HEADS OF THE DIVISION SINCE 1982
when Graphic Arts Division and Photojournalism Division were merged into the current Visual Communication Division

2011-2012  Jeremy Gilbert  Northwestern
2010-2011  Jennifer George-Palilonis  Ball State
2009-2010  James D. Kelly  Indiana-Bloomington
2008-2009  Renee Martin-Kratzer  Florida
2007-2008  Edgar Huang  Indiana-Indianapolis
2006-2007  Loret Gnivecki Steinberg  Rochester Institute of Tech.
2005-2006  Michelle Seelig  Miami
2004-2005  Brian Johnson  Illinois
2003-2004  Kimberly Sultze  St. Michael’s
2002-2003  Kim Bissell  Alabama
2001-2002  Andrew Mendelson  Temple
2000-2001  C. Zoe Smith  Missouri
1999-2000  Jean Trumbo  Wisconsin-Madison
1998-1999  Susan Zavoina  North Texas
1997-1998  Brian Johnson  Illinois
1996-1997  Shiela Reaves  Wisconsin-Madison
1995-1996  Rob Heller  Tennessee
1994-1995  Paul M. Lester  California State-Fullerton
1993-1994  Patsy G. Watkins  Arkansas
1992-1993  Julianne Newton  Texas-Austin
1990-1991  Birgit Wassmuth  Missouri
1988-1989  David Richter  Ohio State
1987-1988  Sandra H. Utt  Memphis State
1986-1987  Doug Covert  Indiana-Indianapolis
1985-1986  Craig Denton  Utah
1984-1985  James W. Brown  Indiana-Indianapolis
1983-1984  Carolyn Cline  Texas
1982-1983  Zoe Smith  Marquette
ABOUT THE
VISCOM
DIVISION

THE VISUAL COMMUNICATION DIVISION OF AEJMC IS
devoted to the study of visual communication and issues concerning the professional practice of visual media production for presentation.

The division members represent a broad spectrum of methodology and application on all types of visual media—advertising, broadcast, digital imaging, film, graphic design, multimedia, Web design, photojournalism, propaganda images, visual images and culture, visual literacy, and visual aspects of political campaigns, etc. The division publishes Visual Communication Quarterly and hosts the annual Best of the Web competition with the Communication Technology Division, the AEJMC logo competition, the Creative Projects competition, and student and faculty research paper competitions.

TOP FIVE REASONS
TO JOIN
THE VISCOM DIVISION

1 Networking and forming friendships with visual communication peers

2 Participating in the invaluable mentoring program

3 Subscription to the division’s top-notch research journal, Visual Communication Quarterly

4 Immediate notification of visual communication job openings from across the nation and worldwide

5 Opportunities to become involved in visual communication areas internationally
My fellow VisCommies:

The art historian Erwin Panovsky once observed that when you talk about yourself, you run the risk of betraying false modesty or genuine conceit. I’ll try hard to steer between those two poles, but I hope you’ll indulge me as I personalize these comments.

My doctoral program was geared to turning out museum curators—not university academics. I recall no discussion of conferences, papers, journal articles, peer review, development or the tenure process. I learned a bit about photography and art history, but in terms of what it took to survive as an academic, I was clueless.

It was the Visual Communication Division—or more precisely, its members—that taught me how to be an academic and saved me from a life of penury.

My first encounter with VisCom was my first AEJMC convention, in Chicago. I was on a teaching panel and the moderator came around beforehand asking us some biographical information for the introductions. I told her, “I’m just a teacher.”

I could tell by her laugh that she knew a lot more about academe than I did. I later learned her name was Jean Trumbo, and that she does much of the “heavy lifting” in the VisCom Division.

On the research side, I remember how exciting it was to be at a panel in New Orleans and realize that more than half of the working historians of photojournalism in the U.S. were present in that room.

Sadly, two of those people are not able to be with us today because of health issues. So a toast to two of my heroes from our division: Zoe Smith and Michael Carlebach.

I remember at the Anaheim convention, how Jim Kelly taught me what a discussant does and why that role is vitally important to the scholarly process.

At that same convention, I met Paul Martin Lester, who taught me the importance of maintaining a serious academic demeanor at all times.

Seriously, I was really impressed yesterday at Paul’s six-degrees-of-separation presentation at the morning teaching panel. It made me think not just about the past of our VisCom division, but its future.

So, I am delighted and proud to see some of my students entering the Division and playing important roles. I think especially of my friend Edgar Huang, who will make a great vice head of VisCom this year and an excellent chair in 2007–2008, and my friend Dennis Chamberlin, who’s attending his first AEJMC convention this year. When you see Dennis’s creative project this afternoon, you’ll understand how much he will be contributing to our collective visual imagination over the next few decades.

Like many of you, I have very few like-minded colleagues at my school. Most of them are all social scientists who love to count things. So I always look forward to our annual conventions where I can talk with people who know and care about photojournalism, graphic design, infographics, and the ethics that undergird all three, and people who understand that aesthetics are more than mere decoration, but are a vital part of our shared human condition—a reflection of our deepest human needs.

Between conventions, it delights me that we continue our camaraderie through the wonderful online conversations we have on our listserv. I value the intellectual stimulation in these threads, and I applaud the willingness to help each other out with problems.

So I am grateful to my many VisCommie friends who have taught me how to be an academic and have made my learning process a great joy.

Because I came of age in the 1960s and because this is San Francisco, it seems appropriate to conclude with a radical idea: I submit to you that there is no Visual Communications Division! Rather, there are people who care about each other, who are willing to support each other, to teach clueless old refugees like me how to become academics.

People with names like Jean and Jim, Paul and Loret, Michelle, Edgar, Michael, Zoe, Julianne, Rob, Kim, Jock, Patsy, Howard, Roxanne. People with the name on your name tag.

My appreciation and my affection to all of you.
Looking Back on 20 After Years

Edgar Huang asked me to “write something regarding your experience of being a senior member of the division.” Never thought about it before, but I guess if you stick around long enough, you are bound to be a senior. Although, in truth, I never think I particularly act like one. Of course, being a senior doesn’t mean I plan to graduate anytime soon.

My first AEJMC convention was in Portland in 1988. I was an ABD assistant professor from the University of Central Florida. (Wow! Twenty years ago. I am a senior!) During that first conference, Rich Beckman of North Carolina was in charge of VisCom. I immediately liked him as we, so he claims, were both born in the same hospital in Flushing, New York. He convinced me to take over the Special Projects competition, and that, my friends, has made all the difference. From Special Projects I moved to the editor position of the newsletter and gave it the name, Viewpoints. On October 1, 1995, I created the position of “webmaster” and am proud to say that Visual Communication was the first Division to have a website because of my initial forays into text-based html programming. Here’s a screen save from 1997 courtesy of the “Wayback Machine” archived at http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www5.fullerton.edu/viscom/vishome.html.

During my term as an officer of the Division, I started the tradition during the annual convention of members meeting over lunch and watching a presentation. The first luncheon speaker was the dynamic, funny, and thoughtful infographics guru, Nigel Holmes, during the Atlanta convention in 1994. When the conference was at Anaheim in 1996, I arranged to have vans take VisCom members to my house six miles away in Fullerton where I treated everyone to turkeys and baked potatoes cooked under-the-ground, luau style in my backyard. The highlight was when I gave everyone band-aids to wear on their foreheads to honor or make fun of Rob Heller who wore one legitimately for a slight injury.

In a nutshell, Visual Communication, the Division, and its brilliant members have been very, very good to me. By inspiring me by meeting, working, and partying with some of the finest minds in the field, supporting my research and publishing endeavors, voting for me to head the Division, and helping me as editor of the Visual Communication Quarterly, my association with the Division brings Aldous Huxley’s famous phrase, “the more you know, the more you see” to life. I truly know more because I have seen at each and every convention.

I Found My Family

Thirty years ago, I found the rest of my family.

I am not sure I knew it immediately, but many of the people I met at my first AEJMC convention would become my extended academic family. That August meeting in Madison, Wisconsin, was my first paper presentation as a graduate student at the University of Iowa. Who knows what the topic was? That is not important, but what mattered is that I met so many other graduate students and faculty. I went to many different sessions because all of it seemed fascinating. What a thrill it was to be in the room with people I had been studying in class!

However, it was not all about the academic stuff. I was interested in visual communication, especially photography, and that was a specialty within the larger field of mass communication. Finding a division filled with people who also loved photography was the highlight of the convention for me.

Way back then, there was no Visual Communication Division. That division came about in the early 1980s with the merger of two smaller divisions—Graphic Arts Division and Photography Division.

By the time the merger happened, I had been to all the subsequent conventions and was teaching at Marquette University in Milwaukee. As one of the few “visual” people on the journalism faculty, I relied on my extended academic family even more.

Unlike some of the other large divisions, the new “VisCom” Division was very open minded, allowing young faculty to take leadership positions. On the other hand, maybe they were desperate. Maybe that is why I became the first division head of this newly merged group! Regardless of why or how it happened, I gained valuable administrative experience and national visibility by being an active member of VisCom.

Every April 1st became an important deadline. It was time to submit my latest research paper or panel idea to the division. A few times, I tried a different group, like the History Division, but my division of choice was VisCom. I have never counted how many refereed papers I authored or co-authored over the past 30 years, but is more than 20. I think there are just three conventions in those 30 years that I failed to attend.

During those three decades, the nature of the convention has changed. I must admit that I do not get to as many sessions as I used to but that is not because I am out sightseeing. More often than not, I miss a session because I am catching up with one of my “family members.” Thanks to VisCom, I have been blessed with a wonderful group of friends and colleagues who feel more like family than some of my own blood.