



Communicating Science, Health, Environment, Risk

A DIVISION OF AEJMC

Fall 2021 Newsletter

ComSHER - Communicating Science, Health,
Environment & Risk Division

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass
Communication

November 18, 2021

From the Division Head and Vice-Head

By: Sara K. Yeo, University of Utah and Timothy Fung, Hong Kong Baptist University

Advancing our Priorities in 2022

With 394 members and 215 submissions to our research competition, our division continues to grow. This year, we dedicated one of our research sessions to highlighting the work of members who are focused on international perspectives as well as diversity, inclusion, and equity. The dedication of our members was once again apparent—all our sessions were well-attended, with our high-density research session leading the way with 58 attendees!

In the 2021 conference, we partnered with the Media Ethics, Public Relations, Political Communication, and the Communication Theory and Methodology Divisions to host engaging and salient PF&R and teaching panels on journalistic norms, misinformation and health inequities, support for students' well-being, and inclusive pedagogy. Moreover, in a new partnership with Inclusive SciComm, we hosted a preconference, Inclusive ComSHER, and our inaugural ISC + ComSHER Cohort this year. With the aim of connecting researchers and practitioners in our discipline, we selected six early-career individuals to the Cohort. In addition to attending AEJMC's annual conference together, they also engaged with the Inclusive SciComm Symposium in October. We hope to continue this initiative next year.

Our division is continuing to work on graduate student and membership engagement. Our Graduate Student Committee, led by Deborah Danuser, is hard at work on activities and events that serve our student members. During the annual conference, under the leadership of Roma Subramanian, our Media Team became one of the more highly engaged divisions on social media. We look forward to even more engagement this year, with Rosalynn Vasquez at the helm.

Finally, we bid farewell to our outgoing head, Kajsa Dalrymple, at our Member's Meeting this year. Kajsa's focus on diversity and equity has led our division to new partnerships and programming that we hope to continue over the coming years. Thanks to her diligent service, the state of our division is strong as we move into 2022. I have learned much from her leadership and admire the grace with which she led our division during a challenging year. Thank you, Kajsa!

From the Research Co-Chairs

By: Jessica Willoughby, Washington State University and Ashley Anderson, Colorado State University

Another record setting year for ComSHER

Even with everything going on, ComSHER members came together for AEJMC 2021, submitting a record number of manuscripts and extended abstracts for consideration, reviewing manuscripts for the paper competition, and engaging in the virtual platform space. We had work from scholars around the world focusing on communicating science, health, environment, and risk, much of which also directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We had more than 200 research and extended abstract submissions for 2021, and accepted 103 for presentation at the annual conference with an acceptance rate of 49.4%. This rate resembles AEJMC's preferred 50% acceptance rate. ComSHER sponsored three research presentation panels with papers that covered a variety of science, health, environment and risk communication topics. Additionally, we hosted a high-density session and had posters presented in two poster sessions.

Thank you so much to those of you who volunteered to review manuscripts for ComSHER. We had more than 100 reviewers this year. We appreciate your service and especially appreciate that you made time to serve as a reviewer even amid the difficulties of the past year. We look forward to AEJMC 2022 and highlighting the important work being done in the areas of communicating science, health, environment, and risk! For questions or other information, feel free to email Research Co-Chair Jessica Willoughby (Jessica.willoughby@wsu.edu).

From the Teaching Chair

By: Kang Namkoong, University of Maryland

ComSHER has two teaching panels being planned for the 2022 conference. Below are summarized descriptions of the panel proposals.

Addressing Sensitive and Controversial Topics in Class:

In higher education, it is inevitable to discuss sensitive and controversial topics in class, which could produce unexpected and unintended outcomes regardless of the instructors' and students' intentions. For example, science, health, environment, and risk topics are often associated with stigmatizing individuals and specific groups (e.g., ethnic, religious, or interest

groups) involved in the controversial issues. Although the instructors and students may not intentionally use the stigmatizing language in the classrooms, it could marginalize some students who identified themselves as the targeted population. Furthermore, if the discussion on the sensitive topics were poorly managed, the stigmatization and prejudice could spill over to those who have different opinions on the topic as well as those who belong to the stigmatized group. This panel will showcase of collective efforts in deliberating how to discuss sensitive and controversial issues in class without the stigmatization and discrimination. The Commission on the Status of Women is co-sponsoring this panel.

Teaching with Augmented Reality & Virtual Reality:

As Covid-19 creates the need for alternative teaching modalities, instructors with experience in applying augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) within the classroom are becoming more in-demand. This teaching panel will bring together instructors with experience in AR & VR, to demonstrate how they've applied these technologies within their classrooms in new and exciting ways. Media Management, Economics & Entrepreneurship is co-sponsoring this panel.

For questions or additional information on the proposed panels, please contact Kang Namkoong [namkoong@umd.edu].

From the PF&R Chair

By: Sojung Kim, George Mason University

ComSHER has two PF&R panels being planned for the 2022 conference. Below are summarized descriptions of the panel proposals.

Denial and Deathbed Pleas for the COVID-19 Vaccine: Seeking New Theoretical and Practical Ways to Address Information Misinterpretations and Manipulations

This panel provides perspectives from researchers and practitioners, who can offer theoretical insights from professional experience and draw connections to approaches in academic research, with a keen eye toward health inequities. Based in regions of the country whether there was strong resistance to public health measures, our panelists offer a diverse array of insights along with their interdisciplinary perspectives from journalism across platforms (daily newspapers, TV, social media, and long-form magazines) to advertising and public relations professionals.

Proposed Panelists

- Rachel Young*, U. of Iowa, panelist, rachel-young@uiowa.edu
- Amanda Hinnant*, U. of Missouri, panelist, hinnanta@missouri.edu

Professors pinch-hitting as university communicators, public health strategists and citizen scientists: Navigating the classroom and politics at universities in states without mask or vaccine mandates (A joint proposal between the Public Relations and ComSHER divisions)

In this panel, we will bring together professors from universities in states without mask or vaccine mandates. These are universities that are not requiring students to wear masks on campus (and/or vaccination). Panelists will contribute their voices on how they navigate the complex role of educator, role model, public health communicator, and individual responsible for keeping their students safe – while also teaching across modalities and navigating their own COVID-19 vulnerability (and that of their family). This panel is intended to capture how faculty have struggled, but also how they've found ways to thrive in this complex role. For example, two of our panelists have researched risk communication and COVID mitigation behaviors, and yet are working in an environment that is not requiring CDC-recommended disease mitigation protocols; we will discuss the cognitive dissonance this creates and how they've worked around it. Other panel members have found ways to teach and stay well (so far), despite chronic disease that compromises their immunity. Our panel/proposers represent small and large universities, an HBCU, and several historically under-represented groups, including faculty who identify as Black, Asian, disabled and LGBTQI.

Proposed Panelists

- Sean Upshaw, University of Texas, confirmed
- Sara Yeo, University of Utah, confirmed
- Vera Walker Hawkins, Texas Southern, TBC
- Candi Carter Olson, Utah State, confirmed

Science Communication: Linking Theory and Practice -- Good News and Updates

By: Susanna Priest, Editor-in-Chief, Science Communication

We've received very good news from Sage Publishing: Our two-year Impact Factor has risen from 2.328 for 2019 to 4.180 for 2020. This is an impressive jump, if we do say so ourselves! The Impact Factor covers current-year citations (from 2020 in this case) to articles from the previous two years (2018 and 2019). Some of this gain may result from changes in how online articles are counted, but this is still a substantial increase over last year, leaving SC highly ranked at 18th out of 94 in the "communication" category (within the top 20% of all communication journals). *Journal Citation Reports*, the source of these statistics, is now published by Clarivate Analytics. Our five-year factor for 2020 was 4.628.

Submissions have been running steady at around 300 (all article types) per year into 2021, with roughly a 15% acceptance rate for research papers. To help cope with these higher submissions numbers, we have added a managing editor, Ted Greenhalgh, to the editorial team. Ted works on organizing some of the “behind the scenes” activities that make the journal work, such as screening out papers that are off topic, suggesting reviewers, and updating the online keyword list. If you have questions about the status of a submission or how the process works, you can email me at editorscicom@gmail.com or Ted at ted.greenhalgh.phd@gmail.com. Because of the rising submissions, we were hard pressed to keep our submission evaluations on schedule this past year, but Ted’s help has allowed us to finally catch up.

This year we welcomed four new board members: Jay Hmielowski, University of Florida, USA; Jakob Jensen, University of Utah, USA; Laura N. Rickard, University of Maine, USA; and Sonny Rosenthal, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Thanks to these and all the many others around the world who have helped with reviewing this past year. If you are interested in reviewing or have submission questions, let us know.

Featuring: ComSHER Student Members

With the ongoing pandemic, 2021 was a difficult year for student members to meet and connect with the rest of ComSHER. So that we can get to know our community better, we randomly selected student members and asked them to share a little about themselves and their work.



Ivy Ashe (Twitter: [@iashe](https://twitter.com/iashe)) is a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Journalism and Media at the University of Texas at Austin. She is expected to graduate by May 2022. Ivy's research focuses on media geography, visual journalism, and online identity. As a former environmental reporter for local newspapers, she is most excited by COMSHER work that bridges the professional-academic gap. Ivy has a rescue cat who enjoys road trips - so far he has been to 18 states and three national parks.



Sammi Munson is a Doctoral student at George Mason University, as well as a researcher at the Center for Climate Change Communication (4C). She is expected to graduate by May 2023 with a degree in Communication. Sammi received her Master's degree from The Ohio State University in Environmental Science. Her research revolves around science communication; specifically, she focuses on environmental communications and how environmental education can be improved. Sammi is excited to be a part of COMSHER because researching communications on science, health, the environment, and risk really helps people through finding and implementing sustainable solutions to problems and injustices that plague many today. In her free time, Sammi likes to ride and show her 3 horses at recognized jumping competitions.



Camilla M. Owens is a second-year master's student at Brigham Young University. She is expected to graduate by April 2022. Camilla's research focuses on the impact of idealized portrayals of body image in social media and entertainment media—an interest that began during her career as a fashion model. Specifically, Camilla is using biometrics technologies such as eye-tracking and facial recognition to gauge attentional and emotional responses to the idealized portrayals, and how they impact participant body satisfaction. She is excited to be involved in COMSHER because of the opportunities that it provides to study issues of health and risk using innovative technologies. Camilla is currently researching and applying to PhD programs that will allow her to dive deeper into the field of health communication.



Robyn Vanherle is a Ph.D. student at the Leuven School for Mass Communication Research (Belgium) under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Kathleen Beullens. She is expected to graduate by the first of October 2023. Robyn is passionate about media-effects research and is currently involved in a multi-method Ph.D. project, consisting of go-along interviews and a daily diary study, to unravel the complex association between adolescents' social media use and their alcohol (mis)use. She is specifically interested in the following domains. First, into how the evolving media landscape changes the depiction of alcohol-related content across different social media platforms and their features. Second, into why these alcohol portrayals are shared as well as how these are perceived by individuals. Last, into how these alcohol portrayals affect individuals across contexts and over time. What excites Robyn for the future, is the rapidly changing and heterogeneous media landscape that can offer both difficulties and new possibilities for health communication. She thinks it is exciting and crucial to change along with these developments. For example, from a research point of view, new research methodologies could be applied to study new media environments (e.g., studying more private media environments) and from a practical point of view, these new media environments can likewise be used to stimulate interpersonal health communication and promote health literacy. Finally, Robyn really enjoys collaborating so feel free to contact her!
Twitter: @RobynVanherle (<https://twitter.com/RobynVanherle>)



Chia-Ho Ryan Wen is in the doctoral program of the Newhouse School at Syracuse University and expected to complete his doctorate by September 2023. As a health communication scientist, he tends to utilize experiments and statistics, focusing his research on preventive measures for COVID-19, vaccination, health interventions, and technology uses for help-seeking behavior. Prior to public health being his foremost interest, his studies were themed on emerging technologies and mobile devices. He analyzed citizens' and experts' risk and benefit perceptions of artificial intelligence. He also investigated netizens' mobile device uses developed in response to potential data breaches on rapidly growing streaming or social networking sites. He believes

that technology is quietly and dramatically reshaping health communication and creating new health inequalities. Digital literacy, information efficacy, and scientific knowledge are playing more and more significant roles in public health. His future research will continue to shed light on these aspects and explore how technology can bring more conducive opportunities for every social member to access health resources.