GSIG SPRING 2021 NEWSLETTER
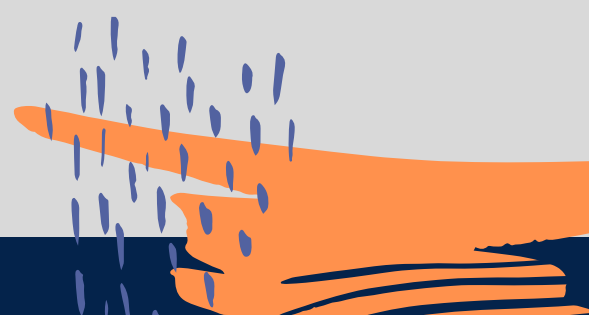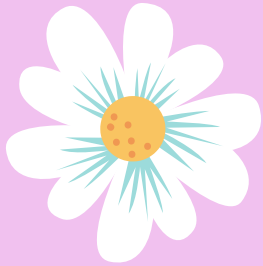
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GRADUATE STUDENT INTEREST GROUP

aejmc

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PEERING INTO THE
PEER- REVIEW PROCESS

An Interview with Dr. Daniela Dimitrova

Dr. Daniela Dimitrova, Editor-in-Chief of Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly (JMCQ), met with GSIG Research Chair, Erika Schneider, to share insight into the peer-review process.

JMCQ is the flagship journal of AEJMC and the oldest refereed scholarly journal in mass communication. After shadowing the previous Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Lousia Ha, this fall, Dr. Dimitrova officially stepped into the role on October 1, 2020. This spring, JMCQ launched a Twitter campaign, Demystifying Academic Publishing, to offer graduate students, junior faculty, and the larger scholarly community a "behind-the-scenes" glimpse into JMCQ processes. Check out the journal's official Twitter account @jmcquarterly and follow the campaign with the hashtag #JMCQdemystified.

What type of terminology does JMCQ use for manuscript decisions?

**Accept/ Minor Revision / Major Revision / Reject**

JMCQ follows the options of Accept, Minor Revision, Major Revision, and Reject. An "Accept" indicates that the manuscript will be accepted as is. For a "Minor Revision" the manuscript may go back to the reviewers, as the editor ensures the minor changes are addressed by the author(s). A "Major Revision" indicates that the manuscript is in need of significant revision for further consideration. The last option is "Reject." Accepting a manuscript, as is, is pretty rare, and "Rejects" are fairly rare as well.

One exception to this peer-review process is the Invited Forum section of the journal, where established scholars within a particular area are invited to discuss and debate key issues. We solicit contributions from four to six leading scholars in the field, and we ask them to take on different aspects of the topic, whether it is an argument, summary, or recommendations for future research. In this case, the person in charge of the Invited Forum serves as a reviewer and gives feedback, but these pieces are not typically driven by empirical data, but rather provide a theoretical or conceptual commentary.

What role does the cover letter serve when submitting a manuscript?

The cover letter is important for two reasons: The first is **to answer the "so what?" question.** This gives the author(s) the chance to explain why their paper is important and a significant contribution to the field. In their own words, they succinctly summarize the contribution of their study, such as a theoretical or practical contribution. The second reason a cover letter is important is because **it allows for the opportunity to talk a bit about the data.** This is a space where the author can state if the data has been used in a previous study, partially used in a different context, or spell out any prior utilizations to address potential concerns, such as plagiarism or conflict of interest.
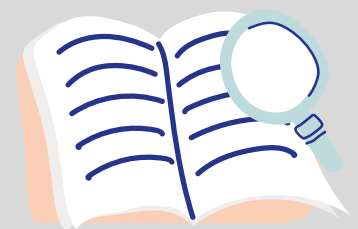
What can go wrong in a revise-and-resubmit response letter?

The one thing that comes to my mind is a tendency for authors to say "we fixed everything," even though it has not been fixed or the reviewer feedback has not been adequately addressed. Reviewers will confirm if the recommendations have been addressed and they will check whether or not all points have been addressed or if the author misinterpreted the feedback. For instance, this may be the case when a reviewer asked for a more thorough development of a concept and an author only included an additional sentence. Make sure that whatever you say in the cover letter reflects the changes you made in the paper, rather than broadly stating that everything has been fixed. If you decide to stand in your decision that contradicts a reviewer's feedback, address it by explaining the reason(s) professionally. It is also important to highlight the areas you have changed within the manuscript itself to make the changes easier to identify.

> "MAKE SURE THAT WHATEVER YOU SAY IN THE COVER LETTER REFLECTS THE CHANGES YOU MADE IN THE PAPER, RATHER THAN BROADLY STATING THAT EVERYTHING HAS BEEN FIXED."

Does JMCQ undergo the double-blind or single-blind review process?

Papers submitted to JMCQ undergo a double-blind review process. This means that reviewers do not know who the author is and the authors do not know who the reviewers are. So we, and I personally, are very careful about protecting the identity of authors and reviewers to ensure we follow the double-blind review process. We are also careful to consider potential conflict of interest.

KEY WORD
double-blind review
the reviewers and authors identities are both concealed

## How many reviewers typically review the submitted manuscript?

3

In most cases at JMCQ, we find three qualified reviewers. We try to have a methods expert, a theory expert, and a topical issue/geographic area expert in the mix. These three reviewers help address different areas in the paper. We try to include a reviewer from the members of the Editorial Board, whose names you can find printed on the masthead.

Is it acceptable to ask for clarification of feedback from the reviewers?

It is acceptable to ask for clarification. When you receive the decision letter from the Editor, read the email notification very carefully. Sometimes, the Editor will give you hints about which comments to prioritize so pay particular attention to how the letter identifies and addresses concerns. For instance, there may be times when two reviewers contradict one another. In these cases, if it isn't indicated in the decision notification, it is acceptable to request clarification about how to prioritize conflicting comments. In the cases where you disagree with reviewer feedback, it is important to explain your reasoning in a professional manner. Rather than being defensive about a decision, it is helpful to take an explanatory stance.

How do you handle research integrity issues?
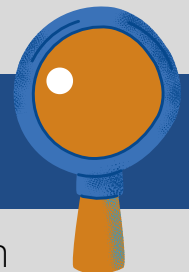
Research integrity issues are always on my radar. With experience in previous roles working with graduate students, it has become easier for me to flag concerns, whether intentional or unintentional. In our SAGE system, Scholar One, we have procedures for pre-screening manuscripts for plagiarism. We are aware of this potential and we will return the paper back to the author stating that it is not acceptable, if issues are identified. This is another reason for desk rejects -- we all need to be vigilant about research integrity.

Is it acceptable to ask the Editor about the status of a manuscript?

It is perfectly fine to reach out in a professional manner to inquire about the status of your manuscript. There are circumstances, especially during COVID-19, where we may be more flexible with reviewers and more understanding of deadline constraints. As Editor, I am perfectly fine with authors contacting me to check on where their paper is at and I do not perceive it negatively. I have also received inquiries where authors, prior to formally submitting to JMCQ, will send me an email with their abstract and ask if they should proceed with submitting it to JMCQ. I will look at the information provided and indicate if the manuscript could fall under the scope of the journal or if it seems like a better fit for another journal.

JMCQ is the flagship publication of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. This means we invite scholarship on a diverse range of topics, theories, and methods that pertain to all AEJMC divisions and interest groups, from public relations to political communication. It is wonderful to have this diversity, but it also requires us to continually work to find qualified reviewers for every area.

> "As Editor, I am perfectly fine with authors contacting me to check on where their paper is at and I do not perceive it negatively."

Who reviews the reviewer?

Something that is not known to many is that at JMCQ, we give scores for each review. You receive a score on the timeliness and the quality of the review. Continuing a tradition established by the previous Editor, this allows for a metrics-oriented approach to the selection of Editorial Board members. If there is a reviewer who is showing a dedication to the journal and consistently providing thorough feedback in a timely manner, there is a possibility that they receive an invitation to join the Editorial Board.

★★★★★

How does a graduate student become a reviewer?

At JMCQ, we don't typically have graduate students serve as reviewers. We have held a reviewer training program in the past where we walk graduate students through the process of reviewing. The reality of this process is that no one really trains you to become a reviewer. You don't receive a class in graduate school that teaches reviewing, so it is one of those things that you are expected to know with time, but no one really explains the process or criteria. To meet this need, the previous Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Louisa Ha, started the Graduate Student Reviewer Training Program. All graduate students are invited to apply to the program and a small cohort of students are selected to be paired with Associate Editors. This is an important service to the field to train the next generation of reviewers. So, what is a good review?

The best tip is simply to think about what you would like to receive as an author. Ask yourself: if you were on the other side, receiving the review, what are the things that you would or would not like to see? Generally, we want the review to be specific, thorough, and professional, which means you can be critical but you should be aware of the tone.

In terms of page length, there are no minimum or maximum guidelines but typically, they might fall between one and half pages to three pages. Reviewers may have different styles for delivering feedback, but they often start with general comments about the paper as a whole and then get into more of the specifics.

REVIEWS SHOULD BE

specific

thorough

professional

critical

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT
DR. ELANIE STEYN

Dr. Steyn is an Associate Professor of Journalism, Gaylord Family Professor, and Journalism Area Head at Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. In this interview, she talks with GSIG's Sohana Nasrin about her work in academia.

Steyn teaches in journalism, media management and business of media. Her research interests focus on women in media leadership, international media studies and media management. She has taught on these topics in several South Asian countries and is the co-PI for several U.S. State Department grants on media and small business with South and Central Asian countries.

Prior to joining OU, Steyn conducted research for media and private sector businesses, government departments, universities and investment corporations in Africa and Europe. Steyn has published more than 30 peer-reviewed articles and/or chapters in textbooks, has read more than 50 conference papers and serves on review and editorial boards of academic journals.

Before joining OU, she was a senior lecturer in the School of Communication Studies at the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus in South Africa.

SN: What is the first step toward conducting international / cross cultural research?

ES: I believe a first step, or two first steps, probably, are that you need a fascination and an interest, a curiosity, about the "other." Whether this is a geographical interest or a curiosity about "how do others do/see/understand things differently than I do?" This interest or curiosity has to be sincere and from a standpoint of "I can learn something from the other." Definitely not from a standpoint of "we do things this way and therefore it is the right way and I only study the other because they are different or wrong and they can learn something from me." A mutual respect between the researcher and the research subjects is crucial, in my view.

Secondly, I believe it is good to have strong connections and "fixers" in the country or culture where you do the research. If I know people in country A, it would be a lot easier to understand the systems and processes I would be dealing with than if I do not know anything about that country, or do not know anyone there. Having these relations do not only open up doors for you as a foreigner, but it also helps with elements such as safety (if that is a factor in a country where you plan to do research), gives you an insider's view into the country and the culture you are doing research in. It helps you prevent cultural misunderstanding and mishaps you might have as a foreigner.

> "A mutual respect between the researcher and the research subjects is crucial, in my view."

SN: How do best deal with IRB when doing international research?

ES: IRB often requires additional approvals and documentation when you do international research than when you do not. These can best be addressed through international partners and collaborations. For instance, if you do interviews or a survey with someone in another culture, IRB requires that a local (i.e., in the country where you do the research) institution certifies that the questions are culturally appropriate, that language issues are addressed, etc. If you have those relationships in the country you work, getting these approvals and making sure you avoid some of the pitfalls related to international research becomes easier.

SN: What are some of the benefits of international research? What are the challenges?

ES: In my mind one of the biggest benefits is how much I learn about others, their culture, their way of seeing the world, their understanding of concepts that we perceive in a specific way. These projects show me, often, how similar people are, even though we tend to think we are so different. It exposes me to people and their surroundings and their traditions that I would not have been exposed to have I not been involved with this kind of research. In addition, I have seen a lot of the world as a result of international research. And I have come to know myself better as a result of these exposure.

Some of the challenges definitely are, depending on whether you do research, related to language, cultural differences, the cost of travel to do the research and the potential misunderstanding that can come from not being a part of the country or the culture you do the research in. However, much of this can be overcome through the collaboration I mentioned earlier. I definitely believe the benefits far outweigh the challenges...

To mitigate the cultural gap, one has to establish relationships of trust and communication. Once you trust the people you work with there, it is as if much of the differences between you and them disappear. And vice versa. If they trust you, they are more open, they speak more frankly and they share information that you would probably not have gotten otherwise. Also, a familiarity with the environment, the culture, the traditions, etc. helps to overcome this gap.

SN: With the COVID-19 pandemic wreaking havoc around the world, how are international researchers adopting to continue their work? What does the future look like amidst the pandemic?

ES: This is a difficult question in the sense that I believe every project is sort of unique and each project gets affected by COVID-19 in a different way. For instance, I wanted to travel in the Fall to do research with interviews and focus groups among South Asian entrepreneurs. Since my project entailed physical travel and contact with people, I had to postpone that because of COVID. However, I think if the nature of the project was surveys that could have been done remotely and online…
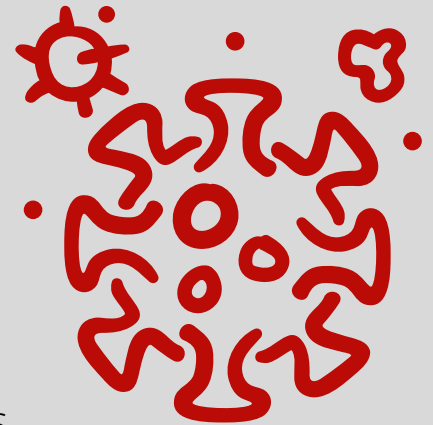
I have all faith that the pandemic will not continue indefinitely. We will travel again, and international researchers will be able to continue their research, albeit in a slightly different manner, maybe. The pandemic has opened up new ways for us to interact with each other. We zoom our days away. This platform, and the extent to which it is now being used internationally, definitely have opened new doors for international research and for collecting data internationally in the future.

> **"The pandemic has opened up new ways for us to interact with each other."**

SN: Can we justify traveling anymore now that many of us have adopted to virtual conferences and virtual ways of collecting data?

ES: Absolutely! If you do qualitative research that requires an understanding and familiarity of the people you do research among, there is no substitute for traveling and immersing yourself in the culture and the people you are doing the research with. Observation, in my mind, of surroundings and interactions and social relationships and dynamics, plays a massive role in how we see and understand the other. You cannot do this without being there. And you cannot grow your own understanding of the world without being present. So, traveling and collecting data in-person remains crucial for certain research projects and for understanding certain issues we research.

ACADEMIC JOB OFFERS
HOW TO NAVIGATE NEGOTIATING, ACCEPTING, AND REJECTING THEM

GSIG's Vice Head, Hayley Markovich, spoke with experienced professors, newer hires, and ABD Doctoral Candidates who were recently on the job market to get their perspectives on how to approach academic job offers. She has compiled their tips and advice here to share with our members.

THE INTERVIEW

The way a school treats you at the interview is a good signifier of how you'll be treated as a faculty member. At the campus interview, you are a special guest to the department and should be treated as such. One contributor noted, "I know it's hard when you need a job and the market is tight, but paying attention to how well you're treated can help you see if you want to be there."

Pay attention to what they emphasize during your visit and the discussions you have. This will also help indicate what the department finds important for the position. For example, is the teaching load higher and research funding less? Then it's apparent the school values teaching very highly.

"AT THE CAMPUS INTERVIEW, YOU ARE A SPECIAL GUEST TO THE DEPARTMENT AND SHOULD BE TREATED AS SUCH."

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Salary ranges for publicly funded universities are available online, so take some time to look those up (both for the university you're applying to, as well as comparable/competition universities). At your interviews they will ask about how much you hope to make in the position so knowing the salary ranges is key. Also reach out to trusted mentors for advice on salary ideas as well.

When trying to decide if a school or position is the right one for you, take time to really think about what you want out of the job. Consider things like geography, salary, if the people you talked with are family friendly. Were they collegial and welcoming?

Also think about where you might fit research-wise. If you hope to attend multiple conferences a year and publish on a regular basis, see if others in the department do the same. One contributor recommended checking out previous conference programs and seeing how many people from your school of interest attended and presented. Are they publishing journal articles or books? Is the research qualitative or quantitative? Do they produce lots of sole-authored papers or is there a lot of collaboration happening?

ASK FOR ADVICE FROM MENTORS

Going to your advisor or other individuals that you consider mentors can be super helpful! They've been down this road before and can offer some great advice on the offer you were given. You aren't in this alone! As one contributor told me, their advisor and another mentor were really instrumental in helping them decide whether to accept a job offer they were presented.
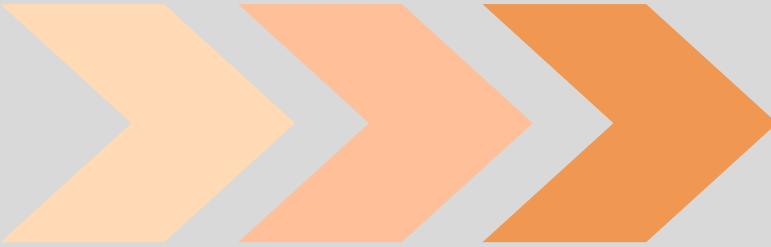
NEGOTIATION

According to the contributors I talked to, there are some things you can try to negotiate. These include salary, research funding, travel funds, job packages for partners, and even house hunting tours and moving expenses.

One individual mentioned that they received a job information packet during the campus visit that contained all of the expectations for the job as well as information regarding salary, research funding, and other details. While they had expected to have had the ability to further negotiate some of these details, the school's department chair was not open to it.

TURNING DOWN AN OFFER

If you've decided to turn down an offer for whatever reason, be gracious. Contributors emphasized the importance of **thank you notes** (either hand written or emailed) to the program chair and search committee chair. You may also consider sending notes to the search committee members. You don't have to tell them why you've turned down their offer, but thank them for the consideration and how much you enjoyed the visit. You'll likely see the search committee at conferences and other functions in the future. And who knows, down the line a new job opportunity may pop up and someone might keep you in mind for it, recommending you to apply, so keeping in touch (if you choose) might have some future benefits too. Overall though, keep in mind that you have to make the decision that is best for you and others in your life. The school will understand. Understand your worth and know that you have the right to be happy.

"UNDERSTAND YOUR WORTH AND KNOW THAT YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE HAPPY."

DON'T GIVE UP

Sometimes you might end a job search cycle without receiving an offer for a position. While that's disheartening after you spent so much time on your applications and related materials, the contributors I talked to had some wisdom here. For one, continue researching and publishing. Keep an eye out for positions that get posted in the spring. These are often yearly renewable positions, but they can help as you continue to search for something more permanent. Also, if it's appropriate to your research area, a post-doc position might be helpful if you might have some gaps in your CV.

Talk to your advisor, members of your committee, and other trusted mentors. They might know of different positions or calls for post-docs that might be appropriate for you. Also if you feel comfortable, you could always reach out to someone on the school's hiring committee what you could do to make your application stronger. You might not hear back, but it is worth a shot.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTIONS

All of the contributors emphasized how important and helpful getting involved is to the job search. **Going to conferences** that are important to your field and area of study is only the first step. Make sure to get involved in the divisions and interest groups that are part of the organization. Network and meet people! Things like the **AEJMC Job Hub** are a great way to also lay the foundation for the job search. One contributor mentioned how much the Job Hub helped in their job search and that it was one factor that helped them get their current position.

PRE CON

All of these topics and more will be discussed at the pre-conference workshop sponsored by GSIG and NOND. Be sure to check it out at this year's virtual AEJMC conference on August 3!

A Quick Guide to
Designing Your Canvas Page

GSIG's Teaching Chair, Eve Heffron, gathered helpful insight on understanding how to make the most of your learning management system (LMS).

Have you ever seen a fellow instructor's Canvas page and wondered how they managed to make it look so incredible and easy to follow? You may have just assumed that they were tech savvy and that such an eye-catching Canvas page was out of reach, but University of Florida doctoral student and instructor Osama Albishri was here to tell us otherwise. Osama walked us through his online course creation and explained the 'why' behind his approaches to online Canvas pages.

Online courses require more forethought to anticipate student needs and questions pertaining to the class than a traditional face-to-face classroom setting. Since most instructors are teaching some version of online courses, we thought providing a crash course on how to enhance a Canvas page was the perfect topic for the latest teaching column. Although we hope you continue reading, here is the link to Osama's Guide in case you don't make it to the end!

"JUST BECAUSE THE MATERIAL IS THERE, DOESN'T MEAN STUDENTS ARE GOING TO BE ABLE TO FIND IT."

Osama took online instruction to the next level with his intuitive Canvas course shell that allows students to have an enriching learning experience. When Osama first started teaching online, he soon realized that students had more questions than expected in an online setting and that "Just because the material is there, doesn't mean students are going to be able to find it." With this in mind, Osama set out to create an interactive online experience where "The homepage acts as a roadmap for the entire course."

Each student is different.

Another major point Osama made was that not all students have the capability of easily navigating online courses and that "they not only have a lot of information to process online, but they have to adjust to different instructor styles depending on the online Canvas experience of the instructor." Assuming not every student will start out with the same level of online course experience, creating a Canvas page that is both straight forward and easy to navigate may alleviate some of the stress associated with online learning. Now, let's go over some of the benefits of developing online course shells, whether synchronous or asynchronous.

What does the research say?

In a 2010 study, Manuela Paechter and Brigitte Maier surveyed 2196 students in 29 Austrian universities about their e-learning experiences. Course design, interactions with instructors, and individual progress during their e-learning process mattered to the level of engagement.

More specifically, Paechter and Maier's research showed the course needs to have "clarity and a coherent structure" within an LMS that facilitates usability. They cite 2008 studies by Su-Chao Chang and Feng Cheng Tung and Jong-Ki Lee and Woong-Kyu Lee, who note a course design enhances satisfaction and performance respectively.

Based on a cursory, nonscientific review of discussion posts in a recent course taught, students mentioned they appreciated the mix of podcasts, video lectures, documentaries and text-related materials to learn about race, gender and class and media representation. The topic's complex topics of hegemony and intersectionality become more digestible when broken down through various modes.

Think of the elements in a course as being part of a choreographed performance—much like face-to-face in a classroom. Instead, of a static space with a list of learning resources, the information now appears on a 2-D stage and needs to be interactive.

Osama's advice.

Osama uses the LMS, Canvas, and has developed helpful guidelines on how to organize a user-friendly and aesthetically pleasing home page for his course.

Albishri said he wanted to include icons on his site to help students find assignments, quizzes, and his office hours, to name a few. He used Canva templates to design the various icons for his course content and then hyperlinked them to the modules or files. He even included a hyperlink to his Zoom private room for office hours. In addition, he developed a syllabus with hyperlinks to help students quickly find information within the document.

Osama stated, "we have to make information as accessible as possible to our students, especially because the pandemic has not been easy for our students."

Beyond the fancy design.

A fancy design cannot impede the accessibility, usability, and inclusivity of a course site for all. Employing a universal design is important, according to Dr. Sheryl Burgstahler of the University of Washington and CUNY School of Professional Studies.

"WE HAVE TO MAKE INFORMATION AS ACCESSIBLE AS POSSIBLE TO OUR STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE THE PANDEMIC HAS NOT BEEN EASY FOR OUR STUDENTS."

Dr. Burgstahler provides useful tips on creating online courses that allow all students to succeed in the e-learning environment. Some of the advice includes incorporating text only reading resources and not PDFs into the modules and captioning videos.

To conclude, all instructors should keep in mind that listening to your students will help you improve the course. As Osama says, "Any idea or suggestion to how I can make this course better for you is helpful. Feel free to speak your mind and express your thoughts. **We are in this together.**"

A Different Type of Responsibility

Matt Blomberg, GSIG's PF&R Chair shares his thoughts on the importance of taking care of your mental health as graduate student.

Traditionally, the responsibility found within Professional Freedom & Responsibility refers to academic matters, however one item that may be overlooked and is vital at this moment is the responsibility that we all have to ourselves and each other concerning graduate student mental health and well-being.

Graduate students, upon entering their studies may find that being productive in teaching, research and coursework, all the while attempting to balance time with family, friends and significant others, and making ends meet, can be all-encompassing and very stressful. Studies have shown that graduate students are increasingly reporting more instances of emotional and mental health concerns and depression (Levecque, et al., 2017; Evans, et al., 2018), and during this period of the pandemic, this is often correlated with greater instances of financial hardship, a delay in graduation, and departures from graduate programs (Soria, et al, 2020).

So, what signs should you look for, either in yourself or your peers? Academically, anyone who is having issues with concentrating, increasingly delaying the start of assignments or the quality of their work is suffering, might need a helping hand. Behaviorally, those who are more withdrawn, increasingly discouraged or lack in confidence about their progress, more irritable or anxious, have changes in sleeping or eating patterns, might benefit from talking with others about what's going on in their lives.

As graduate students, things can and will get stressful and the challenges before us are in no short supply. However, let's remember our responsibility to ourselves and importantly to each other. No one should feel like they are alone or that they can't get the help they need. Be good to yourself. Additionally, let's remember to check in on those around us and ensure that everyone is doing as well as possible during this time. Importantly, don't be afraid to seek out experts in your departments and on your campus that can help you better navigate the twists, turns and difficulties of graduate student life. Together we can make this experience a positive one – an important responsibility that we all share.

Levecque, K., Anseel, F., De Beuckelaer, A., Van Der Heyden, J., & Gisle, L. (2017). Work organization and mental health problems in PhD students. Research Policy, 46(4), 868–879. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2017.02.008

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Evans, T.M, Bira, L., Gastelum, J.B.,Weiss, L.T & Vanderford, N.L. (2018). Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education. Nature Biotechnology, 36(3), 282–284. https://doi.org/10.1038/nbt.4089

BE KIND TO YOUR MIND CHECKLIST

- [ ] TAKE A BREAK
- [ ] DO A SOCIAL MEDIA DETOX
- [ ] READ A BOOK
- [ ] MAKE A GRATITUDE LIST
- [ ] PRACTICE DEEP BREATHING
- [ ] SPEND TIME OUTDOORS
- [ ] CALL A RELATIVE
- [ ] CHECK IN ON YOUR PEERS

- [ ] GO FOR A WALK
- [ ] CUDDLE A PET
- [ ] VISIT A FAMILY MEMBER
- [ ] EAT YOUR FAVORITE FOOD
- [ ] LISTEN TO MUSIC
- [ ] CATCH UP WITH A FRIEND
- [ ] TAKE A NAP
- [ ] MEDITATE IN A QUIET PLACE

STUDENTSPOTLIGHT

FRANKLINE MATANJI

Frankline is a graduate student at the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Iowa. In this interview, Frankline shares his background, research interests, and more with GSIG's pre-conference chair, Patrick Johnson.

PJ: To start, could you tell us about your professional background and your experiences, and how that led to pursuing a PhD?

FM: I hold a bachelor's degree in Communication and Media from Kisii University, Kenya, and a master's degree in Media and Communication from Bowling Green State University, Ohio. My passion of studying media and communication and its role towards social change is the one that led me into enrolling to the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Iowa.

IOWA

School of Journalism and
Mass Communication

PJ: What made you pursue a graduate degree? Did what you did before graduate school lead to you going to graduate school?

FM: Before enrolling to graduate school, I worked as a research assistant in the division of Research and Extension at Kisii University (KSU), Kenya. While working in the division, I was also a member of a two-year Postharvest Food Handling Technologies research project carried out by the Research and Extension division in collaboration with the University of Minnesota Extension, which was funded by the United States Department of Agriculture. I also worked as a marketing research assistant for Powerhive, an American company that supplies solar power in rural Kenya. In this position, I empowered customers to use the supplied power to improve their livelihood by generating ideas that enhanced alternative sources of their income. Having worked as a research assistant, these positions gave me the motivation to enroll into graduate school to continue pursuing research work.
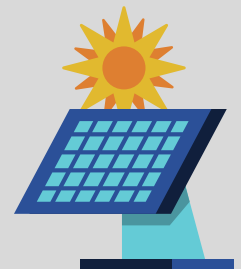
PJ: Could you please describe your research area of interest for us, and maybe share how you got interested in it?

FM: My work focuses on digital media and the empowering role of participatory communication for directed social change, China-Africa international relations, political communication, and computational text analysis. Coming from Kenya, a developing country, it has always been my interest to study the role of media towards economic empowerment in the Global South.

PJ: What are some things you are working on?

FM: Currently, I am working on a project with my advisor, Dr. Melissa Tully, and other researchers where we are looking at the spread of misinformation around COVID-19 on WhatsApp in Kenya and Senegal. I plan to work on another project which I got a Stanley research grant to study public opinion towards Chinese investments in Kenya.

PJ: What are you most excited about in your pursuit of your PhD?

FM: Since my childhood, conducting research has always been my dream. The fact that I am now able to conduct research that may one day contribute to policy formulation keeps me excited and motivates me to keep working. Also, working with my colleagues in the department and meeting renown scholars is one of the best things about graduate school and academia in general.

PJ: Why did you decide to come to Iowa for your doctorate?

FM: University of Iowa avails opportunities for students to progress academically. It offers research grants to conduct research, travel grants to present at conferences, as well as several professional development opportunities. The faculty here are very resourceful and always willing to support their students to succeed as all round professionals.

> "THE FACT THAT I AM NOW ABLE TO CONDUCT RESEARCH THAT MAY ONE DAY CONTRIBUTE TO POLICY FORMULATION KEEPS ME EXCITED AND MOTIVATES ME TO KEEP WORKING."

PJ: What are your long-term academic goals?

FM: After I leave Iowa, I hope to find a teaching and research position at an academic institution. I hope to continue with research and teaching and then eventually serve in the public service.

PJ: What is something fun about yourself?

FM: I am a big fan of sports, especially soccer and basketball.

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