

Viewpoints

The Official Newsletter of the Visual Communication Division of AEJMC

Fall 2001
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AEJMC members competing for pride (and prizes) at the Newseum, in Washington, D.C.

It's A (Conference) Wrap!

by Shawn M. McKinney, Univ. of Texas at Austin
Newsletter Editor/Designer

Not to regurgitate last year's conference wrap-up theme, but it was (again) **hot** this year – this time in our nation's capital. If humidity counts, the temperature was something like 120 degrees by the time I boarded the plane home.

God Bless the D.C. Metro! Maybe it's the my-real-home-is-on-four-wheels Texan in me, but I was overwhelmed by the logic and efficiency of such a system. No car? No problem! Clear, accessible signs spring into view every 100 feet or so, containing helpful, color-coded information. Take it from someone who can actually manage to get lost on his way home from the grocery store – even I figured my way around.

I arrived on Friday, at the Four Points Sheraton. Next morning, I dropped by the Grand Hilton and registered for the Conference. Then I set out, on foot, for the Mall. The Big Green One, not just another generic shopping island in the Consumer Sea. With visions of Lincoln's monument fresh in my head, courtesy of Tim Burton's *Planet of the Apes*, I headed for Abe's bedroom instead. Unfortunately, though the Capitol building does actually look similar to the White House, it's not the same building.

Later, my feet swollen like balloons, I faced an odd sculpture by Roy Lichtenstein. A brightly colored slice of a house stands surrounded by

freshly mowed grass. The house is physically bent in places, by design, but it looks as if the artist wanted the house to *appear* flat, as if the bent parts are merely a trick of perspective. Was I looking at a 2-D or a 3-D house? Were mirrors involved? Was I suffering from heat exhaustion?

The conference kicked off promptly the following morning, a Sunday, at 8:15 AM. For newcomers to the tenure quest, the first Vis Comm session turned out to be of special interest. Panel member, and outgoing Vis Comm Head, Zoe Smith, offered much relevant, if blunt advice. I felt I learned more about how to get (or fail to get) tenure in that single 80 or 90 minutes than in the previous two years.



Photographs by Shawn M. McKinney

Dan Jung and Rachel Elbaum, grad students at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, took "Best of Show" honors in the Best of the Web competition at AEJMC / D.C.

Thus invigorated I sat in on the "Best of the Web." One thing I learned here was how much an instructor can accomplish with the Web when they enjoy excellent Tech support. Top honors ("Best of Show") went to two graduate students from Columbia University. They presented a site addressing the "struggle for the Lower East Side." Roll-over buttons were employed throughout, providing users with sublevels of information, but without cluttering individual pages. Type was distressed in Photoshop (using a "Sponge" tool) to project an "urban look."

In another interesting session, Julianne Newton, University of Oregon, pleaded for visual theorists (i.e., Vis Comm members) to do more visual research. We need a "typology of the visual," Newton suggested, introducing a model for such an approach.

*"Do you want an island of excellence,
or an archipelago of mediocrity?"*

– Michael Gartner

At 7:45 pm, a keynote panel began directing questions at journalism and the educational structures meant to serve it. "Sometimes news is entertainment, sometimes entertainment is news," panelist Michael Gartner reminded everyone. "And thus it has always been." Gartner challenged us, suggesting that journalism education "is necessary – but not for the journalist.... Open your classes to 'readers.'" Janet Keefer, Drake University, wondered "how not to overdrive my professional headlights."

At the Vis Comm business meeting, we elected new officers. Those present discussed continuing problems publishing on the Web. Most Vis

> see *Wrap*, page 8

Letter from the Head



Photographs by John McClelland

Kent Kobersteen, director of photography at National Geographic, in Washington, D.C.



Building on Our Strengths

by Andrew Mendelson, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA

Vis Comm Head

I assume, like me, you are getting back into the routine of the fall semester—having students stopping by to squeeze into your already full class, trying to organize that syllabus before the course begins and making sure the bookstore actually ordered and received all of the books you requested.

It seems a very long time ago that we were all at AEJ in Washington, D.C. Hopefully, you had as great a time there as I did. The Visual Communication division had a very successful convention. One indication of this was the strong turnout at our sessions. Further, we were mentioned at the AEJMC business meeting for the increase in research papers submitted and accepted. Of all the divisions, we offered people more opportunities for refereed work: research papers, creative projects, web sites and the student logo competition.

A number of our sessions were extremely popular and intellectually engaging. More than 50 people attended the presentation by Kent Kobersteen, Director of Photography at National Geographic. He really gave us a great look at the magazine's philosophy on photography. A standing-room-only crowd was at our session on historical portrayals of African Americans and Native Americans. The Smithsonian's Joanna Scherer revealed the stories behind many images of Native Americans, while Howard University's Donna Wells gave us a glimpse of a part of Washington, D.C. that was new to many of us. John King organized a fascinating panel with the photo editor from the Washington Times and three photographers who cover the White House on a daily basis. Finally, Patricia Johnston, an art historian from Salem State College, and Washington Post photographer Michael Williamson discussed the concept of how interpretations of photographs change over time.

Certainly, there are many people to thank for the great convention: Outgoing division head Zoe Smith for her service and for pulling together

many of the guests for the panels and our trip to the National Geographic; Kim Bissell for all her ideas through the year; Kimberly Sultze for spearheading the increase in the research submissions; PF&R chair John King and Teaching chair Brian Johnson for organizing great panels; Jay Anthony for running the creative projects competition; Ray Wong for his work with the student logo competition; Gerald Davey for his work with the Best of the Web competition; all the moderators and discussants for volunteering their time to help make our panels successful; and all of you who read papers for our division for the research paper competition.

This year the other officers and I plan to continue building on the strengths of Vis Comm. Our goals focus mainly on serving division members better by communicating regularly with them and providing many opportunities for refereed work, and by increasing the visibility of our division within AEJ as a whole. Specifically, we plan to:

1. Increase our communications efforts by relaunching the division's web site and getting out more information-filled newsletters.
2. Increase the number of submissions to all our competitions (i.e., research papers, web sites and creative projects) by sending calls to the entire membership of AEJ.
3. Co-sponsor panels with divisions we haven't traditionally worked with in the past.
4. Help organize the AEJ Mid-Winter conference.

This will be an exciting year for Vis Comm, and I am honored to serve as head this year. If you have any suggestions or comments, feel free to contact me (amendels@temple.edu). Also, if you have ideas for the Web site or the newsletter, contact Michael Kennedy and Keith Greenwood (webmasters) or Shawn M. McKinney (newsletter editor/designer).

Remember, Vis Comm is the only division that really sees the world. 

Letter from the Editor

Extend the Body, Free the Mind

by Shawn M. McKinney, Univ. of Texas at Austin

Newsletter Editor/Designer




My youngest brother, Justin, has been trying for years to lure me to the Sierra Mountains, in Northern California, for a bit of outdoor adventure. Yet both of us were surprised when I showed up one morning at the Oakland Airport, in mid-August – fishing rod in hand.

After a hot, dry ride through the Valley ("The Agricultural Wonder of the World"), we reached the ranger station at the foot of the Emigrant Wilderness, part of the Stanislaus National Forest. It had been years since I carried a pack on my shoulders, and I didn't think I missed it. Worried about whether I was bringing the right "this," or enough of "that," about whether my hiking boots were sufficient, and whether my new hat would shield me from the sun, and whether bugs would eat me alive, and whether the weather would hold up, it amazes me that I ever entered the forest.

My brother set a quick pace, one I struggled to equal. Marching forward, kicking up dust and pine needles, Justin pointed out the small, round rocks that could easily twist an ankle. He explained how to identify bear droppings. He wondered why I didn't take more pictures. But as he predicted, after the first twenty minutes, my pack did begin to feel more like "an extension of the body." Nevertheless, not long after that my shoulders began to ache, in surprising places. At the next rest stop, he adjusted my pack, pulling everything tighter against my body. Miraculously, that did the trick. Except he couldn't do anything about my appalling lack of aerobic fitness.

Four miles in, we set up camp, beside (the ominously named) Bear Lake. My brother re-introduced me to tasks I had known well, in a former life. We set up tents, pulled together fishing gear, hung our food (in a bag, from a tree), gathered and filtered water, built a fire, and made tea. These and similar activities were repeated over the next few days. Hiking, camping and fishing – particularly in combination – demand physical labor, another concept I had mostly forsaken.

Every night, under a sky flooded with stars, we ate well, thanks to Justin's ability to create gourmet food with little equipment and fewer ingredients. Everything was so peaceful. Everything was so *real*. Months of stress peeled away. Helvetica? Times Roman? Who cares! The air brushed slowly through the trees. The campfire cracked and popped. Even exhaustion felt right.

Now and then, if you are lucky, for awhile you get to go backwards. It is well worth the effort. 

Photograph by Justin McKinney



Viewpoints

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Research

Understanding Vis Comm Research

by Kim Bissell, Univ. of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL
Vice Head and Programming Chair

At the AEJMC annual convention this year, the Visual Communication Division co-sponsored a research panel with the Entertainment Studies Interest Group titled "Understanding Research in Visual Communication," bringing together visual communication scholars—both junior and senior. The goal was to shed light on some of the issues facing visual communication researchers and elaborate on the breadth and depth of the field. Building on this session, I'd like to present to you the results of my unscientific content analysis of published visual communication research in some of our field's "top" journals.

While I do not like to think about the numerous rejection letters I have filed away in my desk drawer, I can personally say that the quantitative research I have done using visual media has not been well received by the so-called "top" journals in our field. While this division publishes an outstanding journal, *Visual Communication Quarterly*, getting published in *VCQ* alone would not be acceptable to some tenure review committees. Many of us have pressure to publish in specific journals. Yet, if we want to do research that is of importance and interest to us, we may run into difficulty if these "top" journals are not publishing a great deal of visual communication research. I have been told by more than one person to put aside my interest in visual communication research, churn out a few "JMCQ" articles, then come back to research in visual communication once I have met the necessary requirements for tenure. Rather discouraging. An important question is, what kind of luck can visual communication researchers have with mass communication or journalism-related journals that aren't specifically tailored toward visual communication research?

To answer this question, at least partially, I decided to review the journals I had sitting in my office. The point of this was to identify how frequently visual communication research appeared in them.

In six journals, 587 total articles were published in 95 issues. Forty-six articles were in some way shape or form related to visual communication research—this represents 12 percent of the total articles published. Forty-five percent of the 46 total articles were essentially content analyses of television content—news or entertainment.

Here's a breakdown of what I found in the six journals sitting on my shelf:

- *Journalism & Communication Monographs* (1997-2001) published 20 articles; none were related to visual communication.
- *Newspaper Research Journal* (1995-2001) published 103 articles; 6 articles were related to visual communication, representing 6 percent

of its content in that time frame. Some of the topics from this journal were the use of visual communication in public journalism, how digital imaging changes the work of photojournalists, conceptualizing and designing news for the Internet, and high-imagery news language and news recall.

- *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* (1995-2001) published 230 articles, 25 of which were related somehow to visual communication, representing 12 percent of its content in that time frame. I'd like to point out that 12 of the 25 published articles dealt with a content analysis of television. Some of the topics from this journal were picture, audio and video downloads, content analysis of crime on television, sexuality in print advertisements, content analysis of photos of the elderly, web page design, digital manipulation and editorial cartoons published in foreign newspapers.


- *Journal of Communication* (1995-2001) published 88 articles, 9 of which were related to visual communication; 7 of the 9 were published in a special symposium issue. Some of the topics from this journal included a content analysis of television news, the visual aspects of media literacy, editing of television news, design changes in newspapers and images of race relations.

- *Mass Communication & Society* (1998-2001) published 48 articles, 2 of a visual communication nature. One article was a content analysis of television entertainment; the other was a content analysis of television ads.

- *Communication Research* (1998-2001) published 98 articles, 4 of which were related to visual communication. Topics included two content analyses of television news and an article on Super Tuesday and campaign coverage.

While, on one hand, this is encouraging because it does appear as if many of the "top" journals are willing to publish research related to visual communication, a lot of this published research seems to be centered around a few topics and methods—content analyses of television, content analyses of advertisements, and web-related research. This research is certainly important, yet the breadth and depth of our field doesn't seem to be represented here. Of course, I could have been looking in the wrong places. There are certainly numerous other outlets for publication; however, to a tenure review committee, some journals "count" more than others.

I think it's crucial for all of us to keep the dialogue going about important research issues, including how to publish, where to submit, etc. More importantly, it is crucial for us to keep in touch with younger scholars who may need some guidance and/or a mentor as they wade through the tangled web of scholarly publishing.

I welcome your feedback and thoughts, as I hope to have another research session in Miami—Understanding Research in Visual Communication, Part II. E-mail me at: bissell@jn.ua.edu. 

Programming

Panel Ideas Due October 1

by Kim Bissell, Univ. of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL

Vis Comm Vice Head and Programming Chair

Hello, fellow Vis Comm members! As you begin your fall semester this year, I am going to ask you to help me come up with some fantastic ideas for panels for the 2002 convention in Miami. Some of Andy's goals for the division this year include working with divisions we typically haven't co-sponsored with and coming up with panel ideas that can have a Latin American theme. When the Vis Comm officers met on the last day of the 2001 convention, we tossed around a few ideas for panels for next year's convention. I'll include some of those ideas below.

In addition to asking for feedback about some of our proposed panel ideas, I welcome any new ideas you might have for teaching, PF & R, and research panels. The panels co-sponsored by the Visual Communication division this year were a huge success, in part, because of your contributions in the planning stages. I'd like to see our 2002 panels be equally successful, and I can't do that without your help. Please e-mail me at: bissell@jn.ua.edu if you have panel ideas for next year's convention.

A few proposed panel ideas:

- Visual heritages of Latin American communities
- Teaching visual reporting
- Implications of teaching new media in old classrooms
- Teaching diversity in a visual journalism classroom
- Cultural influences on visual media – photo, design, web and color
- Cultural perceptions of the "ideal" body image
- Making cultural connections – incorporating international journalism into the curriculum
- Typography and culture: break on through to the other side
- Censorship of visual media
- Celebrity culture in Latin America

These are just ideas. However, I'd love to hear your thoughts on these ideas. Do you know anyone who would be a great panelist for one of these panels? Do you have any suggestions for re-conceptualizing the ideas above? I'm open for suggestions, and I look forward to hearing from you. ***I need any and all suggestions A.S.A.P., but I must have all ideas by October 1.*** Thanks to everyone! ☺

Teaching

Redesign (in) Your Classroom

by Sam Winch, Penn St. Univ.-Harrisburg, Middletown, PA

Teaching Chair

I'm always looking for new ideas to help me in my teaching, so in this issue of our newsletter, I'm going to share a technique I use. If you have an interesting technique that's worked for you that you'd like to share, let me know and I'll share it with the group.



Photograph by Shawn M. McKinney

Claude Cookman, Indiana University, discussing digital type at AEJMC / D.C.

In my introductory desktop publishing class, I found that having students redesign existing publications is often the best way for them to learn the aesthetics of publication design. After we discuss design principles and some of the things we try to accomplish in design, I ask students to find an example of a poorly-designed publication, and bring it into class. This forces students to look critically at publications they encounter in their daily lives – evaluating the good and bad points of each. They probably don't realize the impact this has on their behavior as media consumers until we talk about that later in the semester, but that is one of the main reasons for doing redesigns – to get students to use critical thinking skills when they look at the visual aspects of publications they use or encounter. Sometimes they'll bring in what others think are well-designed publications, and we'll ask them what they think needs improvement. They soon realize their job is easier if they begin with particularly bad-looking publications. I feel like much of what they need to learn has been accomplished when they demonstrate that they can locate and verbally articulate design principles.

When they submit their redesigns, they're required to submit an analysis of the original, an explanation of their changes and improvements, and a self-critique of their work. I also ask students to present their assignments to the rest of the class, first explaining what they did and why they did it, and then answering questions their fellow students have about their work. These techniques help them build their visual literacy by requiring them to use the vocabulary of design to describe visual elements. By the end of the semester they have the knowledge to thoughtfully discuss and evaluate visual designs. This is the primary goal of this class. Students who want to go on to professional careers in design will take additional courses to refine their production skills.

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For the next issue, I'm going to share my experience last semester with student plagiarism. I'll talk about how to avoid it, how to spot it, and how to prove it. If you have any ideas about this topic – particularly as it relates to visual courses – please email me at: spw10@psu.edu ☺

PF&R

Redefining "Classroom"

by Loret Gnivecki Steinberg, R.I.T., Rochester, NY

PF&R Chair

Just as news media have been reexamining their roles and function in the public arena, higher educational institutions have been rethinking their presence and relationships with local communities.

Our students face some tough challenges. As publications expand or adapt to relate to increasingly diverse audiences, photojournalists need new skills. The public rightfully points out that too frequently stories are developed from a limited perspective. It's no surprise, then, that we're looking at how our students might develop new insight and a deeper understanding of a wider range of subjects that they can carry into their professional work after graduation.



Photograph by Katie Hanna

Meilin Rosario, 18, and her daughter, Cely, two, shop for diapers at the local market. "Cely goes everywhere I go," Meilin said.

Can a student whose entire world is a middle class suburb or a small family and neighborhood learn to understand subjects beyond those spheres? Can you teach students about seeing and expanding their life experiences while you're teaching digital capture, fill flash and how to edit a picture story in a classroom?

You have to redefine the word "classroom."

A project that provides a service to a community group or neighborhood starts to connect the students and the university to the lives outside. Shaping this kind of project and introducing students to people who are prepared for an open dialogue can turn students' gaze outward.

Although it's a term that has become increasingly common, I hesitate to describe my class projects as "service learning." Some people wince at the idea that students paying umpteen dollars for tuition might be giving something away. Are they?

I prefer to emphasize the word "learning."

By taking students to neighborhoods to work with people they might never have met, we can teach the stuff of photojournalism within a human and very real life context. Because the students are working with subjects who represent a wider range of life experiences than they're likely to find on their own, classroom dialogue expands.


The students begin to see how their work affects and is interpreted by the subjects they cover and by the audience looking at their work. As they get to know individuals, they become more sensitive to the potential for stereotyping or misunderstanding people within a group or neighborhood or demographic previously unfamiliar to them.

For over ten years, I've been taking students off campus to do projects that have been woven from the objectives in our curriculum. In one project we worked with boys in a juvenile correctional facility, photo-



Photograph by Jacqueline Martin

"I want to go to college, but I worry about the money," Zory says. "I worry that I'll start something and not be able to finish, you know?"

graphing and writing together while exploring the topic "what it takes to be a man." In another, we photographed and interviewed elderly people in a managed care facility and discussed life changes and aging. I have countless examples – of discovery, insight and revelation – that prove to me that students can learn how to bring untold stories to life. And the excitement and commitment of my students leaves me confident that they can rise to the challenges of the new way we need to do journalism. 



Photograph by Stacey Staibus

Jada Washington says she likes to sit on the porch at her Mom's house where people can't see her but she can see them.

Technology

Our Web Site Undergoes a Makeover

by Michael Kennedy, Zayed Univ., Dubai, U.A.E.

Co-Web Master

The Vis Comm Web site is back, this time with a touch of international flavor.

The new URL is <http://jmc.ou.edu/viscom>.

Created by Keith Greenwood of the University of Oklahoma, Norman, and Michael D. Kennedy of Zayed University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, the site contains familiar links, fully updated and presented in a straightforward way.

"The goal of any Web site is to convey useful information to its consumers in an attractive and easy-to-use manner," Kennedy said. "We believe we have done that. The redesigned site isn't fancy or flashy, but it is attractive and intuitive, and we believe we have provided fellow Vis Comm members with the information they want and need."

Greenwood, an Assistant Professor and Computer Coordinator with the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at O.U., wrote all the code and developed the navigational structure.

Site features include a link to information describing the Vis Comm Division; a list and contact information for the 2001-02 Vis Comm Division officers; a link to the AEJMC home page; a Gallery/Contests link; and a link to Resources, where members can share information with their colleagues. (Note: at press time for this edition of **Viewpoints**, only part of the site was loaded – the home page and the Vis Comm officers page.)

"I'm hopeful that the resource area will be a part of the web site all Vis Comm members will use and contribute to," Greenwood said. "I see it as a great potential resource for class materials, syllabi, reference material developed by members or whatever else the members believe will be useful."

In addition to building the Resource link, the two Web masters also want to develop the Gallery section of the site.

"It would be great to see the creative works of

our colleagues," Kennedy said. "That is exactly the reason for having the Gallery, so we can all see what everyone else is doing. We strongly urge all members who have produced viable creative projects to contact us so we can get them loaded."


Kennedy, an Assistant Professor of Journalism and Visual Communication with the College of Communication and Media Sciences at Zayed, designed all the graphics and shot the photo used on the home page.

"All of our students are U.A.E. national women and we cannot photograph them without written permission from their parents or husbands," Kennedy said. "I had a group of about 14 students whose families had given permission. We were on a set of steps shooting a scene for the university's public relations department that only required three or four of them. When we finished, I turned and saw those two women sitting on the ledge above us, chatting. Fortunately they were among the 14.

"When selecting an image for the home page, I thought the animated way they were using their hands as they spoke to one another conveyed the point of how often we use visual communication in our lives, even when we are speaking. Besides, Khulood (left in the photo) and Sherifa, got excited when I told them we might use it on a nationwide site in the States. So I went ahead with it."

In preparing the new site the men divided the workload, but the site will be loaded on Greenwood's server space at Oklahoma because he and Kennedy were not sure about the reliability of using a server in a foreign country.

The bulk of the site should be active by early October, but with Vis Comm members contributing materials, it's a site that Greenwood and Kennedy hope will continue to grow.

To post any information on the site, Vis Comm members may contact Greenwood at his email address: kgreenwood@ou.edu; or Kennedy, at his: michael.kennedy@zu.ac.ae. 

It's A Wrap

from page 1

Comm members concurred that if you want an article to get published – and count towards tenure – don't even allow it to be reprinted on the Web. Also, outgoing division head Zoe Smith thanked Andy Mendelson for all the work he did putting the convention program together and picking up the slack when Zoe was incapacitated by knee replacement surgery.

I spent much of Tuesday visiting museums, before heading to the main event, at the National Geographic. Late as usual, I had trouble getting past security but finally located the auditorium, where Kent Kobersteen, director of photography, was dealing with technical problems of his own. Later, I boarded a tourbus and was deposited at the local Newseum, sponsored by the Freedom Forum. Here was evidence that "interactivity," done right, can open up hidden worlds and transform education. But before I could adjust to the splashy new environment, I found myself under the bright lights, on a game show panel that tested one's knowledge of current events. Fortunately, the good guys won.


Finally, it was my turn to take the stage. I served on my first AEJMC panel session, entitled, "Teaching Typography in a Digital Age." I also served as moderator. First, Ute Kraidy, University of North Dakota, discussed the impact of computer-generated default choices on page layout designs. Then Kay Amert, University of Iowa, reminded us that typography is a humanistic pursuit, one with a long history. As she insisted, "Letters are at the center of any culture."

I presented a list of ideas for teaching typography on a project basis. And Claude Cookman, Indiana University, compared the conservative typographic approach espoused by many Web-usability experts with the expressive, "design is king" philosophy promoted by other designers. Echoing Web design guru David Siegel, Cookman suggested that "hyper" may also be an attitude – not just a reference to links – on the Web.

"Typography is (now) everybody's business"

– Kay Amert

Jay Anthony, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, organized the final Vis Comm session, featuring "Creative Projects in Print" winners. John Kaplan, University of Florida, was recognized for a slide show of bold color photographs documenting his travels abroad. Patsy Watkins, University of Arkansas, discussed a handmade book she designed and produced, about "hands." Everyone in attendance received a copy.

And then it was over. A last drink with friends quickly turned into dinner, another reminder that Washington, D.C. is as much about dining out as discussing politics or visiting museums. And while centered around panels and presentations, annual conferences such as this one are also precious opportunities to renew old friendships, and start new ones. 

Viewpoints

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
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