

Viewpoints

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The official newsletter of the Visual Communication Division of AEJMC

Notes from the new VisCom division head

By Kimberly Sultze, St. Michael's College
Division Head

At the convention in Kansas City, Visual Communication division panels and sessions explored the lines and the intersections between traditional and digital, between still and moving visuals, between interactive and not-so interactive online news, and between the fine arts and the practical arts.

The changing professional and business landscape for freelancers and staff photojournalists was the focus of the Tuesday evening pre-convention. We learned that the traditional skills still apply, but that people moving into the workforce in the current day may also be asked to 'flex' in different, nontraditional directions. Greg Peters, photo assignments editor at The Kansas City Star, let us know that a critical consideration in determining who gets a freelance assignment is whether the person can transmit photographs via cell phone. Brian Plonka, award-winning photojournalist at The Spokesman-Review, told us that over the next year, he will be asked to shoot video.

At the News for the Next Generation panel on Thursday, Scott Cunningham, Multimedia Technologies Manager at USA Today's Media Lab, asked the audience to consider a Minority Report-style future in which the news follows you. Personal portable electronic devices and news delivery systems that use GPS to identify where in the world you are should make it possible to have the news customized — based both on your current physical location and on your news and information likes and dislikes.



photo by Brian Kratzer

Keith Davis, fine art programs director at Hallmark, showed VisCom members selected prints from the company's extensive photography collection.

The intersections between fine art and photojournalism were explored in our Integrating Art into Photojournalism teaching and research panels on Wednesday and Thursday. Keith Davis, fine art programs director at Hallmark, engaged the audience at the research panel and also led a tour and a contemplation of Hallmark's collection of pristine photographic prints. Speakers on the recent trends in print design panel on Friday outlined the top 10 design trends in consumer magazines; analyzed Japanese influences in contemporary graphic design; and profiled Reiman Publications, an advertising-free, subscription-based, submission-driven magazine empire from middle America.

I would like to thank the many people whose contributions helped

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make the past year — as well as the Kansas City convention — a success: Kim Bissell, our outgoing division head, for her incredible service and commitment to the division over the past four years;

Michelle Seelig for orchestrating all aspects of the research paper competition; John Freeman for organizing the creative projects



Kimberly Sultze

competition; Liz Skewes and Justin Brown for overseeing the Best of the Web competition; Fab Darling-Wolfe for her work with the student logo competition; Loret Gnivecki Steinberg, PF&R chair, and Sam Winch, teaching chair, for their panel ideas and provocative columns; Renee and Brian Kratzer for their outstanding work as newsletter editors; Mike Kennedy and Keith Greenwood for managing our division Web site; and to all the moderators, discussants, and speakers at the convention and to our members who served as judges for the refereed competitions.

At our members meeting in Kansas City, new officers were elected, and you can find their names and contact information in the box to the right. Julianne Newton gave the annual report on *Visual Communication Quarterly*, and we voted to increase division dues to \$20 for faculty and \$10 for students. At the executive committee meeting, two new initiatives were proposed for the coming year. One of them is participation in the **AEJMC division-wide membership drive**. We are looking for any ideas you may have about ways to seek out, find and make contact with people who are not AEJMC and Visual Communication division members, but who should be. Dan Close (Dan.Close@wichita.edu) is our membership chair and will be leading this effort. Please share with him any suggestions you have.

Also, we discussed creating a **directory of division members** on

our Web site. The directory might include such things as a headshot, contact information and areas of teaching and research. Mike Kennedy and Keith Greenwood, our co-webmasters, will be organizing this project. You can expect to hear more about the format and how to submit your information in the next issue of this newsletter.

The Visual Communication division will again participate in the **AEJMC Mid-Winter Conference**, along with Communication Technology and Policy Division, Civic Journalism Division, Media Management and Economics Division, and the following interest groups: Media and Disability, Graduate Education, Entertainment Studies and Science Communication. The conference will take place **Feb. 27-29 at Rutgers University**. Watch for more information about the conference and the call for abstracts on the listserv and coming to you in the mail.

Division members who attended last year's Mid-Winter Conference at the University of Colorado in Boulder had an outstanding time (very fine discussions, very fine dining, and yes, very fine skiing.) Thanks again to Kim Bissell for coordinating the division's participation in that event. For questions about this year's Mid-Winter Conference, contact Second Vice Head Michelle Seelig (mseelig@miami.edu) who is organizing this year's conference.

I am looking forward to serving the division this year. Please contact me with your suggestions for the coming year (ksultze@smcvt.edu). As usual, many people's energies are currently being focused on planning for the next convention in **Toronto, Aug. 4-7, 2004**. We have already generated some excellent panel concepts on the listserv. Please keep them coming. If you have panel ideas or suggestions for speakers, send them to Jean Trumbo (jmtrumbo@earthlink.net) or Michelle Seelig (mseelig@miami.edu.) by Oct. 8.

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Researching Convergence from a Visual Perspective

By Edgar Huang
University of South Florida
Research Chair

Media convergence became an unprecedented hot topic at the AEJMC conference held in Kansas City this summer. Four teaching panels, three paper sessions and one workshop had media convergence as the theme. Among all the research interests on convergence addressed at the conference, research on the relationship between visual communication and convergence could have been better heard.



Edgar Huang

Those of us who are interested in the future of visual communication education need to think about what kind of journalists we should prepare for a converged media environment, how curriculum in our schools or departments should be reshaped to acknowledge this trend in the media industry, and how visual courses could be integrated into the curriculum to better prepare students.

Visual communication is at the forefront of convergence. Preparing students to work for converged media is often about teaching them how to use visual tools, such as video, still images, animated images and the Web, to materialize and expand their story ideas into multiple platforms. Should J-schools continue to pass on departmentalized knowledge of visual production from different sequences or teach all skills holistically? How can we effectively converge the teaching of visuals and the

teaching of writing? More research needs to be done in these areas.

Almost all visual tools are now high-tech in nature. It is literally impossible to teach convergence without teaching technology. Therefore, another big question is how much new technology is enough for our students. At a session during the summer conference, a professor who knew little about Web design told the audience that he simply let his students learn technology without providing any guidance. As we all know, not all students are self-motivated or have the time to figure out how to meander in the maze of technology. Students with no technology background tend to produce sub-quality news products.

On the other hand, teaching too much high-tech in a visual course downgrades the quality of university teaching and even makes the existence of a J-school illegitimate. Therefore, exploring appropriate ways to deal with new technology in VisCom courses is a new topic for VisCom researchers.

In the last couple of years, even at this summer's conference, there has been debate about whether training backpack journalists is desirable or possible. A backpack journalist is a reporter who can write stories and produce visuals for multiple media platforms. The term "backpack journalist" has taken on a derogatory

color since the term was coined not long ago. Such journalists are often regarded as a "Jack of all trades, and master of none." But do they have to be? I have repeatedly heard from

some news industry administrators and J-school professors that training backpack journalists should never be the goal of journalism education. In her article "The Backpack Journalist Is a 'Mush of Mediocrity'" published April 2, 2002, in *Online Journalism Review*, Martha Stone said that the "do-it-all" journalist model "is fraught with problems" and such journalists should be exceptions and not the rule. Those journalists *are* exceptions today, but what about tomorrow?

Through training and practice, some journalists like Jane Stevens (see OJR, April 3, 2002)

and Preston Mendenhall (see OJR, April 2, 2003) have become skilled in all trades. Mendenhall believes the backpack journalists will continue to grow in popularity. Stevens is convinced that in a few years, "backpack journalists will not only be the rule, they will rule."

Right now, much debate has been based on personal experience and anecdotal stories rather than on solid data. Studies in this area will have salient ramifications for journalism education at large and especially for VisCom education.

There are many things VisCom researchers can focus on, but studying media convergence and its relationship to VisCom calls for our immediate attention. I encourage more of these studies in the years to come and expect to see some at Toronto's AEJMC conference.

Should J-schools continue to pass on departmentalized knowledge of visual production from different sequences or teach all skills holistically? How can we effectively converge the teaching of visuals and the teaching of writing? More research needs to be done in these areas.

Visit VisCom Online

To learn more about the division, visit the VisCom Web site at
<http://jmc.ou.edu/viscom>

Subscribe to the VisCom listserv by following the instructions at
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/vis-com>

Wanted: Your best ideas for conference panels

By Jean Trumbo
University of Nevada-Reno
1st Vice Head/Program Chair

IDEAS! IDEAS! IDEAS! I know it seems ridiculous, but planning for next year's AEJMC annual conference is already rolling. We have a few terrific ideas on the table for visual communication-oriented teaching panels, PF&R panels or research sessions for the annual conference. I want to invite you all to think about adding to that mix by sharing your ideas. We are always looking for ideas, and I am committed to representing the interests of all visual communication members.

So, if there are issues that we need to address or sessions that we need to plan, please let me know by **Oct. 8**. Also, if you have contacts in the Toronto area that might add to our colorful mix of participants, please contact me.

Send panel ideas to:

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The following is a list of suggested panels:

■ **Teaching design basics for new and old media** (Pre-conference session)

■ **Images of Sex and Sexuality in Advertising**

Co-sponsor: Advertising Division

■ **Documentary Photography: Beyond Photojournalism**

Co-sponsor: History Division

Sociological and historical perspectives in documentary photography will be examined. Participants will address the potential for cultural representation, the ethical issues involved in visual documentary, and the future of the documentary image in new media environments. How can journalism curricula incorporate alternative ways of seeing?

■ **Visual Storytelling in New Media**

Co-sponsor: Communication Technology and Policy Division

This session will address the teaching strategies necessary to tell a good story using new media technologies. How can visual communicators adapt to a learning environment that requires fluency across multiple media formats and delivery systems? How can theories of visual literacy inform visual commu-

nication education? What is visual literacy in a dynamic media environment? What alternative forms of digital storytelling can inform journalism education? What are the implications for the journalist as storyteller?

■ **Visual Communication and Social Change** (PF&R)

Co-sponsor: Public Relations Division

How have effective efforts in political, health, civic engagement and public information campaigns used the power of visual communication to make a difference? The panel could include a cross-section of experts from diverse cultures to emphasize global issues. An interesting twist might be to have speakers from activist groups and political organizations present examples of how they have used visual communication to bring about remarkable social change with scholars providing theoretical insight and critical response.

■ **Visual Communication and Media Convergence** (Teaching)

How have the challenges of media convergence changed the learning environment for educators and students? This panel will explore integrated approaches to editing, writing and design and innovative approaches to the structure of courses and instruction. Panelists will discuss pitfalls and promises of new approaches to teaching visual communication in a convergence environment.

Other Suggestions

- Contracts for photojournalists
- Photojournalism in a closed society or international photojournalism
- Cyborgs and cybermen (Steve Mann, U of Toronto professor who has been experiencing life through a digital camera for the past 20 years; new media and memory, new media and privacy)
- Teaching convergence, teaching with new technologies
- Photographing people from other cultures
- A session that would take advantage of the international communities in Toronto (like the Chinese community)
- Cultural influences on design
- Internships
- A session on Canada's relationship to/perceptions of the U.S., possibly involving the CBC show "Talking to Americans"



photo by John Freeman

Two children play in the fountains in front of Kansas City's Crown Center.

IMAGES

from the first place creative project



photo by Jason Cook

By Rita Reed
University of Missouri
Creative Projects Winner

In the interest of expanding the reach of photojournalism beyond traditional publication outlets and providing our students with opportunities to explore the possibility of applying their photojournalism skills in the non-profit sector, I developed a partnership with the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation of Kansas City.

For three semesters, students in our capstone course – Picture Story and Photographic Essay – undertook a group documentary project funded

by the Kauffman Foundation. The final presentation of the projects took a different form each semester. For the first project, the students produced an exhibition made up of 16 panels. Each panel presented a picture story or photographic essay on issues and concerns for Missouri's children and youth.

In the second semester, students produced stories and essays for publication in the foundation's annual report. The third semester, the emphasis was on material for the foundation's Web site.

The partnership has proven

mutually beneficial for both the foundation and our program and students. The foundation has been delighted with the candid documentary photojournalism produced by the students; the school has been provided with equipment that has benefited all our students; and students participating in the project have been afforded research, story generation, material and housing support while they worked on stories in both rural and urban Missouri. As a teacher, I have learned much about grant writing and leading/picture editing group projects with tight production schedules.



photo by Nikki Poppe

ABOVE: The plastic bubble of a jungle gym offers a curious view for 20-month-old Ji-Ho Lee.



photo by Chris Zuppa

LEFT: First-graders at Hearn Elementary School in Charleston, Mo., hang upside down from the jungle gym on the playground during recess.

LEFT: Medical problems have given Dusty an opportunity to observe doctors at work. She uses a stethoscope to play doctor to her sister.

When Good People Make Bad Decisions

By Loret Gnivecki Steinberg
Rochester Institute of Technology
PF&R Chair

A few years ago, a senior photojournalism student at our school questioned the need to study ethics. "It's just a matter of common sense, isn't it?" he asked. Others, though, thought that "common sense doesn't always tell you what you need to know." I added that what everyone used to consider okay might now be unacceptable.

This summer I could have given them two examples of respected photojournalism professionals who found out how much has changed since their "common sense" judgments were formed.

In August, the North Carolina Press Photographers Association took back three awards given to Charlotte Observer staff photographer Patrick Schneider. Editors at the Observer discovered that Schneider's photographs had backgrounds that had been greatly darkened — one to the point where information had been entirely obliterated. In another image, the subject was vignettted by powerful black tones — the result of burning, not shadows.

In an interview on "All Things Considered," Schneider claimed to be doing no more than standard burning and dodging. "What we're doing now is something that we might have spent hours (doing) in the darkroom. But we're now able to step out of the dark and in front of a computer screen, where we can do it with far more precision than what we could before." Indeed, the "hand of god" fashion for burning cluttered backgrounds, popular during the late 1960s and '70s, took hours to result in something believable.

Schneider can point to some respected predecessors. Gene Smith's favorite print of "Woman in the Asylum in Haiti" showed the woman's tormented face emerging from a black void. Yet, in earlier prints from the same negative, you can see that

there was light streaming in from the left and other people in the same room.

We all know that film or CCDs cannot accurately record what we see. So how do we square the inherent falsifications of the process with the obligation to reflect if not to tell the truth?

In the radio interview, Schneider said, "I think as it is now within our industry, it's an individual photographer's line. I don't feel that I went in there to deceive anybody." And yet, later in the same interview, he admits that there is a firm rule in photojournalism against removing or adding things in pictures. How could he not see that negating an entire background was the same thing as removing something?

Schneider's newspaper agreed there was a problem. Observer editor Jennie Buckner said, "We don't believe Patrick set out to intentionally deceive" but "he went over the line."

Schneider was reprimanded and given a three-day suspension without pay in addition to losing his awards.

That's the first case. Earlier in the summer, Larry Nighswander, the director of Ohio University's Visual Communications program and a long-respected newspaper photographer and former National Geographic picture editor, was served with a lawsuit by one of his students.

The student says she agreed to model for a photo shoot, but thought she would be posing for portraits.

When she came to the studio, though, she claims Nighswander showed her photographs on his Palm Pilot, including nudes and semi-nudes of other students and asked her to remove her clothing. Her papers also claim that some of the photographs made her uncomfortable and that she felt coerced into cooperating.

Nighswander doesn't deny taking photographs of students who are either partially or entirely nude, but he explains that all shooting sessions are conducted in a professional manner and that the pictures are used "in class lecture material ... as examples of how to light a subject."

Nighswander was initially cleared of sexual harassment, but a subsequent university investiga-

tion resulted in his replacement as director of the visual communications program. Though still a faculty member at OU, he is on leave for the current academic year.

What do these stories have in common? Both men thought that what they were doing had precedents in their profession. Both emphasized the value of the photographs they made instead of addressing ethical issues. Both expressed surprise at the response to their actions.

Schneider was right that digital imaging has changed the printing process. One of those changes, though, is our new awareness that traditional darkroom work sometimes went too far. Digital manipulation has reminded us that we cannot alter a photograph so much that a

Why wasn't it obvious that burning absolutely every detail in a background goes too far? Or, if you already have a large file of lighting examples for photographing nudes, why couldn't you use those? Why didn't these two professionals know better?

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Put Your Teaching Philosophy in Writing

By Ken Heinen, Ball State University
Teaching Standards Chair

Those of you who have a teaching portfolio know that a teaching philosophy statement serves as the introduction to the more exhaustive work. The teaching philosophy statement by itself, however, can enhance your teaching by helping you focus on your values. When assembling your teaching philosophy statement, consider the following suggestions.

Start by reflecting on how you think students learn in your classroom. What is your role in that learning? As you address your beliefs about the relationship between teaching and learning in your particular situation, review your current practices, then use this exercise to stimulate your own growth.

As you know, students learn in a variety of ways. Some process information by taking notes, reading books and performing on tests. Others want to be pointed in the right direction and continue to explore on their own. Still others want hands-on

experience for individual practice. There are those who want concepts repeated for reinforcement while others complain about your being too repetitive. As you develop your teaching philosophy, consider how you are addressing different styles of learning so that everyone can find his or her own way in your classes.

Do you think of yourself as a teacher of facts or a facilitator of learning? Are you there to teach specifics or to foster the learning process? How do you feel about students taking risks? How do you reward this?

Have you looked rationally at your student evaluations? Naturally, we all want to know how we fared last semester, but what did the students say that can strengthen your teaching? Over the years, have your students said basically the same things?

Being open to new ideas can be a mutual learning experience for you and your students. By showing the students that you value their input, you demonstrate to them that your

mind is open to learning, just as theirs should be. That is not say that you will not look critically at what they say.

As you think about your teaching philosophy, discuss your thoughts with colleagues who can offer insights that had not occurred to you. Professionals working in your specialty can tell you what they expect from graduates, which can influence how you teach.

A meaningful teaching philosophy statement need not be long and filled with technical details. One page written for a specific audience is sufficient. If you are writing for your students, then address who you are and what you expect from them. You might write with a different emphasis for your promotion and tenure committee, for a search committee, or for a teaching portfolio.

The point is that everyone gains after you take an honest yet gentle look at yourself with the goal of articulating clearly how you see the relationship between teaching and learning.

Provocations for the Classroom from the VisCom Preconvention

- Freelancers, in order to get the job: Have a cell phone, answer it, and be able to use it to transmit digital photographs.
- Caption writing matters. Photo people have to do words.
- There aren't bad assignments, just bad photographers. You should be able to take 'bad' and turn it into something good.
- Thumbs down to portfolio presentations by Web site only (because two-thirds of applicants' sites don't load).
- Job applicants at the AP take a current events quiz. Photojournalists are journalists. They need to RTFP (Read The Friggin' Paper).
- It's not all about the camera and the pictures; it's about connecting with people. A photojournalist needs to be able to develop a strong rapport with a total stranger in an instant.
- For the future: The line dividing still imagemakers from moving imagemakers may disappear.



photo by Brian Kratzer

A conference attendee looks at one of the many research papers on sale at the convention. The VisCom Division had 16 papers accepted out of 36 submissions.

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fellow observer wouldn't recognize the scene in our images. The change in technique has given us more insight into our responsibilities, and so have the changes in attitudes to relations between faculty and students. We are far more sensitive to the inequality of any student-faculty relationship than in years past. Students often don't know how to handle situations with authority figures. We have learned to be more thoughtful about student motives and sensitive to their vulnerabilities; we do, indeed, have to be protective even when the student seems agreeable. These changes run ahead of the rules.

After Schneider's manipulations came to light, the Charlotte Observer clarified its existing policies, forbidding the removal of backgrounds. Ohio University College of Communication Dean Kathy Krendl has drafted a ban on nude photo sessions involving VisCom professors and their students. In neither case

was the absence of explicit rules a reasonable defense. What will help the next photojournalist faced with a decision that isn't specifically outlined?

I keep returning to my student's question about common sense. Why wasn't it obvious that burning absolutely every detail in a background goes too far? Why couldn't you light a mannequin for class or use examples from published material? Or, if you already have a large file of lighting examples for photographing nudes, why couldn't you use *those*? Why didn't these two professionals know better?

There is no answer to the last question, of course. We all consider doing things that we know are wrong, sometimes at the moment we do them. Nancy Andrews once told my students that her standard was how she would feel if someone else found out. But what kind of "someone else" is important. I'm sure that Nancy wasn't thinking of just anybody finding out. We need to look, not to our

friends and drinking buddies, but to a larger group — our professional colleagues, our trusting readers, our impressionable students. What we do in the studio or in the darkroom or at the computer will affect them. How would *they* feel if they knew?

For a comprehensive story with examples and links to the Charlotte Observer, go to www.Poynter.org and Quicklink A45119.

To see all of Schneider's photographs as submitted to NCPPA POY, go to: www.ncppaonline.org/exp/POY%202002/Runner-upPhotogYear/index.html

For the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette article on Nighswander, go to: www.post-gazette.com/local-news/20030511photog0511p3.asp

Patrick Schneider has agreed to contribute to this newsletter's winter PF&R column because of his interest in continuing this discussion.