

# PR UPDATE

The newsletter for AEJMC's Public Relations Division

Volume 55, No. 3 | June 2021



**Spring Issue**

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# PR UPDATE

Vol. 55, No. 3; June 2021

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## The New "Normal"

As we recover from the recent academic year and prepare for the new one, we're facing opportunities and challenges in defining the new "normal" - from reevaluating our courses to determining our student expectations to planning research, we're charting unknown territory.

What should return to pre-pandemic norms? What have we learned that we should do differently moving forward? There is much to consider this summer and into the future. The upcoming AEJMC conference will be just one place where we can discover and discuss what we've experience and what lies ahead.

This is a brief issue - with much more to come in a special pre-conference issue. We look forward to sharing more about the conference and the PRD's hard work thus far this year.

Thank you for reading.

PR UPDATE is published three times a year.  
You can find past issues [here](#).

Please send all inquiries and contributions to  
[Debbie.Davis@ttu.edu](mailto:Debbie.Davis@ttu.edu)



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## Katie R. Place

Quinnipiac University

### Reflecting and Moving Forward

**Dear Public Relations Division,**

With the spring came new opportunities for public relations teaching and research, new ways to forge community across our membership, and new ways to reflect on our position as a division. As we pass the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic, I acknowledge the trauma, pain, and sacrifice we have endured as educators and caregivers.

It was an incredibly challenging school year and I am in awe of the ways we have come together as a community – whether to trade online teaching resources, serve as a guest lecturer in a PRD colleague’s class, or offer support for colleagues during the PRD virtual lecture series. Additionally, in the wake of recent shootings in the Atlanta area and as we face ongoing social unrest, I reiterate that the division condemns anti-Asian and anti-Black hate and violence.

We remain committed to listening, compassion, and action in solidarity with the AAPI and Black communities. The public relations division is likewise committed to advancing scholarship and teaching that eradicates social and racial injustice in order to foster a more equitable community for public relations scholars, students, and professionals.

#### **In Reflection**

*Meeting Goals* - Looking back on the past months, I am proud of what the PRD has already accomplished with regard to our goals. The division remains a source of

community and support for teaching and scholarship.

The new PRD Writing Support Group, led by Geah Pressgrove, Stephanie Madden, and Melissa Janoske McLean, has a steady membership and meets every other week via Zoom to discuss writing goals and provide encouragement. Please consider following the support group on Facebook or attending one of the bi-weekly meetings!

Additionally, the 2021 Virtual Conference provided our members with opportunities to learn innovative approaches to public relations teaching and scholarship ranging from instructional design to maximize online learning, hospital public relations in the time of COVID, decolonizing public relations history, and public interest communications teaching and practice. A tremendous thank you goes to Richard Waters, Amanda Weed, Geah Pressgrove, Teri Del Rosso and Adrienne Wallace for your work leading the Virtue Conference efforts.

*DEI Strides* - The PRD also continues to make fantastic strides to develop our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion initiatives. Thank you to all of our members, anonymous contributors, university partners, and corporate sponsors that donated to our DEI programming fundraiser during the month of February.

Approximately \$6,500 was raised to support our DEI-related paper awards, speaker series and programming, and scholarship or outreach programs. Individual letters of thanks will be going out to each donor this summer.

# Reflecting and Moving Forward

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Additionally, we are sincerely grateful for a donation of \$2,500 from Edelman Public Relations to support HBCU outreach and faculty support.

Likewise, PRD was thrilled to host its inaugural Black History Month lecture on February 25 with guest speaker Shardé Davis, assistant professor at University of Connecticut and creator of #BlackInTheIvory. She shared insights on recognizing and addressing systems of oppression and racism in academia. Many thanks to the DEI committee on your programming work and for Mia Long Anderson, DEI Committee Co-Chair, who moderated the event.

Additionally, we were thrilled to be joined by Cathy Renna, Director of Communications for the National LGBTQ Task Force and Principal of the PR Firm, Target Cue this past Wednesday, June 9 for our inaugural Pride Keynote Lecture. Thank you to Dr. Erica Ciszek, University of Texas at Austin for moderating!

## Looking forward

Looking forward, I thank everyone who contributed your research to our teaching, and GIFT paper competitions this year – and thank you to everyone who served as a paper reviewer! Although we will not be meeting face-to-face in New Orleans in August, we have a fantastic slate of programming in the works.

A sincere thank you goes to our Research Committee leaders Hyejoon Rim and Chris Wilson, our Teaching Committee leaders Melissa Janoske McLean and Pamela Brubaker, and our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee for managing our paper competitions this year! Thank you to everyone who contributed panel proposals as well.

In order to allow for greater participation among the AEJMC membership in meetings regardless of conference registration status, AEJMC has programmed a variety of meetings before the annual conference in late July. In particular, please

save the date for our division-wide members / business meeting on Tuesday, July 27 at 9 a.m. CST. Additional meetings held in July include:

- CPRE Executive Committee – Monday, July 19 at 6:30 p.m. CST
- JPRR Editorial Board Meeting – Tuesday, July 20 at 6:30 p.m. CST
- PRD Past Heads Meeting – Wednesday, July 21 at 6:30 p.m. CST
- JPRE Editorial Board Meeting – Thursday, July 22 at 6:30 p.m. CST
- PRD Executive Committee Members Meeting – Friday, July 23 at 6:30 p.m. CST

Additionally, please save the date of Wednesday, July 21 at 7:30 CST for a special panel event honoring the legacy of our women PRD pioneers: Doug Newsom, Kathleen Kelly, and Judy VanSlyke Turk. A link to register and promotional materials will be sent out soon via the PRD listserv and social media channels.

DEI Committee strategic planning is ongoing and members are encouraged to volunteer! We are especially eager to partner with HBCU and HSI public relations programs, faculty, and students as the PRD develops its HBCU and HSI research scholarships and member support initiatives. Additionally, PRD supports ongoing DEI dialogue and engagement. Please look out for upcoming panel presentations and research presentations at AEJMC this August, too!

Ultimately, the strongest aspect of our division is our membership. Thank you, members, who contributed your research, donated to PRD fundraising efforts, attended PRD programming, or volunteered your time in one of our many committees.

Best wishes for a happy, healthy, and productive summer.

Warmly,  
Katie

# In Memory

The Public Relations Division is saddened by the recent loss of many members of our public relations community and we offer our sincere condolences to their families and friends. They leave a lasting legacy of service to the public relations discipline, their schools, and their students that will not be forgotten.

Vicky Bagwell, M.A., APR, Fellow PRSA  
*Associate Professor*  
*Western Kentucky University*



Kathleen Kelly, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA  
*Professor Emerita*  
*University of Florida*



Douglas Newsom, Ph. D., APR, Fellow PRSA  
*Professor Emerita*  
*Texas Christian University*



Judy VanSlyke Turk, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA  
*Professor Emerita*  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*



# Conference Preview



[Registration](#) is open for the 2021 AEJMC Virtual Conference, which will be held August 4-7, is open until July 23. Login credentials will be sent a few days before the conference.

**Member Rates:**

Faculty - \$69  
Student - \$39  
Retiree - \$39

*Below are some important "Save The Date" details for PRD.*

In order to allow for greater participation and better access to meetings, AEJMC has scheduled division and interest group meetings before the official conference during the week of July 19. Links will be made available soon.

CPRE Executive Committee – Monday, July 19 at 6:30 p.m. CST

JPRR Editorial Board Meeting – Tuesday, July 20 at 6:30 p.m. CST

PRD Past Heads Meeting – Wednesday, July 21 at 6:30 p.m. CST

JPRE Editorial Board Meeting – Thursday, July 22 at 6:30 p.m. CST

PRD Executive Committee Members Meeting – Friday, July 23 at 6:30 p.m. CST

**Division-wide Members / Business Meeting:**  
Our division-wide members / business meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 27 at 9 a.m. CST.



# Clarifying the Programming & Research Competition and Review Process

By Katie Place, Quinnipiac

As a membership-driven organization, we depend on your contributions of research and panel proposals for programming – especially during the annual AEJMC Conference in August. The process of contributing your programming or research, however, can sometimes be intimidating or confusing. Therefore, we've created this note to help clarify the processes in place for our panel and paper competitions to help you understand every step of the process.

## **AEJMC Panel Proposal Process (Research, Teaching & Professional Responsibility and Freedom Panels)**

### **1. When does the call for panel proposals go out?**

Typically, the formal call for panel proposals is sent to PRD members in late August. Members are encouraged to collaborate with colleagues across the discipline and send in panels that address research, teaching, or professional responsibility and freedom-related topics pertaining to the public relations field.

**2. What makes a strong panel?** Strong panel proposals address innovative or emerging topics in public relations, have a diverse make-up of panelists, have a clear rationale, and are well researched and detailed.

**3. How are panels first evaluated?** After the due date, all panel proposals are gathered into a shared file. (Typically, PRD receives approximately 20 panel proposal submissions.) Then, a team led by the PRD Vice Head (Programming Chair) and a committee of PRD

executives representing all three areas (PF&R, research, and teaching) review each panel proposal.

Each panel proposal is evaluated and ranked by the team with regard to a) clarity and depth of proposal description, b) fit and alignment with the Public Relations Division, with consideration to having a diverse slate of panels representing all three areas (PF&R, research, and teaching) c) innovation or creativity of the panel proposal, d) whether all panelists are listed and committed to speaking, e) if a proposed co-sponsor is listed – and if this is a new or innovative co-sponsorship match.

The evaluation process helps PRD executives to whittle down the 20 panel proposals to a list of 6 to 10 to then put forth to AEJMC for the “Chipping Process.”

### **4. The conference programming / chipping process:**

In late fall, all AEJMC divisions and interest groups then submit panel proposals for programming in the AEJMC Conference to the “Chipping Process.” As one of the largest divisions, the PRD has about 3 “chips” (programming spots) to program our panels (chips are typically split in half by co-sponsoring with other divisions). Therefore, this means that the PRD can typically program only up to SIX panels – if we find co-sponsors for each panel. The chipping process requires negotiation skills, countless emails, and lots of



compromising to find co-sponsors for our panels.

It is often a hit-or-miss and disappointing time. Strong panel proposals may not garner interest from other divisions. Or, other divisions might propose similar panels – and then we must combine panels in order to share a “chip.” In the end, we try to ensure that we have co-sponsored panels in all three areas (teaching, research, and PF&R) and make programming matches that will interest our members.

**5. After the chipping process:** After the formal chipping process and before the final conference program is written up, divisions may negotiate or edit the make-up of the panels. This is especially true for panels that had to combine in order to share a chip.

Therefore, even though you proposed a strong panel with a diverse group of scholars, you may find the panel is edited to add new panelists or topics of discussion to meet the needs of the co-sponsoring division.

### **AEJMC Conference Paper Process (Open, Teaching & Student Calls)**

**1. Writing up the call for papers:** In the late fall, the PRD research and teaching committees, alongside the PRD executives, write the formal call for conference papers with guidance from the AEJMC Central Office and Standing Committee on Research.

The paper call is written and edited to ensure that the formatting and content specifications are clear and detailed. We also add details for new paper calls or awards. For example, you may have noticed that this fall, we added a call for the new Race in Public Relations award.

**2. April 1 deadline:** Papers are due to the AEJMC All

Academic site by 11:59 p.m. CT on April 1. Up until the deadline and immediately following, the Research Committee and Teaching Committee executives are assessing papers for factors that could potentially disqualify the paper (e.g. over the length requirements, identifying information (names) are listed in the body of the paper).

In some circumstances if errors are found before the deadline, the Research or Teaching Committee executive will reach out to the author(s) and help them edit the paper (e.g. to eliminate identifying information) and re-submit the paper. Ultimately, if authors’ papers were disqualified, they will be notified in a timely manner – and a final disqualification report is sent to AEJMC.

**3. The paper review process:** Before the April 1 deadline, reviewers are recruited to help assess and rank the PRD paper competition entries with a sign-up survey. Then, in early April, all papers are assigned reviewers by the Research and Teaching Committee executives who have access to All Academic.

Three reviewers are assigned to each paper. PRD ensures that reviewers are a) faculty members, b) assigned to paper categories that differ from the categories they submitted a paper to, and c) assigned to papers based on the areas of topical and methodological expertise they identified in the sign-up survey to every extent possible. For example, if you are a qualitative scholar with expertise in dialogic theory of public relations, the research and teaching committees will try our best to assign you to papers complementing your topical and methodological areas of expertise. The review and scoring criteria are set by the AEJMC Standing Committee on Research.

**4. Ranking papers by scores and evaluations:** After all of the reviewer scores are in, the Research and

and Teaching Committee executives with access to All Academic assess the paper scores and comments for their respective paper competitions.

Many factors go into this assessment including a) the raw numerical scores of the paper, b) the recommended “accept” or “reject” scores of the paper, c) the average transformed score & the average normalized score for the papers, d) the topical and methodological diversity of the papers, and e) the traditional 40% acceptance rate for papers alongside the number of paper programming slots we have for the AEJMC conference.

Ultimately, all papers undergo a strict double-blind review and are thoroughly assessed for a variety of factors. PRD strongly advises that all reviewers utilize a “coaching method” for their reviews and contribute detailed reviews that will offer insights for development of the paper’s methodological and theoretical strengths.

When reviewers fail to offer written feedback, they are contacted directly and reminded of the expectations for submitting a quality review.

### **AEJMC GIFTs Process**

1. The GIFTs Call: In the late fall, a call to send in Great Ideas for Teaching (GIFTs) is sent to the PRD listserv. Individuals are invited to send in a short-form (one page) description of a single teaching idea or assignment – supplemented with examples or materials.

Submissions that discuss teaching an entire course or multiple assignments will be disqualified.

**2. Assessing GIFTs:** The GIFT applications are combined into a shared file after the February due date. Then, the Teaching Committee (and additional PRD executives as necessary) all review the GIFTs applications and score them on a scale of 0 to 5 based on rationale/clarity, learning outcomes, assignment details, relevance to teaching PR, and relevance to PR theory/practice. Sometimes qualitative comments are also gathered, but those are not required from reviewers, and they are only used internally for the committee.

Typically, the top 5 scoring GIFTs are then selected for presentation at the AEJMC Annual Conference. Additionally, other GIFTs may be chosen for presentation at the AEJMC Annual Conference if space is allotted.

**3. The paper review process:** Just like with the paper competition, GIFTs undergo a double blind review. This is the reason qualitative comments are not required and not shared with the submitters--the Teaching Committee is often a small number of people, and their names are publicized within the division, making the desired double blind review impossible.

GIFTs are not reviewed prior to the submission deadline for potential disqualification.

## **Congratulations!**

Congratulations to the Public Relations Divisions members who were elected to AEJMC-level service positions!

• Linda Aldoory, University of Maryland – Vice President

• Bey-Ling Sha, Cal State Fullerton – Accrediting Council Rep

• Donnalyn Pompper, University of Oregon – Publications Committee

• Carolyn Bronstein, DePaul University – PF&R Committee

## Reviewing Members Feedback and Experiences Through the 2020 Division Survey

By Melanie Formentin, Towson University

Every two years the AEJMC Public Relations Division (PRD) distributes a survey to gauge member perceptions of PRD programs and practices. The following is an overview of the results from the biennial PRD Membership Survey.

The most recent survey was distributed in Nov. 2020, and participants (N = 115) were recruited via official AEJMC Public Relations Division communication channels including the official listserv and social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). Data was collected anonymously and both members (n = 102) and non-members (n = 13) who access PRD resources were encouraged to respond.

Participants were primarily tenure-track and tenured professors (n = 75) working at institutions with balanced teaching and research expectations (n = 45). Participants were primarily white (n = 65) females (n = 64) who first joined the division between 2015-2020 (n = 37).

### Membership Experiences

When examining why members join the PRD, participants (n = 96) strongly agreed they are members to network with colleagues (M = 4.44, SD = .708) and agree they are members to stay informed about PR scholarship (M = 4.36, SD = .771).

Members also (n = 94) have positive beliefs about their membership in PRD. They are satisfied with their membership (M = 3.87, SD = .883) and believe PRD officers are accessible (M = 3.89, SD = 1.05).

In recent years, the division has made a concerted effort to increase its outreach on social media and virtual event options. On average, participants are most satisfied with the listserv (M = 4.11, SD = .754), the virtual panels (M = 4.01, SD = .819), and social media content (M = 4.0, SD = .922).

When asked to provide additional comments about member experiences with the PRD, there were various

comments applauding the leadership for their efforts. Participants reported enjoying becoming more involved, the information they received, and the number of opportunities to get involved.

However, a variety of concerns were acknowledged. The most prominent concerns included costs associated with the division (and AEJMC in general) and questions about the criteria to get involved in division leadership and volunteer positions. Additionally, participants pointed to an interest in seeing more diverse research presented at the conference.

### Division Programming

On average, participants seemed particularly pleased with the quality of PRD programming. Participants were satisfied with the annual conference submission process (M = 3.84, SD = .884) and the quality of content in PR sessions and panels (M = 3.83, SD = .881). However, they neither agreed nor disagreed about the quality of reviews for the research competition (M = 3.31, SD = .950).

Additionally, despite challenges presented by the pandemic, on average, participants are most satisfied with the Offsite Tour (M = 3.94, SD = .759) and the Bill Adams/Edelman Luncheon (M = 3.97, SD = .914).

Next, participants are neither satisfied nor unsatisfied with the PRD grants and awards. Notably, far fewer participants (n = 43-46) responded to these items, suggesting they have may no experience or opinions.

In general, the open-ended comments about division programming emphasized perceived areas of improvement. Suggestions emphasized:

1. **Grant/Award Programs:** Strengthening “management, fundraising and communication” about

# Membership Survey (continued)

these programs.

- 2. Diversity of Research:** Accepting a wider variety of research; fostering cross-division collaboration; and diversifying panelists and panel topics.
- 3. New Member Outreach:** Developing more welcome and get-to-know opportunities and more training on how to move into leadership roles.
- 4. Strengthening Reviews:** Strengthening quality of reviews; providing more qualitative feedback; and creating a stronger system for evaluating panel submissions.

Among the suggestions and feedback, comments highlighted how active and well-organized the division is, especially on social media. Participants noted the PRD's clear and concise communication, supportive colleagues, and availability of excellent resources for teaching, collaborating, networking, and professional development.

## Paper Submission Feedback

In general, most survey participants submitted 0 papers or abstracts ( $n = 58$ ) to the PRD for AEJMC 2020. A total of  $n = 18$  (15.7%) participants reported remembering the reviews they received.

When evaluating the quality of reviews,  $n = 7$  (6.1%) participants felt the reviews were a mix of helpful and unhelpful ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = .899$ ) and they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ( $n = 6$ , 5.2%) with the quality of the reviews ( $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = 1.098$ ). In general, participants indicated they plan to submit a paper to the AEJMC 2021 conference ( $n = 50$ , 43.5%).

Comments regarding feedback about conference reviews were minimal as there were few respondents to these questions ( $n = 5$  per question). In general, however, comments emphasized ensuring qualitative comments, concerns about reviewer expertise, and quality of comments.

## Conclusion

In general, the PRD appears to be serving member needs. Members are pleased with the supportive environment, division resources, and division programming. However, there still exist opportunities to improve ongoing efforts. Based on survey feedback and anecdotal evidence confirmed by the survey, the division and its committees have already spent the year exploring opportunities to strengthen communication with division members.

To date, more networking opportunities have been made available for PRD members and non-members through the launch of programs such as the PRD Writing Support Group. Outreach on social media has also continued its steady growth with virtual events such as the Inaugural Black History Month Keynote Speaker event with Shardé Davis and the Semester of Service Twitter Chat.

Ongoing efforts include strengthening the division's scholarship and grant programs, creating more transparency around the panel proposal process, and developing opportunities for reviewer training. The formation of and early work by the PRD Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee has already strengthened events and fundraising to help the division achieve its DEI goals.

As the division continues working for its members and colleagues, we welcome questions about how to get involved.

- A full list of committees and members can be found on the [PRD Website](#)
- Members are encouraged to sign up for the [PRD listserv](#)
- Additionally, connect with the PRD through [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to receive the latest news and event announcements.

# Fair Assessment in an Era of Remote Teaching and Learning

By Minhee Choi, Virginia Commonwealth

We never know what is ahead of us! The year 2020 taught us a good lesson. Although most of us think that the past year has been somewhat challenging, we have adapted ourselves well into this new environment, and we have made it to 2021!

This new era has introduced many additional ways of teaching and learning, and both instructors and students have to constantly explore these options to find the one that suits them best. Grades help students gauge their success. As instructors, we may feel challenged in providing our students with a fair assessment during this pandemic. I list below four examples of challenges and the corresponding recommendations.

First, *cheating and offering fair assessments* for an online test. Widespread cheating has become a major concern for many educational institutions during the pandemic (Newton, 2020). Bilen and Matros (2020) proposed a uniform online exam policy that requires a camera that captures the computer screens and rooms of students when taking an exam. However, this policy has been criticized as it invades the private spheres of students. Therefore, this method should be used in a transparent manner and be guided by data protection regulations (García-Penalvo, Corell, Abella-García, & Grande-de-Prado, 2020). Giving students limited time to complete their tests and asking simple questions may also help instructors provide a fair assessment of their performance in online tests.

Second, *both instructors and students face technological obstacles almost every day*. One study suggested that using the technologies that are readily available at a university can effectively boost the confidence of instructors and students in new online assessment

environments (García-Penalvo et al., 2020). Moreover, implementing a clear policy related to technology issues and proposing viable solutions (e.g., university IT team contact information, university resources for laptops, and Wi-Fi access) to students at the beginning of the semester will help them address their problems. These clear policies and viable options will also reduce the noise coming from technology-related problems.

Third, *for a fair overall assessment*, continuous assessments using multiple exams and activities can help reduce the effect of a single assignment (García-Penalvo et al., 2020). Diversified methods also promote the engagement and concentration of students on their course.

Fourth, *constant online interactions between instructors and students will guide them toward success even when they are away from their campuses*. Understanding the expectations of one another under such time of uncertainty can also guarantee the success of these instructors and students during the semester.

## References

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- Newton, D. (2020). Another problem with shifting education online: cheating; Data show the rate of cheating on tests is on the upswing. The Hechinger Report. Retrieved November, 13, 2020.

## Promotions and Appointments

Regina Luttrell has been appointed the Associate Dean of Research and Creative Activities at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University.

Chris McCollough joined the faculty in the Department of Communication at Jacksonville State University in Jacksonville, Alabama after over eight years of service at Columbus State University. He has been elected to serve as Department Chair in Fall of 2021.

Debbie Davis has been appointed the Assistant Dean of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Media and Communication at Texas Tech University.

## Books

Melissa A. Johnson's book, *Engaging Diverse Communities: A Guide to Museum Public Relations*, has been published by the University of Massachusetts Press. The text relies on in-depth interviews with communicators at ethnic museums, along with content analyses of more than 200 mainstream and culture-specific museums' websites, digital press rooms, social media, and more. It is the first book about museum PR since 1983.

Dustin Supa and Lynn Zoch have published *Strategic Media Relations in the Age of Information - An Evidence-Based Approach* with Oxford University Press.

Donnalyn Pompper has published *Community Building and Early Public Relations: Pioneer Women's Role On and After the Oregon Trail* with Routledge.

Karen Freberg has published a new introduction to public relations textbook with SAGE called *Discovering Public Relations: An Introduction to Creative and Strategic Practices*.

*Have some good news to [share](#)? Publications, promotions, speaking engagement, job changes? Let us share via the AEJMC PRD Newsletter. The next deadline is July 15..*