

spig news

Fall 2021: *The official newsletter of the AEJMC Small Programs Interest Group*

Death of beloved prof was lesson in resilience

By Jackie Incollingo
Rider University

The COVID-19 pandemic and widespread social justice movements could make it necessary for teachers of journalism and mass communication to pay closer attention to teaching resilience, AEJMC panelists said.

Recognition of students' widespread challenges, trauma, and grief may be critical in attempts to return to "normal" education.

The teaching panel was coordinated by the Small Programs Interest Group and International Communication Division and was moderated by Dr. Ruth Moon of Louisiana State.

Dr. Tamara J. Welter, associate professor at Biola University, said

her colleagues and students sought to work through processes of grief last spring when a beloved professor died after a brief illness.

Welter said the death of Associate Professor William "Bill" Simon was like losing a family member. Welter said it was critical for educators to be honest about personal feelings and make room for grief.

Professors canceled regular classes to talk about the loss; the department opened up Simon's office, providing a space for students to mourn or make crafts in his memory. Educators adjusted deadlines and provided flexibility to individual students struggling to focus.

*Please see **RESILIENCE** on page 4*



Jeremy Sarachan

head notes

What's ahead? New partners and plenty of opportunities

As the incoming head of SPIG, I wish to thank Kalen Churcher for all she's done in this role the past year and to let you know about some of our future initiatives for the 2021-2022 academic year.

First, let me introduce myself: I'm an associate professor at St. John Fisher College in the Finger Lakes region of New York. I've been a full-time faculty member for 16 years and am now in my seventh year as department chair. We are a true "small program," with five full-time faculty, one staff member, and approximately 70 majors.

I'm very excited to be the new Head of SPIG. Work on this year's initiatives for SPIG is well underway.

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Students pose with the late William "Bill" Simon, a Biola University associate professor, as shown in a screenshot from the AEJMC presentation.

aejmc 2021 conference

Panel concludes empathy matters in many situations

By Michael Longinow
Co-Chair, PF&R

Empathy matters. And it might mean more now than in many years past. That's the conclusion of a PF&R panel at the AEJMC national conference in August that brought tears and chin-scratching ideas to a session that convened at 7 a.m. Pacific Time. The session was co-sponsored by SPIG and Media Ethics Division.

Christy Vines, president and CEO of the Ideos Institute in California, opened the session with intellectual handholds on what journalists and journalism educators should consider in navigating visual or narrative coverage of trauma.

She lamented what can easily become a "path to polarization" in communities that neglect empathy. Vines, a scholar with graduate training with Harvard's Kennedy

School, brought the perspective of a non-profit CEO and entrepreneur. Vines' background is in research into the role of empathy in conflict zones and climates of extremist violence.

Dr. Antje Glück, a scholar from Bournemouth University in the UK, discussed insights from her studies on the role of emotion in journalistic decision-making. Glück, who has news reporting experience in Europe, showed examples of COVID-19 news coverage that demonstrated, or neglected, empathy. And she brought a deep-dive into theoretical perspectives on empathy that separate it from parallel notions of pity and compassion fatigue.

In a riveting segment, panelist Clarke Finney, a reporter and anchor at a CBS affiliate in San Antonio, Texas, showed a video clip of the moment she choked up – on air – while reporting on deaths after a

mass shooting in Odessa. Finney noted the empathy that develops in small community journalism, where reporting can become personal and a connection develops with leaders and audience members that is different than in larger markets.

Dr. Tamara J. Welter, a scholar from Biola University, talked about a project she coordinated in which students were directed to research a people group by use of empathy mapping – a process guiding students to examine the lived experience, the perspectives, the historical context, and the daily habits of those on whom they're reporting. Welter's research has international and cross-cultural emphasis.

The panel was moderated by Dr. Michael Longinow, Biola University Digital Journalism and Media Department chair, and scholar on trauma and cross-cultural encounter.

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aejmc 2021 conference

Bumps and mountaintops were both felt in lockdown

By Kathleen McNulty

Marist College

In the early weeks of the Spring 2020 semester, Darren Sweeney's broadcast journalism students tackled the typical speed bumps of producing a newscast.

But, oh, what challenges lie ahead.

The COVID-19 pandemic struck, and they fled Central Connecticut State University campus, leaving the TV studio and their comfort zone behind.

Scattered to the winds, they scrambled. Like professional journalists around the world, they improvised with cell phones, laptops, Zoom interviews, and newscasts stitched together from at-home, ad hoc studios.

Sweeney's description was part of the AEJMC 2021 Conference teaching panel, "What I learned in Lockdown."

He said the hardest part was re-establishing lines of communication about what everyone was doing and when, a must-have in any successful newsroom.

The result of their work?

Students nailed the very first newscast, and one student received an award for reporting from the Connecticut chapter of the Society for Professional Journalists.

"It showed they were cutting through the madness and technical struggle to uphold the highest standards of journalism possible," said Sweeney, an associate professor.

Among the most practical lessons to carry forward: Thinking "mobile" about all equipment, maximizing whatever technology is at hand, and staying in touch and on track with newscast details.



Other panelists said they tweaked, adapted, and experimented as their campuses remained shut and the pandemic raged. Some tips they shared included:

Traditional ice-breaker exercises personalize interaction when learning is fully remote – from John Kerezy, associate professor at Cuyahoga Community College in Ohio. He tweaked his popular online "What's Your Story" exercise with a COVID-19 question: How has the pandemic affected each student's education?

Surveys determine student-learning needs when situations are in flux – from Kyung Jung Han, an assistant professor at California State University, Bakersfield. Her students got more comfortable with online, self-paced learning as the 2020-2021 year went on, surveys showed.

Students also liked real-time meetings to socialize and ask questions. Han set up study and support groups for more interaction.

"Ungrading," a less-rigid approach to assessment, is a "more human" grading experience for students – from Professor Paolo Banchemo of the University of Alaska, Anchorage.

Grading changes she started before COVID-19 continued, including more flexible deadlines and allowing resubmissions, plus goal setting and self-assessment by students. Points and final grades are still awarded.

Perusall, billed as a "social e-reader," boosts student participation – was one recommendation from Professor Jacqueline Marino of Kent State University, who taught online for the first time during COVID-19. Using Perusall, she uploaded reading material, then had students annotate, discuss and add questions, giving Marino a jumping-off point for class planning. She said she will use Perusall for in-person classes, too.

Online class breakout rooms and surveys that measure students' online learning readiness and technology access are key – from Sheila Webb, a professor at Western Washington University, who had a student log into class while aboard a ferry.

When all was said and done, a comment Sweeney made about his broadcast class seemed an apt description of what many students and instructors experienced during the lockdown.

"The learning curve," he said, "was pretty awesome."

Resilience was a key for educators

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Welter said it was critical for the faculty to be honest and transparent with students while moving through their own stages of grief.

Panelist Dr. Shearon Roberts, an associate professor at Xavier University of Louisiana, said the impacts of COVID-19 and nationwide social justice demonstrations in response to police violence placed challenges on professors at HBCUs, such as her institution, and increasingly diverse classrooms elsewhere.

Roberts said many students felt their lives were forever changed by the Black Lives Matter movement, upending traditional teachings that journalists must be silent on their personal experiences. Students participating in protests challenged notions of journalistic objectivity and normative ideas of media professionalism, in light of personal experiences with systemic oppression.

Roberts said incidents such as the May 2020 on-air arrest of CNN correspondent Omar Jimenez, who was covering Minneapolis protests, were traumatizing to students of color. (Jimenez, who identifies as

Black and Latino, according to *The New York Times*, had shown police his press credentials but was handcuffed and detained, prompting widespread First Amendment outcry. He was later released from custody without charges, and the governor issued an apology.)

Like Welter, Roberts said crisis prompted educators to reconsider classes: How to keep course goals and objectives the same, but rethink deadlines, assignments, and rubrics. Still, Roberts said, it's also OK to know that not all students will pass, or that some may need to take a semester off to grieve or take a break, then come back rejuvenated.

Dr. Brian Semujju, a lecturer at Makerere University in Uganda, said many of his students experienced significant difficulties due to the pandemic lockdown, and both educators and students resisted the switch to all-remote learning. Instructors initially received no support and training and struggled to find tools like Zoom that could accommodate large classes. Eventually, he said, the university held a four-week training to help lecturers switch to the university's learning

management system, but by that point, some professors were reluctant to move away from Zoom.

Semujju said important professor-supervised industry internships abruptly switched to zero industry contact, limited contact with professors, and new work assignments and expectations, such as essays or research proposals instead of industry-published clips.

Semujju also reported students dropping out, disengaging, and struggling with technology access.

Roberts said it was critical for educators to learn from crises to inform future teaching. Classrooms, she said, can be a space to be frank with students about their struggles too.

Welter said this fall many students may still need room to grieve what has been lost during the past 18 months. She advised educators to "pay attention to caring for yourself first," in order to be prepared to help students. It's important to recognize that many students may have experienced personal trauma, Welter said, and consider providing students space for reflection and flexibility with how to reenter regular academic routines.

SPIG leaders already hard at work

Continued from page 1

Our vice head, Jackie Incollingo, has been working hard on creating partnerships for SPIG panels in preparation for the conference next summer in Detroit.

We are also looking to include more video material on our social media platforms to complement our always active listserv. We are exploring ways to draw more readers to our journal, *Teaching Journalism and Mass Communication*, and in the same spirit, increase the number of SPIG-sponsored papers at the national conference.

Last year, Kalen distributed a survey to help our members locate guest lecturers and panel members, and we plan to make that available this year.

Additionally, as many of our members are or have been department chairs, I hope to create more opportunities for SPIG chairs to discuss and commiserate on issues related to these responsibilities, including the possibility of a regular virtual meet-up (in addition to the member meet-ups discussed elsewhere in this issue).

Finally, though we missed the celebration of our 20th anniversary

in 2020, we're looking to postpone a large celebration until our 25th. Having a big bash for our 22nd (in 2022) seemed odd, and a delay will lead to a much bigger party in just a few years!

I invite you to let me know if any (or all) of the above endeavors are of interest to you and how you might like to be involved. If there are other concerns or goals you'd like addressed, please don't hesitate to contact me.

My email is jsarachan@sjfc.edu. I look forward to talking with many of you soon and seeing you at the conference in just a few months.

milestones

John Hanc's latest book collaboration – *Survive to Thrive: Living Your Best Life With Mental Illness* by Margaret Chisholm, M.D., with John Hanc – was published October 26 by Johns Hopkins University Press. Hanc freelances for the *New York Times*, *Newsday*, *Smithsonian*, *Brain & Life* (patient magazine for the American Academy of Neurology), and others. He officially retired as a full professor at New York Institute of Technology on August 31 of this year – only to magically re-appear as an adjunct the following week, where he continues to advise the student publication and student-run advertising and PR agency classes.



Ginny Whitehouse

has been named director of the newly formed School of Communication at Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Kentucky, where she has taught since 2011. She is the cases and commentaries section editor of the *Journal of Media Ethics* and serves on the editorial board. She teaches and researches in the areas of media ethics, media law, and intercultural communication.



Maureen Boyle,

Stonehill College, Easton, Massachusetts, had her second, non-fiction narrative book, *The Ghost: The Murder of Police Chief Greg Adams and the Hunt for His Killer*, published this year by Black Lyon Publishing. It details the murder of Saxonburg Police Chief Greg Adams in 1980 and the eventual discovery of his killer nearly 40 years later in Massachusetts.



It is her second true-crime book. The first was *Shallow Graves: The Hunt for the New Bedford Highway Serial Killer*, published in 2017 by University of Press of New England, which has since shut.

Doug Mendenhall,

Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas, created audio versions of five past religion columns he'd written about his family dogs, in honor of National Dog Week in September. These were aired on the local NPR station, KACU, at 6 p.m. each day that week, in the space before Fresh Air with Terry Gross. The 4-minute stories are available at dougmedenhall.com



Lisa Carponelli,

Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa, has been promoted to full professor in the Department of Multimedia Communication. She also is head of the college's Division of Business & Multimedia Communication.



Carrie Buchanan,

John Carroll University, near Cleveland, Ohio, is on step-down retirement, working part-time this year and retiring in May 2022. She and her husband George plan to move back to Canada, where they are citizens, to live near Ottawa, Ontario. Spare time will be occupied with selling the house, moving and finding new accommodations suited to their retirement lifestyle and income. Carrie hopes to write a memoir with her sister and teach part-time in retirement, while George, who retired in June, is already getting contract work in his profession as a Unitarian Universalist minister. Buchanan is Co-Chair of the SPIG Research Committee.



Dave Madsen,

Morningside University, Sioux City, Iowa, was elected this summer as president of the Iowa College Media Association.



Madsen is co-chair of the SPIG Research Committee, and as a personal milestone, Madsen and his wife, Mary, welcomed their first grandchild this summer.

Michael Ray Smith,

research fellow at LCC International University and former head of SPIG, and **Paul Glader,** a professor at The Kings College in Manhattan and director of The Media Project non-profit, with their colleague, videographer Micah Danney, won third place in Religion Story of the Year from the Religion News Association's Awards for Religion Reporting Excellence. Their entry was a long-form, multimedia piece about churches with teams that carry weapons to protect parishioners during services. They also won third place for Excellence in Religion Reporting at Online-Only news outlets for the same story package.



Mitzi Lewis is

serving as interim chair of the Mass Communication Department and **Jim Sernoe** is serving as interim dean of the College of Fine Arts at Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls, Texas. Sernoe said, "We are both counting down the days until we can return to our normal jobs, although the university keeps changing that date. In the meantime, we are both eating poorly, down to our last nerve, and not exercising enough. Plus at least one of us is drinking too much."

