

ComSHER

Communicating Science, Health, Environment and Risk Division
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

Fall 2020 Newsletter

Staying the Course and Forging Ahead to 2021

As our sense of community continues to be challenged and redefined, ComSHER members around the world remain committed to producing high quality research, teaching, and service work that contributes to both the academy and our greater society. The dedication of our members was clearly displayed in August at [AEJMC's first virtual conference](#), where attendees showed up with bells on and all of our sessions were packed with outstanding faculty and students.

With 280 members and 126 total submissions, our division continues to be a leader in the field. We accepted 65 papers for an overall acceptance rate of 50% and were able to highlight the work of 20 graduate students who represented 30% of the division's work presented at AEJMC 2020. The accepted papers were presented at two asynchronous poster sessions, three research panels, and ComSHER's first ever high-density session, which featured 10 papers. We were also proud to recognize more than a dozen honorees for the [Article of the Year](#), [Top Paper](#), and the [Eason](#)

[Prize](#), still the largest cash award for student papers at AEJMC.

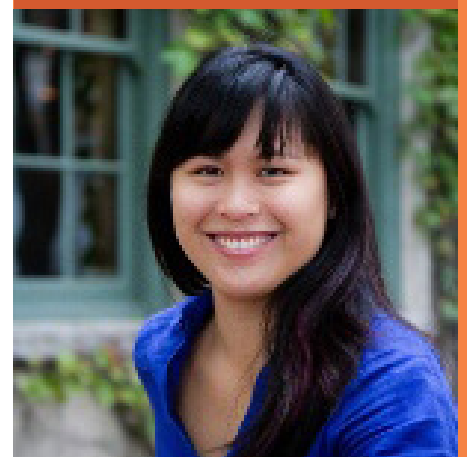
This year, ComSHER has focused on forging new relationships and creating more programming space for discussing issues of equity and social justice. This commitment resulted in five outstanding teaching and PF&R panels that highlighted topics related to environmental justice, community engaged research, and equity in science communication. We look forward to strengthening our connections with our new collaborators in the [Political Communication](#), [Minorities and Communication](#), and [Media Management, Economics & Entrepreneurship Divisions](#), as well as our colleagues at [#InclusiveSciComm](#) and the [Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science \(SACNAS\)](#).

We were also thrilled to devote funding to eight graduate students in order to cover conference registration fees and will continue this program in 2021.

Our officers have been hard at work developing programming



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aimed at continuing these conversations in [New Orleans](#). In addition to our teaching and PF&R panels, we will be soliciting papers for a unique research panel dedicated to highlighting work regarding social justice, equity, and international perspectives in ComSHER. If you have any work that addresses these issues please reach out to our research chairs, [Matthew VanDyke](#) and [Jessica Fitts Willoughby](#), for more information.

For 2021, graduate student and membership engagement is another division priority. We have a fantastic team of media pros running our social media and encourage you to look for us and post relevant content on our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages. ComSHER has also created a Graduate Student Committee dedicated to improving student engagement in the division and to better connect graduate students with potential faculty and peer

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mentors. In short, we are taking great strides to improve inclusion within ComSHER and create new opportunities to support new and future members.

Finally, it was with great sadness that we said goodbye to our outgoing head, [Rachel Young](#) at the business meeting. Having dedicated 10 years to the division, Rachel's hard work and dedication to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice has changed the face of the division. During her time with ComSHER, she has grown student membership, forged

relationships with new partners in the field, and improved the rigor of our research competition. It has been an honor and pleasure to work at her side, and I have personally benefited from her constant strength, intellect, and kindness. Heading into 2021, the division is in excellent shape to continue her excellent work. Thank you, Rachel, for your leadership and friendship!

We look forward to seeing you all in [New Orleans!](#) 🌟

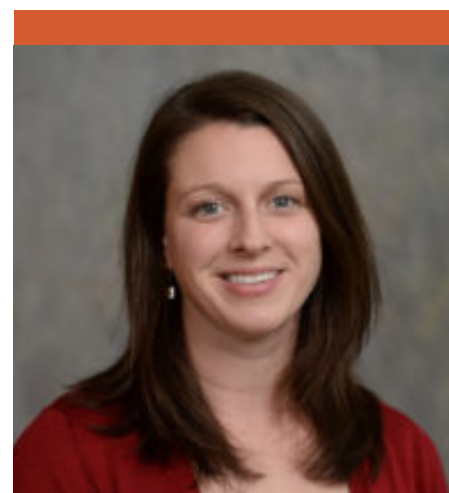
Planning for the AEJMC 2021 Research Competition

Although AEJMC 2021 may seem far away, winter is a good time to start thinking about your submissions. AEJMC will begin accepting submissions for AEJMC 2021 on January 15, 2021. All submissions must be submitted prior to April 1, 2021 for consideration.

ComSHER invites original research submissions related to science, health, environment, risk and related topics from all disciplinary approaches and methodologies. ComSHER is also interested in highlighting research that showcases diversity, equity, inclusion, justice and international perspectives. For more information, see the message from ComSHER head Kajsa Dalrymple and vice head Sara Yeo in the newsletter.

AEJMC will be accepting extended abstracts this year for possible inclusion as well as full length manuscripts. Look to the full call for papers for AEJMC for additional information.

Also, along with research paper submissions comes the need for potential reviewers. In the coming months, we will be sending out a message soliciting reviewers for the AEJMC 2021 ComSHER conference submissions. We look forward to your help and your submissions so that we can program a strong showing of ComSHER research for AEJMC 2021! 🌟



Jessica Willoughby
Research Co-Chair
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AEJMC will begin accepting submissions for AEJMC 2021 on January 15, 2021.

ComSHER Research at the 2020 Virtual Conference

In spite of the pandemic, ComSHER had a great year for submissions to the 2020 paper competition, participation from reviewers, and engagement from virtual conference attendees. We showcased excellent work focused on communicating science, health, environment and risk from scholars around the world.

this year given the unique circumstances, adjustments, and demands forced by the pandemic.

We were grateful for your service to and participation with ComSHER during this year's research competition and conference! We look forward to highlighting and sharing your great work at next year's conference in New Orleans.

We received 166 research and extended abstract submissions this year, and accepted 83 submissions for presentation at the annual conference for an acceptance rate of 50%.

We received 166 research and extended abstract submissions this year, and accepted 83 submissions for presentation at the annual conference for an acceptance rate of 50%. This rate resembles AE-JMC's preferred 50% acceptance rate. ComSHER sponsored three research presentation panels with five papers each highlighting COVID-19 communication and information behaviors; understanding audiences for science and health risk information; and the top-rated work submitted to the division. Additionally, we hosted a high-density session featuring 10 presentations and 57 poster presentations across two scholar-to-scholar sessions.

A big THANK YOU again to those who volunteered their time to review submissions this year! We had 113 reviewers this year, and were able to keep the average of papers and extended abstracts at 3.53 per judge. We truly appreciated your service to the division

For questions or additional information, please email Research Co-Chair Matthew VanDyke at vandyke@apr.ua.edu.



Matthew VanDyke
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From the ComSHER Community

What have you been reading or listening to lately?

Rachel Young,
University of Iowa

The podcast *Nice White Parents* (which to me seems to be built on reporting by the New York Times reporter Nikole Hannah-Jones) is unflinching in illustrating how even those of us who care about equity can perpetuate unjust systems, especially when those systems benefit us.

Roma Subramanian,
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Citizen: An American Lyric by Claudia Rankine. It's an incredibly painful but critically essential read about lived experiences of systemic racism illustrated through powerful poetic prose and artwork.

Kristin Timm, George Mason University & University of Alaska Fairbanks

The podcast *Unlocking Us* by Brené Brown. The episodes shed light on several important issues, but the episodes on burnout, loneliness and stretching vs. chasing had useful insights for adapting to the stress and challenges of COVID-19 (and finishing a dissertation!)

Professional Freedom & Responsibility Panels

New Normal for Journalism Ethics in 2020: Journalists' Responsibility in Addressing Misinformation in the Year of Coronavirus, Social Protests, and Natural Disasters

Co-sponsored with the Media Ethics Division

The year 2020 is challenging time for journalists who have to handle a considerable amount of new information from a variety of news sources, such as scientists, health providers, politicians, government officials, and celebrities, who have been often found as sources of misinformation. With limited time for fact-checking, journalists also became sources, as well as victims of misinformation from time to time.

This panel will address journalists' responsibilities as they cover the broad range of topics, including social (e.g., Black Lives Matter), environmental (e.g., wildfires in the West coast of the U.S.), and health issues (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic), and share their

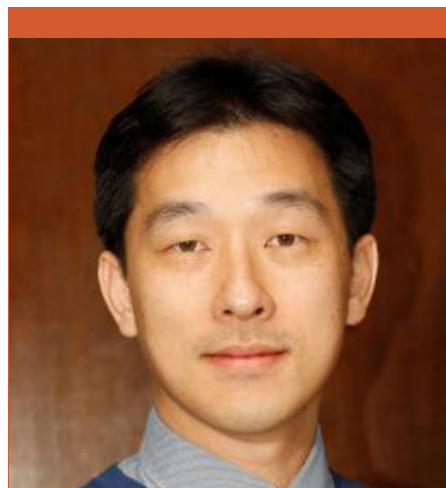
knowledge and experience of how journalists can protect the principles of truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, and public accountability in the middle of substantial challenges in 2020.

Misinformation, Racism, and the Magnification of Health Inequities: Research Informing Publics and the Practice (and Vice Versa)

Co-sponsored with the Public Relations Division

Misinformation has long been a problem in our field; however, the COVID-19 pandemic, racist rhetoric tweeted from the White House, national protests inspired by Black Lives Matter, and other events in 2020 brought issues related to truth, trust, and social justice to the forefront of public discourse.

In this panel, scholars will 1) discuss how their work contributes to our collective understanding of misunderstanding, and 2) set a research agenda for how future work can more closely examine



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the intersection of misinformation, racism, health disparities, and social justice.

For questions or additional information on the proposed panels, please email PF&R Chair Kang Namkoong at namkoong@umd.edu. ✨

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Find ComSHER Online:

Website: <https://aejmc.us/comsher/>

Listserve: comsher@googlegroups.com



Two Teaching Panels Planned for AEJMC 2021

Inclusive pedagogy for online teaching

Co-sponsored with Communication Theory and Methodology Division

Online teaching has become front and center during the COVID-19 pandemic. This panel reflects on online teaching best practices with a particular focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

It presents exemplars and models for online teaching content and delivery, evaluations, student participation and engagement, and comparisons of asynchronous vs. synchronous learning, while acknowledging student differences in abilities, social identities, cultural perspectives, and neurodiversity.

Confirmed panelists:

- Danielle Kilgo, University of Minnesota
- Rachel Mourão, Michigan State University
- Nathian Shae Rodriguez, San Diego State University

More panelists to be announced!

Assisting the student in crisis: How to identify resources, balance expectations and needs, and support well-being for students facing difficult challenges

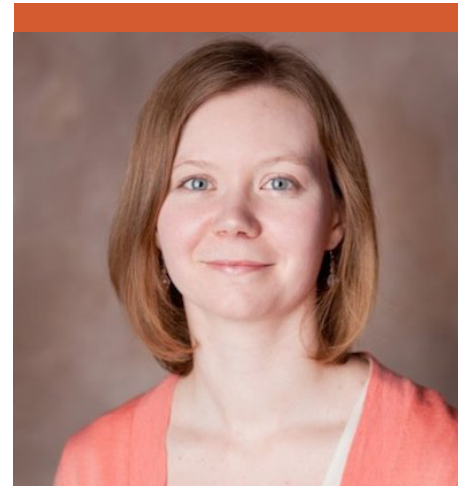
Co-sponsored with Political Communication Division

The mental well-being of students in post-secondary institutions has been a growing concern. Major external events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and heightened profiles of events steeped in racism, provide additional challenges to navigating the college experience.

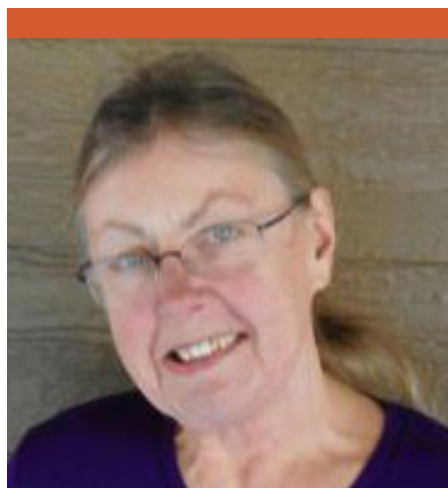
This panel explores different case studies and resources for addressing such issues. It identifies best practices for helping students in crisis mode, while also determining how to assist students handling ongoing (or long-term) threats and concerns.

Panelists for this second panel will be announced soon!

For questions about either panel, please email Teaching Chair Ashley Anderson at ashley.a.anderson@colostate.edu.



Ashley Anderson
Teaching Chair
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Susanna Priest, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief
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Science Communication: Linking Theory and Practice

Our journal has had a very long (although informal) relationship with both ComSHER and its predecessor, the Science Communication Interest Group. We are a ranked communication journal and both international and interdisciplinary in our board membership and authorship. We generally look for strong theory and solid empirical methods, whether qualitative or quantitative, as well as a focus on science communication. Both the “science” and the “communication” aspects are important. Good writing and consideration of applications to professional practice are both “pluses” in submissions. We define science broadly to include all of the ComSHER specialties (health, environment, and risk, as well as science more generally).

Impact factor and ranking: 2019's two-year impact factor (the number of citations in 2019 to papers published in 2017 and 2018) has continued to tick up, going from 2.302 the previous year to 2.328 today. For comparison, our 2015 two-year impact factor was 1.820 – for an increase of 28% over the last five years. This puts us today at 26th out of all 92 Web of Science ranked communication journals. Our 2019 five-year impact factor was 2.865.

Submissions: As of October 2020, we have received our 263rd submission for the calendar year. For comparison, in all of 2019, we received a total of 210 submissions, and by this same date in 2019, we had received just 165 – so our new total represents an increase of just under 60% over where we were this time last year! This includes over 35 submissions for our in-press COVID issue, which (courtesy of Sage) is being published open access – and all seven of the successful papers are already available in OnlineFirst at the journal website. Thanks to all of you who have taken on additional reviewing responsibilities in the post-COVID era (and a special thanks to Associate Editor Jessica Myrick, who acted as

guest co-editor for the special issue). Marilee Long and Cynthia Coleman continue as senior associate editors.

Editing opportunities: We still have room for at least one other associate editor. These unpaid positions allow you to have an impact on the field's future – and as a bonus, should look good on your CV. Associate editors choose reviewers and otherwise manage the review process for specific manuscripts. We try to see to it that they have no more than two active submissions to work on at one time (and there are stretches where only periodic monitoring and an occasional nudge are required). You should have some reviewing and/or authorship experience with us, and any background that includes academic editing is a big help.

Volunteer ad hoc reviewers: If you have completed a Ph.D., you are always welcome to be a reviewer. Board members who typically review two to four papers a year are ultimately chosen from the most active ad hoc reviewers, depending on current topical and methodological needs. We try not to assign more than one paper every three months to people in either group. We are rejecting a few more papers without review and deciding quite a few more

papers with just two reviewers, if a third cannot be found. Thus, the actual time to decision remains at three to four months. Our 2019 acceptance rate for research papers is going to be quite similar to 2018 at right around 14-15%. We also publish 3000-word commentaries (edited by Linda Billings) that are not peer reviewed. These can discuss scholarly issues in the field, describe innovative science communication programs, or offer related policy opinion.

Submission review time: For those of you waiting for decisions on a 2020 submission, rest assured that the manuscript system does not allow us to lose them. We are trying to process the influx of papers as fast as possible, even while we understand that many reviewers have had their schedules seriously disrupted by the pandemic. Please don't be dismayed if the system shows no status change right away – it does not mean we've forgotten you. All papers are initially read and evaluated in the order of receipt. To minimize everyone's waiting time, we have collapsed some steps. In normal times it takes four to six weeks for an initial decision and while it might be a bit longer at this time, it is trending toward normal again. 🌟



Science Communication: Linking Theory and Practice

Learn more: journals.sagepub.com/home/scx

Submit: mc.manuscriptcentral.com/sc

Introduction to the special issue, "Special Issue: Communicating Risk and Uncertainty in the Face of COVID-19": <https://bit.ly/3mUxTRG>

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NEWS