

UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI PROFESSOR DEBORA WENGER WINS 2026 BLISS AWARD - BROADCAST JOURNALISM EDUCATION'S HIGHEST HONOR

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The Broadcast and Mobile Journalism (BAMJ) Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) proudly announces the 2026 winner of the Edward L. Bliss Award for Distinguished Broadcast Journalism Education is Professor Debora Halpern Wenger of the School of Journalism and New Media at the University of Mississippi.

A nationally and internationally respected educator, Wenger's career bridges more than two decades in professional broadcast newsrooms and a quarter century in the classroom. Wenger was selected by five previous Bliss Award recipients who laud her record of innovative and experiential teaching, groundbreaking research on the future of local television and AI in journalism, and tireless devotion to her students, her institution, and the profession.

2025 Bliss winner, Sonja Williams (Howard University & Bliss Award Winner 2025), calls Wenger an academic and professional "rock star": "Her impressive national and international career in journalism and in higher education includes the authorship of an influential textbook, book chapters and journal articles, along with her leadership of and dedicated service to her home institution as well as to AEJMC and other professional organizations. Additionally, Wenger's former students consistently describe how she takes an interest in and encourages their professional and personal journeys. As one former student (now a television news reporter) put it, "There are people who teach, and then there are people who change the trajectory of your life. She did the latter for me."

Of those who wrote in support of Wenger's nomination, several noted her lasting influence on their careers, life choices and ongoing mentorship. Mary Rogus, (Ohio University & Bliss Award Winner 2014) says Wenger has been the ultimate teacher since their early days together in TV news. "(Deb) reached out to me as a first-time EP at a company news managers meeting and made me feel comfortable among much more experienced folks. She develops the same kind of lifetime relationship/mentorship with her students and research partners. Both her students and colleagues rave about her willingness to be supportive and helpful throughout their careers. Her service to the profession and teaching/research is unmatched."

2013 Bliss Award winner, William Davie (Louisiana), says what stands out about Wenger's record of accomplishment is her incredible leadership skills in all quarters of broadcast journalism. "Whether she is creating a new course in AI at Ole Miss or teaching professional journalists in Eastern Europe, this Bliss award winner clearly knows how to motivate faculty and guide her mentees towards achievements of excellence."

2022 Bliss winner Bob Gould (Michigan State) recognized Wenger's portfolio as extraordinary. "She is so deserving of the Edward Bliss Award for her dedication to broadcast journalism and passing her knowledge on to young, budding journalists. I have seen her present on panels at BEA, and I always come away with new teaching ideas and information to use with my students."

Service & Scholarship

Through her scholarship and service work, Wenger has made remarkable contributions to broadcast journalism education. She serves on the RTDNA Ethics Committee, has led multitude workshops through the Google News Initiative, conducted journalism training workshops on behalf of the U.S. State Department in Croatia, Slovenia, and Fiji, and has presented her research at major conferences on five continents.

Assistant Dean Emeritus B. William Silcock (Arizona State) spoke to the deeper significance of Wenger's work. "In teaching, scholarship, and service, Dr. Debora Wenger brings global impact, extraordinary energy, and deep collegiality to everything she does. Her career reflects the very tradition Ed Bliss helped establish — where the wisdom of newsroom experience meets the calling of teaching."

Wenger's scholarship focuses squarely on the future of local television news and the integration of AI in journalism education. Two recent articles were among the most cited works in *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* for three consecutive years.

As Editor-in-Chief of *Electronic News*, the flagship journal of AEJMC's BAMJ Division, Wenger helped raise the value of the research to a current impact factor of 1.3 — a reflection of her ability to achieve excellence in all areas of broadcast journalism education. Her Associate Editor, Keren Henderson (Syracuse), framed Wenger's success in the language of the award itself. "Dr. Wenger embodies each pillar of teaching, research, and service connected to this prestigious educator's award."

In testament of her impact in the classroom, Wenger's co-authored textbook, *Advancing the Story: Quality Journalism in a Digital World* is now in its fourth edition with a fifth on the way. Co-author Deborah Potter, herself a former student of Ed Bliss, offered a uniquely personal perspective on Wenger's fit for this honor. "As a former student of Ed's, I believe Deb is exactly the kind of professional-turned-educator that he hoped would be teaching the next generation of journalists."

Bliss Legacy

Named after legendary journalist and educator Edward L. Bliss Jr., this award recognizes individuals who have made a lasting impact on broadcast journalism education. Bliss, a former CBS News producer and editor who worked alongside Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite, later dedicated his career to teaching at American University.

Bliss Award recipient (2012) and former journal editor Robert “Bob” Papper, who knew Ed Bliss personally, put it simply: "There is no question in my mind that Ed would find Deb Wenger an outstanding candidate for an award now named after him.... Deb Wenger is the consummate journalism professor. She's dedicated to the field, to her students and to excellence."

For her lifelong commitment to the very best practices in journalism education, Wenger will be officially honored in August at the AEJMC Convention in New Orleans, LA. Her name will also be added to a special plaque in the Ed Bliss Memorial newsroom at American University. With this year’s award, Wenger becomes just the seventh woman to receive this distinguished honor.

Since 1983, this award has honored journalism educators who have shaped the field. Past winners include Jack Shelly, Iowa State (1983); Ed Bliss, American (1984); Dick Yoakam, Indiana (1985); Henry Lippold, Wisconsin-Eau Claire (1986); Rod Gelatt, Missouri (1987); Mitchell Charnley, Minnesota (1988); Don Brown, Arizona State (1989); Irving Fang, Minnesota (1990); Ernest F. Andrews, Syracuse (1991); Al Anderson, Texas (1992); Michael Murray, Missouri-St. Louis (1993); Joseph R. Dominick, Georgia (1994); Joan Konner, Columbia (1995); Gordon Greb, San Jose State (1996); Travis Linn, Nevada-Reno (1997); Vernon Stone, Missouri (1998); Elmer Lower, ABC, NBC (1999); Ken Keller, SIU-Carbondale (2000); Lincoln Furber, American (2001); James Hoyt, Wisconsin (2002); Phillip O. Keirstead, Florida A&M (2003); Thomas Griffiths, Brigham Young (2004); Peter Mayeux, Nebraska (2005); Bill Knowles, Montana (2006); Jim Upshaw, Oregon (2007); Glenn Johnson, Washington State (2008); Sam Swan, Tennessee (2009); Phillip Jeter, Winston-Salem State (2010); C.A. "Charlie" Tuggle, North Carolina (2011); Robert Papper, Hofstra (2012); William R. Davie, Louisiana at Lafayette (2013); Mary Rogus, Ohio (2014); Mark Harmon, Tennessee (2015); Gary Hanson, Kent State (2016); Ken Fischer, Oklahoma (2017); Lee Hood, Loyola-Chicago (2018); Kent Collins, Missouri (2019); Max Utsler, Kansas (2020); Nancy DuPont, Mississippi (2021); Bob Gould, Michigan State (2022); Laura K. Smith, South Carolina (2023); Stacey Woelfel, Missouri (2024); Sonja D. Williams, Howard (2025)

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