Division enjoys visibility at summer convention

By Kim Bissell, University of Alabama
Division Head

I assume the last month has been crazy for all of you, like it has been for me. I know many of you started classes just a few weeks ago, while others have been in full swing for more than a month. Best of luck to all of you as you proceed full throttle through the fall term!

It seems like a very long time ago when we were all at AEJ in Miami. I hope you enjoyed the conference, and I hope you had time to enjoy some of the sights in and around Miami Beach. Our division had a very successful convention, and I am continuing to hear positive feedback from division members about the programming. We had a great showing for many of our sessions, including the creative projects presentations, which was one of the most attended sessions. Our division was very visible this year as we participated in two mini-plenary sessions, plus we had numerous showcase sessions for refereed work: the research paper sessions, the creative projects session, and the best of the Web competition.

Several of our sessions were very popular and proved to be thought-provoking and intellectually stimulating. More than 30 people attended our pre-conference session on the future of interactive journalism. We had seven wonderful panelists who offered us tips for teaching, training, revising the curriculum and thinking about new media in new ways. Our panelists involved in the teaching diversity in the classroom panel spoke to a nearly packed room. Kenny Irby, Visual Journalism Group Leader at the Poynter Institute, shared his “Conditions of Difference” diversity wheel and explained how we can get students and professionals to think more broadly about difference. His “Conditions of Difference” wheel can be found at http://www.poynter.org/dj/tips/vj/difference.htm. Outgoing division head Andy Mendelson engaged those attending the tabloid journalism panel on Saturday and pushed the audience to look at celebrity photography in another way, by thinking about image control rather than issues of privacy. Randall Publishing’s John

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Loret Gnivecki Steinberg photo

Florida's sand and sun offered a serene backdrop to AEJMC's summer convention.

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Michelle Seelig, the new research chair, discusses two areas for improvement.
Last year was good for our division, and I’d like to capitalize on this momentum and continue to improve and strengthen our division.

Last year was good for our division, and I’d like to capitalize on this momentum and continue to improve and strengthen our division. I am excited and honored to serve as head of the Vis Comm division this year. I believe we can have a successful year and an exciting conference in Kansas City next summer, but I can only do this with your help. If you have any suggestions, ideas or comments, please feel free to contact me (bissell@jn.ua.edu). If you have panel ideas for next year’s convention, please contact Kimberly at (ksultze@smcvt.edu) or Shawn at (smckinney@mail.utexas.edu).

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Best,

Kim
Are We Taking Care of Business?

By Sam Winch, Penn State Harrisburg Teaching Chair

Reading the NPPA-L email discussion list, I get the impression that freelance contracts, copyrights and negotiating assignments are the most pressing issues for many professional photojournalists. Students often post questions to the NPPA-L asking for advice on freelance rates. Recently, one asked if it was reasonable to be paid $75 for a day-long assignment that required them to sign over the copyright to the images.

Some responses questioned whether students are being taught anything about business practices in college. This is a good question: Are we doing a good job teaching business practices to our students? I think we have a responsibility to prepare our students for a media marketplace that is increasingly converting full-time staff positions to freelance subcontractor-type positions.

Alicia Wagner Calzada, a photographer and member of the NPPA Business Practices Committee, says a lot of fresh graduates “do not go directly into a job and, therefore, have at least a brief period where they are freelancing.” Calzada says it’s important to educate future freelancers because “without proper education on how to run a freelance business, they are doomed to make mistakes, sign bad contracts and undervalue their work,” which is bad for the profession as a whole.

Obviously, things are changing. Jim Gordon, professor emeritus, Bowling Green State University, says, “I never brought it up when I was teaching. It wasn’t part of the culture.” Gordon says everyone just accepted whatever the publications would pay. But back then, graduates were often getting staff jobs with benefits.

Mark Loundy, owner of Mediaworks, a multimedia production company in California, and business practices columnist for News Photographer magazine, says one of the problems today is that there are too many photographers willing to work for too little money. “Photographers are still living off-site activity or a setting for a social in Kansas City.”

Panel ideas needed soon

By Kimberly Sultze, St. Michael’s College 1st Vice Head and Program Chair

Greetings, Vis Commers. It’s already time to be thinking about our division’s programming for the next AEJMC convention in Kansas City, July 30 to August 2, 2003. I’d like to invite anyone who has an idea for a panel on teaching, research, or professional freedom and responsibility to get in touch with me so we can include your ideas in our panel proposals. I can be reached at ksultze@smcvt.edu.

A reminder: almost all of our panel ideas that end up getting programmed for Kansas City will ultimately need another AEJMC division to co-sponsor. Sometimes it’s useful to keep that in mind when framing a panel idea.

When the Vis Comm division officers met in Miami Beach, we generated a number of panel ideas. In addition, some Vis Comm members have already been in contact to suggest others. A few of the panel ideas that have been proposed are listed to the right.

Your input and thoughts are encouraged. Do you have an idea for a great speaker on one of these topics or an interesting way to refine the conceptualization of one of these panels? I’d welcome your feedback. Or maybe you have suggestions for a new panel or for an off-site activity or a setting for a social in Kansas City.

Please submit all panel ideas and suggestions as soon as possible. I need all ideas by October 10. I look forward to hearing from you!

Proposed Panels

- How Pictures are Not Universal: Lessons from Doing Visual Communication in International Contexts
- Race & Sex in Visual Communication Education (racism & sexism in the academy)
- Preparing Students for the Professional World – with speakers from NPPA
- Issues in Typography
- Teaching Photojournalism, Documentary Image-Making, and Artistic Photography
- Visual Heritage: Great Photography of the Great Plains Region
- Show Me: Environmental Reporting and the Role of Imagery
- Visuals Matter: Incorporating an Analysis of Visuals into Your Research
- Images, Still & Moving: When Photographers Become Videographers & Videographers Become Photographers

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Top Creative Project
by Gerald Grow

In summer 2001, I had a week to myself. I experienced the luxury of being able to ask what I most wanted to do each day. The answer was always the same: I wanted to write about the Rembrandt self-portrait in the Frick Collection.

The portrait seems alive in a remarkable way. In particular, it seems to change as you look at it. The changing light from the overhead skylight brings out different expressions in the face. It has been described as regal, kingly, powerful, monumental, godlike, lordly, forceful, intimidating. Yet in a certain light, you also see what the Frick describes as "a face blurred and eroded by age, sorrows, and illness."

As a way of spending time with this painting, I set out to discover more about how a painting could appear to change as you look at it. Along the way, I tried to visualize what the painting would look like as the light changed. I looked for different, contradictory expressions in the face and sought ways to make them more apparent. Using PhotoShop, I highlighted some of those expressions, to suggest the range of emotional experience the painting conveys.

This was not an exercise. It was a calling. My purpose was not to analyze Rembrandt's painting, but to occupy my very curious mind with as rich an analysis as I could manufacture, so that I could sit at the feet of this painting and, as it were, listen to it.

For more information about Gerald Grow's project, contact him at gerald.grow@famu.edu

In the illustrations above, the amount of brightness is reduced by degrees of about 20 percent in each. Notice how the result is not just a darker version of the same face, but a face in which a different overall expression emerges.

The team takes to the field on a game day. Rob Heller says sharing his experience of creating a photography book has been beneficial for his students.
Surviving Torture
John Kaplan, kaplan@writeme.com
BELOW: More than 125 governments engage in the practice of torture. I traveled to West Africa in July 2001 to document victims of government-sponsored torture in Guinea. The atrocities documented in these photographs are unspeakable. But speak we must.

More Than the Game: The Tennessee Football Experience
Rob Heller, rheller@utk.edu
ABOVE: For the past 15 years, I have shot photographs of the pageantry and culture that brings more than 100,000 people to our campus on fall Saturdays. I realized that I had the makings of a book project. I found a publisher and designed the entire book.

On the Road Again: Photographs Across America
John Freeman, jfreeman@jou.ufl.edu
LEFT: This project focuses on journalistic photographs taken with simple cameras during two years and provided a change of pace from the rigors of teaching. The photographs were taken on business and personal trips.

9-11 Photographs
John Freeman, jfreeman@jou.ufl.edu
RIGHT: While listening to Elton John's song "Believe," I thought of the images my advanced class had captured in the aftermath of 9-11. I compiled a tight selection into a sequence. I matched the images and lyrics to produce a slideshow that had both substance and sorrow.

"Lay down your hand," they said. ... Five were killed in my presence, as if normalcy," said Fayia Mondeh, 51, from Sierra Leone.
By Loret Gnievecki Steinberg, R.I.T.
PF&R Committee Chair

The second day of September, on a quiet morning when many of us were likely preparing classes for the beginning of term, the Vis Comm discussion group’s email delivered a challenge:

“I have noticed at our annual conference that diversity is not one of our strong suits. In fact, the only real differences in color that I’ve noticed among the visual communication group are the seasonal tans and the changing hair color of colleagues.

“Why are we so white? And whose voices are not being heard in the classroom because of this? Can a group of educators who are monochromatic really provide multicultural perspectives to our students?”

Jean Trumbo, who has contributed much to our dialogue about visual communications, posed some pretty heavy questions—not only about the lack of diversity in Vis Comm, but also about bias throughout academia.

Maria Santana saluted Jean for her comments and added, “Some of the designs I prefer are pages that most people will not like. Our business is mass communication teaching, and we have to understand our audience. Indeed, our audience is and will continue to change in color, age and culture.”

The examples she uses in class “don’t always include award-winning entries or (examples) from design books” but come from magazines and newspapers “breaking the norm ... they see differently and take chances. In the future, they’ll win awards and write textbooks. How could they like the same things I do today when their future is still in the making?”

Jean questions the lack of diversity in academic programs and faculty as well as in Vis Comm. Santana extends the question of diversity to include aesthetics and academic assessment.

Does racism enter into either of these issues? In describing the division’s good-spirited group of individuals, Jean declares, “I doubt that we think of ourselves as racist...” But we have come to see that bias can be reflected in supposedly neutral operations like the assessment of work. Women photographers and artists, for example, have long claimed that “female” subjects are taken less seriously than those usually assumed to be “important.”

But different ways of seeing can be an asset. In the January/February 1998 American Journalism Review, Sherry Ricchiardi examined how women photographers in the battlefield have changed the scope of war coverage. Traditionally “male” subjects are still prominent, but they’re being supplemented by stories such as those detailing abuse of women and girls. Ricchiardi explains that women are likely to recognize and have access to different kinds of stories, but also see and frame them in different ways.

But Santana’s comments suggest a harder question—something feminists and people of color have tried to address in relation to the canon of photographic history: Is there a “white” male aesthetic? There has been a lot of writing and analysis of these issues in photography and painting; the short answer so far seems to be, well, yes.

The problem is not so much differences in aesthetics and taste among cultures, genders, classes, ethnicities and even regions, but how attitudes toward these differences influence the established standards, which in turn are those taught in classrooms. Are there different kinds of “good work?”

Bill Johnson, a former director of education at George Eastman House, once said there was no evidence that we’ve missed great works by photographers forgotten because they were women or people of color. But even if the past produced no female or African-American photographers comparable to Robert Capa or Walker Evans, might there not be other visual traditions that could give rise to great work in the future?

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Visit Vis Comm Online

To learn more about the division, visit the Vis Comm Web site at http://jmc.ou.edu/viscom/

Subscribe to the Vis Comm listserv by following the instructions at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/vis-com/
emotionally in the 1940s, when photography was being done for Life magazine, and it was specialized knowledge," Loundy says. "Now, anybody can do photography — it's technically easier and economically cheaper to do."

Loundy says professors should discourage more students from attempting a career in photojournalism. "You don't need to push the romance — they're bringing that with them." He has a point. Some students probably need a good dose of reality.

My own feeling is that photojournalism has always been competitive, and the students not winning awards and getting published know that they will not be getting jobs. Most of my students take photography for the joy of it and aren't burdened with illusions of working full time in photography.

So, what should we be teaching?

Perhaps the best guidance on what we should include in our curricula can be found by examining what other organizations are doing. Editorial Photographers (http://www.editorialphoto.com/), a group dedicated to educating professionals in proper business practices, is a great resource. EP's Web site has copies of handouts and lecture notes from the business practice workshops they offer. They also post guides on pricing, sample contracts and lots of other good information. In addition, their outreach program offers to send trained professionals to come to your classroom to teach these topics for you.

The workshops cover the following main areas:

- Understanding business and contract terms
- Understanding the differences between being an employee and being employed
- Calculating the cost of doing business
- Understanding copyright protections
- How to create the standard "paper trail" for an assignment or contract
- How to negotiate fair contracts

Jean Trumbo, associate professor at the University of Nevada-Reno, says she uses the American Institute of Graphic Arts guidelines, particularly in her upper division graphic arts classes. Trumbo says AIGA's Web site (http://aiga.org) has good resources to help graphic arts professionals write and negotiate contracts and rights.

Joe Sommerville, owner of Peak Communication Performance in Houston, says before you begin negotiating, it helps to know some of the standard rhetoric used by prospective media buyers.

For instance, if they say, "We can't modify the standard contract. Our lawyers won't allow it," then recognize this as the old "good cop/bad cop" routine. Your response should be, "Neither will mine."

And if they say, "When we buy print rights, we automatically get Web rights, too," you should ask: "When your advertisers buy print ads, do they automatically get Web ads for free?"

Teaching our students proper business practices is yet another thing to add to the already packed curriculum, but considering the importance of the future financial well being of our students, we certainly owe it to them. Plus, teaching them the true value of their work is an invaluable lesson in self-respect.

The present climate has begun to encourage a broader notion of what's good and what's bad art, what is important as subject matter and what's not. Santana's suggestion that we consider differences in aesthetics is clearly worth further study and discussion.

And what about the institutions themselves? Access to undergraduate and graduate education was limited through most of the 20th century. Quotas and differences in class, resources, gender and, yes, race presented insurmountable obstacles for those who dared to step out of their assigned "place" in American society. And when women, people of color, and those who had managed to move into academic pursuits from working class backgrounds were standing at the academy's door, the jobs dried up. The student pool was smaller, money grew tight, tenured slots were either not filled or replaced with adjunct or non-tenure track positions. When anyone who overcame the old obstacles managed to get through the door, support systems were minimal or nonexistent.

And the barriers don't have to be overt. How do you compare a candidate who had access to traditional resources to those who didn't? Can you support someone based on potential instead of established credentials? When you're on the outside looking in, all of this can sound like a lot of excuses. It's not an unfair judgment. Even though we in Vis Comm didn't create this exclusive environment, we'll carry it on if we don't become involved now.

But in a larger sense, Jean's question is aimed at too narrow an audience. If we want to know why we're so white, we're not likely to gain insight by asking each other. Turn around, look for somebody who wasn't at any of the Vis Comm presentations or meetings this year. Try to seek out some of the faculty — or people who could be faculty — who represent the diversity we don't have. Then let's start asking each other how these things happen.

Jean said, "I want to understand why such good people in such good places are so damn white." And more importantly, what are we going to do about it?

Indeed.

This topic will continue in the next Viewpoints with some new voices included. If you would like to contribute, please e-mail me at lgfpph@rit.edu
A new focus on increasing student involvement and research

By Michelle Seelig, University of Miami
Research Chair

This year, I had the pleasure of attending my first-ever convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). The convention provided many opportunities to meet with peers and share research ideas. I regret not pursuing AEJMC sooner.

With that in mind, I have two areas I wish to address this year as research chair: graduate student participation and the use of visuals in research. Both of these issues were subject for discussion during our meeting in Miami.

First, faculty need to not only encourage graduate students to attend AEJMC, but also to present their research. There was some discussion in meetings to establish a mentor program. This sounds like something our division should consider. I have been a member of our division for many years; however, it was not until I was a faculty member that I finally pursued attending AEJMC. Most likely, if I had faculty support as a graduate student, I would have been more likely to attend.

Another area of discussion was the use of visuals in research. I must say that I, along with others, have been negligent in this area as well. We as researchers have at times been accused of focusing only on words. For instance, we can be concerned with meeting the desired page length instead of how best to present our research. As the old saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. Why then are so many researchers reluctant to display information visually? Possibly it is ingrained in us when we are grad students to focus on what we are saying, so we often lose sight on how to say it.

This gets back to my first discussion point – getting graduate students more involved. We need to let them know that presenting their work is important. I know if we extend our reach to graduate students, they will make our division stronger in the years to come.

As your newly elected research chair, I encourage you to contribute to our division’s activities during the upcoming year. Please be sure to read thoroughly the next newsletter for all of our division calls and submission guidelines. Please feel free to contact me with your questions, comments, and ideas.

I look forward to serving as your research chair as well as working with our division leaders and members to develop an exciting program of events for the 2003 convention.