

Mass Communication Division – Meeting Minutes

Date: Saturday April 5, 2025

Time: Meeting called to order at 4:18 PM

Chair: Melissa Smith

Location: SSCA 2025 Annual Convention, Norfolk, VA

The annual meeting of the Mass Communication Division was called to order at 4:18 PM by the chair, Melissa Smith. The first order of business was the approval of the minutes from the 2024 meeting. The minutes had been distributed in advance, and after a motion to approve was seconded, they were accepted unanimously by a voice vote.

Melissa then provided a comprehensive report from the Executive Council meeting. She shared that the 2029 conference will be held in Charlotte, North Carolina, with positive progress toward securing a room rate of \$199 per night. A new executive director was approved, who receives a \$10,000 stipend. This is a new initiative, aligning the organization with similar professional associations. The director received approval from the Finance Committee, as reported by Frances Brandau, who also emphasized the need to prioritize updates to the MemberClicks platform. This change would address ongoing issues, particularly the cost associated with member inquiries.

Melissa introduced Leland Spencer, newly appointed as the 2nd Vice President of SSCA, who greeted the membership. The group then briefly discussed constitutional amendments and upcoming resolutions. Melissa noted that the process for submitting and amending the constitution will be documented in an accessible format.

A conversation also took place regarding the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, specifically whether the committee should consider a name change due to concerns raised by members, including Pat Wheaton. In addition, the division is drafting its five-year strategic plan, a process currently being led by Wheaton.

Looking ahead, Melissa announced that the 2025 conference will take place in Birmingham, AL. The conference theme will focus on Artificial Intelligence. She invited members to suggest ideas for programming and potential guest speakers. Given that Birmingham was the original site of the SSCA conference, there was discussion around thematically tying the conference to its historical roots. Melissa encouraged attendees to consider creative themes and programming directions. No questions were raised at that time.

Melissa also introduced Elise Hansen Smith as the new communications officer. Members are encouraged to send any information they would like distributed to Elise, who will handle decisions on dissemination. A current list of division membership was also sent out.

Following this, the Vice Chair delivered a report on submissions and acceptances. For the current cycle, the division received a total of 19 submissions—13 papers, 3 panels, and 3 posters. Of these, 10 papers, one panel, and one poster were accepted. The top student paper award went to Matt Martin of the University of Southern Mississippi.

The Vice-Chair provided a brief report on organizer meetings, highlighting collaboration among panel planners and a discussion around the potential use of AI to help identify nearby institutions to solicit submissions. He went over the timeline for the 2026 conference. The division will need to have our own call ready by May 15, submissions must be in September 15, and reviews must be done by October 15. This will leave about one month to complete reviews. He stressed the need to increase our reviewer pool, especially if we are going to proactively work to solicit submissions from nearby institutions. One member raised concerns about the XCD system's outdated information and the need for improved updates.

During the Old Business section, Melissa addressed concerns over a low-quality and low-quantity submission pool. She reported that Umisha agreed the batch was weaker than usual and emphasized the need to improve the division's visibility and reputation. Suggestions included reaching out to local community colleges and universities and contacting individual members directly for submissions to the division. There was also speculation that the division's proximity in scheduling to the BEA conference may be siphoning potential submissions.

Members discussed whether the division should begin accepting abstracts or extended abstracts to encourage more participation. However, there was concern about how such submissions would be evaluated—especially for awards. It was noted that other divisions, like Political Communication, do not consider extended abstracts for awards. Some confusion also arose over submission types and how reviewers would know which was which given the XCD system. This could be resolved by requiring a clear label (e.g., “paper” or “extended abstract”) in the submission header. The group agreed to look into models and standards from other divisions.

The possibility of reviving the division's former “Production Showcase” was also discussed. This showcase had once served as a session to feature AV media and creative work. There was interest in bringing this back, perhaps with a pedagogical or creative theme. Suggestions included integrating the showcase into the call for papers or securing a private panel space with AV equipment. Others proposed using convention center monitors in public areas to display projects. The idea received broad support.

Under New Business, concerns were raised about the cost of AV and problems with panel attendance. One panel that morning had only one of three scheduled presenters in attendance. Melissa suggested that the conference needs a feedback mechanism for no-shows. While AEJMC and NCA have policies withholding credit from non-presenting panelists, enforcement remains a challenge.

The group discussed the possibility of banning future participation for those who fail to show without notice. However, concerns were raised about overreach, potential legal issues, and the fairness of such policies—especially in cases involving graduate students or emergencies. Some members suggested sending a strongly worded email or notifying department chairs. Another proposal involved sending a personalized confirmation email prior to the conference, including room assignments, AV setup, and contact information for all panelists, respondents, and planners. This message could reiterate the importance of attendance and include options

for virtual presentation when needed. These communications would be sent via the XCD system.

The floor was then opened for nominations for the position of Secretary. With no immediate volunteers, Dr. Bill Harlow was nominated and seconded. A motion to close nominations was approved, and Dr. Harlow was elected Secretary by acclamation.

In announcements, Leland Spencer, editor of *Critical Studies in Media and Communication*, invited members of the division to submit their work to the journal. The Osborne Reception was also announced, and all were encouraged to attend.

The meeting was adjourned following these final announcements.