Call for Submissions

Southern States Communication Association – 2026 Convention
Freedom of Speech Division

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The Freedom of Speech Division invites submissions for competitive selection for the 96th Southern States Communication Association Conference to be held in Birmingham, Alabama April 8–12, 2026. We especially welcome submissions that address the convention theme: "*Comm-AI-nity: Conversations in the Age of Intelligence*."

The division welcomes scholarly papers and panel proposals that center the freedom of expression. The division invites projects from across all theoretical and methodological perspectives, including, but not limited to, rhetorical, historical, empirical, or legal approaches to the study and application of free expression in society.

In recent years, artificial intelligence has saturated public discourse and the ways we approach digital communication. The rapid proliferation of artificial intelligence has significantly affected all fields of study within communication, including that of free expression. For example, the US judiciary has begun to rule on cases at the intersection of the First Amendment and artificial intelligence, like that of *Garcia v. Character Technologies* and *Thaler v. Perlmutter*. Surely, many more cases at this intersection will soon make their way through the courts, all of which could significantly shift our perceptions of free expression.

The conference theme also grapples with our sense of community, especially within the context of artificial intelligence and an ever-changing media ecosystem. We ask, too, that authors consider how shifting media technologies are influencing our sense of community within physical and digital spaces as it pertains to the ethic of free expression. For instance, it has been widely reported that artificial intelligence tools are fostering political division regarding contemporary crises. In turn, community spaces, particularly those ripe for civic activism like college campuses, become sites of heated political contestation with significant implications on the actualization of free expression.

In sum, while we welcome all scholarly studies and conversations that center the concept and application of free expression, we especially encourage those that engage the complex contemporary intersection of community and free expression in an age of artificial intelligence.

Proposals that explore connections and co-sponsorship with other divisions or interest groups are strongly encouraged. Please notify the division planner if you think your proposal would be suitable for co-sponsorship.

The Freedom of Speech division welcomes four types of submissions:
>   **(1)** Completed papers that do not exceed 25 pages (standard formatting and excluding references).
>   **(2)** Extended abstracts of between 1000 and 2000 words that outline the paper's research questions, methodology, theoretical framing, and initial findings.
>   **(3)** Thematic panels of 3–5 papers focused on a central topic. Panels comprised of individuals representing different institutions are preferred.
>   **(4)** Round table discussion panels of between 4–7 discussants focused on a central topic.

Details for each submission type are as follows:

Competitive Paper Submissions
"Competitive papers" are completed research projects that develop a substantive critical, methodological, analytical, or theoretical contribution. Submissions will consist of 1) the full anonymized paper 2) a separate cover page with the paper title, author name(s), institutional affiliation(s), contact information, and an abstract of no more than 200 words.

Please follow the instructions on the convention site. Omit all author-identifying information from the manuscript to facilitate anonymous review.

All completed papers submitted will be considered for the Division's Top Paper Award. For student papers, indicate "STUDENT" on the first page of the manuscript, and indicate "Student Paper" during the submission process. The Division's Top Student Paper will be submitted for consideration for the SSCA Bostrom Young Scholar Award. To be eligible for student awards, all authors of the paper must be students at the time the papers is submitted. (i.e., a paper co-authored by a student and a faculty member will not be classified as a student paper.)

Debut Papers*:* A "debut paper" is one submitted by an author or authors who are presenting at SSCA for the first time.

Extended Abstracts
The division welcomes proposals of works-in-progress that address ongoing legal, social, and political issues bearing on the freedom of speech. Extended abstracts will be considered along-side completed papers for inclusion in the program, but will not be eligible for the Top Paper Award.

Submit an abstract as a paper submission. A strong abstract submission will address the following: 1) Primary topic, case, or controversy, 2) Methodology, 3) Theoretical framework, 4) Initial findings, tentative conclusions, and/or hypotheses, 5) Implications for our understanding of the freedom of speech, and 6) References.

Panel Submissions
Panel proposals are for a slate of 3–5 papers focused on a central topic or theme. Submissions must include 1) a panel title, 2) an overall panel rationale (no more than 200 words) and 3) the following information about each presentation on the panel: a) the presentation title, b) the presentation author(s), with their institutional affiliation(s) and contact information, and c) the

presentation abstract (no more than 200 words per abstract). All of this should be compiled in a single document and submitted in the "paper upload option" on the XCD platform. A best practice for all divisions is to submit panel proposals with diverse participants comprised of individuals representing different institutions, and where possible and relevant, potential new members.

Round Table Submissions
Round table proposals bring together a group of scholars to discuss a topic or theme. This type of session typically has between 4–7 presentations. Submissions must include 1) a session title, 2) an overall session rationale (no more than 200 words), 3) a list of participants' names with their institutional affiliations and contact information. All of this should be compiled in a single document and submitted in the "paper upload option" on the XCD platform. A best practice for all divisions is to submit round table proposals with diverse participants comprised of individuals representing different institutions, and where possible and relevant, potential new members.

Panel or Roundtable Submissions: Panels and roundtables are submitted through the same process as competitive papers; just be sure to select the appropriate submission type when prompted. The submitter will be able to add other panelists as "authors" after the initial submission. Upload a copy of the panel, listing the description/rationale, panelists, and, if appropriate, panelists' individual topics; upload this at the "Upload Paper" prompt.

Pertinent to All Submissions
Submissions must be completed online no later than 11:59 p.m. PST, September 15, 2025.
Go to the paper submission site by going to the conference website (https://www.xcdsystem.com/ssca/member) and clicking the submission link. First time visitors to the site will need to create an account. Return visitors will need to make sure to use the same email address that they used to establish the account. To avoid technical problems, early submission is strongly advised. Any submission not meeting the above requirements will not be accepted for review. If you have any questions, please contact the 2026 program planner for the Freedom of Speech division, Joshua Guitar, at jguitar@kean.edu.

Audio-Visual Support: Audio-visual equipment should be requested ONLY if it is essential to a presentation. Most submissions do not require A/V equipment and there will be limited availability during the conference. Your judiciousness is appreciated in considering whether a request is appropriate for your presentation. Due to prohibitive cost, A/V requests will be considered but may not be met. The final program will indicate which sessions have A/V capability. An alternative may be a shareable QR code that audience members can access from their own personal devices.

Submission Protocol: Submissions to SSCA must be original research that has not been published or presented at another regional, national, or international conference. Also, the same paper or panel should not be submitted to more than one division. Divisions and interest groups reserve the right to reject any submissions not following these standards.