvdkNldz09>