

BEST PRACTICES IN TEACHING: INCORPORATING DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION INTO THE JMC CLASSROOM



DEI

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ELECTED STANDING COMMITTEE ON TEACHING**

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Best Practices in Teaching: Incorporating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion into the JMC Classroom

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Best Practices in Teaching: Incorporating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion into the JMC Classroom

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Sponsored by the AEJMC Elected Standing Committee on Teaching

This booklet contains the winning entries of the 2022 Best Practices in Teaching Competition, sponsored by the AEJMC Elected Standing Committee on Teaching.

This is the 17th year in a row that AEJMC's Elected Standing Committee on Teaching has honored innovative teaching ideas from the AEJMC membership. Each year, the committee selects winners in a themed competition – highlighting different areas across the journalism and mass communications curriculum.

This year's competition focused on creative ideas/methods for incorporating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion into the JMC classroom. We were particularly interested in innovative practices in courses outside the Race/Class/Gender curriculum (in which DEI concepts are centralized). The committee sought entries that explained how faculty members used projects or tasks to teach practical DEI skills in print, broadcast, reporting and editing; public relations; advertising; visual communication and photojournalism. We received 38 entries from around the globe. The winners are as follows:

1st Place:

Invisible No More: Elevating Historically Marginalized Voices through Audio Storytelling (*Todd Henneman, California State University, Long Beach*)

2nd Place:

Shifting the Paradigm: A 'Diversity First' Approach to PR Campaigns (*Adrienne Wallace, Grand Valley State University, and Regina Luttrell, Syracuse University*)

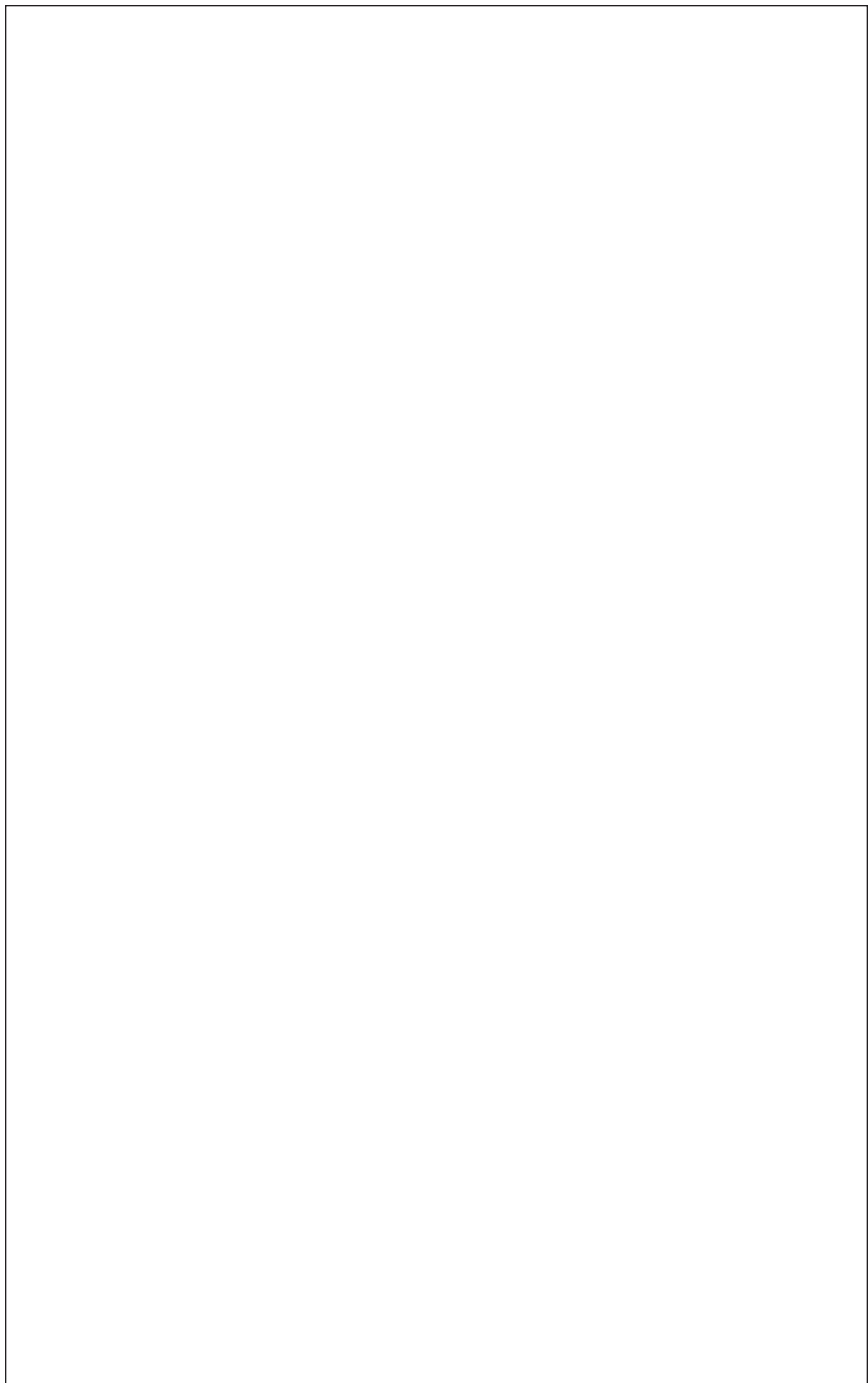
3rd Place:

Outside the Box (*Harrison Hove, University of Florida*)

Honorable Mention:

Rural Community Engagement: Understanding Difference Through an Experiential Communications Course (*J. Caleb Walters, The University of West Alabama*)

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FIRST PLACE

Invisible No More: Elevating Historically Marginalized Voices through Audio Storytelling

**Todd Henneman,
California State University, Long Beach**

Abstract: Ethical and comprehensive journalism requires journalists to identify stories and seek sources often overlooked or misunderstood. Academic literature on journalism consistently links the concepts of “product quality” with “diversity” (Lacy & Rosenstiel, 2019). However, too often journalism espouses objectivity and neutrality in theory but perpetuates stereotypes in practice (Grzeszyk, 2019). This assignment accomplishes the dual goals of elevating voices of people from communities often marginalized, misrepresented, or misunderstood while also demonstrating skills associated with effective audio storytelling.

Explanation of teaching practice or activity: Students are presented the following prompt: *As a class, you will tell stories about people often overlooked or misrepresented. Each of you will create an approximately five-minute episode of the class podcast, called “Invisible No More.” Your episode should tell the story of one specific person who represents a group or subject historically overlooked, misrepresented, or marginalized. It also should reflect the fundamentals of audio storytelling, using ambient and characteristic sounds, actualities, and narration. Your work will be judged on how well it reflects those fundamentals, how well it adheres to the goal of elevating an overlooked experience, and whether it places that person’s experience in context. When done, upload your script and place the URL of your episode, posted on Soundcloud, at the top of the document.*

This assignment is the culmination on a four-week module focused on audio storytelling. Students pitch their ideas. After receiving approval, they continue to research the topic and identify sources. Simultaneously, they hone their audio storytelling skills through a series of in-class activities and small assignments. To practice finding ambient and characteristic sounds, for example, they record a student recalling an amusing anecdote that took place on campus and capture relevant sounds. In another developmental assignment, they attend an on-campus event, come up with a prompt, and record people’s responses. Recently, students attended an on-campus health fair and asked people, “What does ‘health’ mean to you?” They then return to the classroom, identify the best soundbites, and practice writing into and out of those actualities. They also dissect professional podcasts, explaining whether — and how — each source added to the storytelling and the purpose of each ambient or characteristic sound. This experiential learning allows them to apply concepts from readings and lectures in formative activities that correspond to the skills needed to report and produce their episode of Invisible No More.

Rationale: I believe that discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion should be woven into the fabric of courses, not a “one-and-done” philosophy. I have revised assignments and lessons so each emphasizes at least one specific element of diversity, equity, or inclusion. For example, I may show demographic data to underscore the importance that sourcing reflects the city’s population. I see this audio assignment as an opportunity to think about whose voices journalism tends to miss or misrepresent and challenge students to break those cycles of stereotyping or excluding. Because it comes early in the semester, the assignment sets the tone immediately about engraining diversity, equity, and inclusion into routines. I introduce students to Loden & Rosener’s (1991) seminal framework for examining and discussing dimensions of diversity. It fosters a more wholistic view of diversity. As the framework details, we each have “internal” dimensions of diversity: race and ethnicity, national origin, age, mental and physical abilities, gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation. We also have “external dimensions” that include political beliefs, education, work experience, family and religion, among other aspects. The framework moves students beyond a casual understanding of diversity. The assignment connects to the ideal of giving voice to the voiceless and generates portfolio-worthy work.

For this module, we hold meetings in class that simulate newsroom meetings in which they:

- Articulate in one sentence the episode’s focus and what makes it interesting as well as respond to questions posed by classmates about their story idea.
- Identify an audience interested in the topic, informed by research.

In addition, the assignment provides organic opportunities to help students better understand privilege and stereotypes as they talk through ideas. As they move through the assignment, they:

- Research data to place an individual’s story in context.
- Identify and explain the purpose of sounds they select.
- Produce an episode worthy of streaming.

Outcomes: I evaluated the assignment by looking at the quality of stories and diversity of subjects and at qualitative feedback about whether this assignment contributed to learning.

Diversity of stories

The assignment generated episodes exploring a robust range of experiences: pressures on first-generation college students, stigmas about mental health in the Latinx community, the role of music for a transgender woman, social isolation of international students during height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effect of “catcalls” on college women, anxieties of same-sex foster parents, hopes and concerns of undocumented immigrants, and much more. I have no way of anonymizing the stories because students state their full names in introductions and conclusions of each episode, and stories often refer to local places and events.

Anonymous feedback from students

Four sections of the course spanning two semesters have completed the assignment. Students consistently indicate that the assignment enhances their skills and prepares them for workplaces.

- “Yes, it was challenging, but it was also rewarding and taught me a lot.”
- “[It was a] “good assignment to shed light on minorities or people who are underrepresented.”
- “It gave a chance to talk about something that doesn’t normally get attention. It also gets you thinking about things/people/ideas that often get overlooked.”
- “The assignment helped me branch out from other journalism projects. I learned a lot about my topic and it was an insightful learning process.”
- “I really enjoyed it. Great for my portfolio.”
- “I was scared at first, but I’m adding it to my portfolio of work because it was worth it.”
- “I really thought it was a helpful way to solidify my skills in podcasting.”
- “Thanks to this podcast, I’m an NPR intern finalist. I submitted it as a work sample.”

Works cited:

Grzeszyk. (2019). Diversity matters! How cross-border journalism calls out media bias. *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*, 8(2), 169–189.
https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms.8.2.169_1

Lacy, S., & Rosenstiel, T. (2015). *Defining and measuring quality journalism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers School of Communication and Information.

Loden, & Rosener, J. B. (1991). *Workforce America! Managing employee diversity as a vital resource*. Business One Irwin.

Faculty Bio: Todd Henneman teaches social media communication, multimedia journalism, and news writing. He also coaches other faculty members on enhancing student engagement in face-to-face environments and adapting pedagogies for synchronous and asynchronous modalities. His commitment to nurturing inclusive and effective learning communities extends beyond the classroom, reflected in him developing a bystander intervention program to reduce gender-based violence on college campuses. His service ranges from advising honors students on theses to advising the campus chapters of both the National Association of Black Journalists and NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists. His research interests include applying social identity theory and intersectionality to understand better the processes through which perceptions are developed and maintained as well as exploring ways to strengthen the connection between the practice and teaching of digital media. Henneman earned his master of business administration from the University of California, Los Angeles and a bachelor of science in journalism from the Northwestern University.

SECOND PLACE

Shifting the Paradigm: A 'Diversity First' Approach to PR Campaigns

**Adrienne A. Wallace, Grand Valley State University, and
Regina M. Luttrell, Syracuse University**

Abstract: With recent political changes and social uprisings, communications professionals are once again clambering to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Proactive use of the Diversity & Inclusion Wheel for PR Practitioners can be introduced in public relations courses to develop student ability to create campaigns that address “diversity first.” Students carry the model forward throughout their program to embrace DEI and learn how to develop more inclusive campaigns from the beginning – the “diversity first” approach. Rather than making DEI add-on elements, future professionals can make conscientious decisions to put DEI at the forefront of all planning efforts, transforming their practice.

Explanation of the teaching practice or activity: During the first week of class, to help students begin to think critically about DEI issues, we first define diversity, equity and inclusion to set the stage for the semester and open the discussion surrounding the role diversity plays within the field of PR. We propose the following: diversity is the “difference or variety of difference or variety of a particular identity”; equity addresses the “resources and the need to provide additional or alternative resources so that all groups can reach comparable, favorable outcomes;” and inclusion involves the “practices, policies, and processes that shape an organization’s culture” (Beavers, 2018). Rather than making DEI add-on elements of strategic communication campaigns and messages, practitioners should make conscientious decisions to put DEI considerations at the forefront of their planning. This model can be introduced in introductory level courses, then students can carry the model forward throughout their program of study.

Next, introduce the Diversity & Inclusion Wheel for PR Practitioners (Appendix A). In doing so we teach our students how to develop more inclusive campaigns from the beginning – the “diversity first” approach. Explaining the wheel: the center of the wheel has six core spokes that brands should consider when beginning to develop a campaign - national origin, age, physical qualities/abilities, gender, race and ethnicity. The outer layer of the wheel, beginning at the top and moving clockwise around the wheel, includes seventeen additional attributes such as marital status, religious beliefs, mental health/well-being, language, communication styles, thinking styles, education or language. The idea is not to incorporate every spoke or external layer represented in the D/I Wheel, rather to consider deeply whether the same people are continually represented and create a campaign that includes two or three inner spokes and an array of external layers presented.

Step 1: Students are given a recent PR case study or campaign to read chosen by the instructor. As they read, instruct them to make notes that illustrate

connections to DEI principles. Additionally, students should go online to assess the digital assets available for the campaign. In this step students begin to connect specific areas of DEI to actual campaigns.

Step 2: Have students take out a piece of paper and draw a circle in the center. Prompt the students to use the D/I Wheel as a guide (Appendix A). In the smaller circle, have students identify at least two aspects from the center of the wheel. In the larger circle have students identify at least four aspects from the external portion that they believe were implemented in this case study. In this step, students investigate and identify multiple aspects of diversity, equity and inclusion. Here students begin to understand the importance of multidimensional and intersectional diversity.

Step 3: Ask students to look up the diversity and inclusion policy of the company featured in the case study. They should analyze the principles of DEI and compare them to the case study they just evaluated. Do the company's mission and values align with the campaigns they are executing? By doing this, students think critically about the messages being sent publicly versus the actions taken internally by organizations. Sometimes the two are at odds with one another.

Step 4: Open the floor to discuss the student findings from the exercise. The learners should provide examples from their discovery to fuel the conversation. Have students explore why certain decisions were made and why (or why not) certain representations are present. This assignment provides a foundation for instructors to use and refer back to often when conducting research, developing content, identifying strategies or planning campaigns. An add on assignment is to have students write their own DEI statements that they can post to their website portfolios using concepts learned.

Rationale: Through this activity, we seek to shift the paradigm of student awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in and through public relations campaign courses. Through learning how to apply the researcher developed Diversity & Inclusion Wheel for Public Relations Practitioners, students can then operationalize this tool to build strategic campaigns that encompass diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles. Facilitation of cultural competence through relevant curriculum, like, public relations campaigns, empowers students (Pelletier, 2019) and breaks barriers of cognitive and cultural dissonance (Smith, 2019), which in this case applies to creating a “diversity first” approach of examination into, and development of, comprehensive communications campaigns with students.

Outcomes: Having taught and tested this approach over the past two years, we have found that students consistently respond positively. Students become more comfortable with aspects of DEI (LO1); a student commented, “This was all new to me. I’ve never thought about diversity from a communication perspective. Other classes don’t use this concept and I wish they would.” While another re-

marked on the importance of application of DEI efforts to campaigns and the field (LO2), “I don’t know why this isn’t a standard part of learning how to put together an integrated campaign.” As a result of this practice, students can demonstrate a deliberate and effective way for addressing various audiences through empathy and consideration of diverse populations using a customized tool built for PR practitioners (LO3), whereas one student commented, “I used to think diversity was just making sure that different color people were in the pics I used for my assignments.” Additional assessment results available in Appendix B.

Appendix A

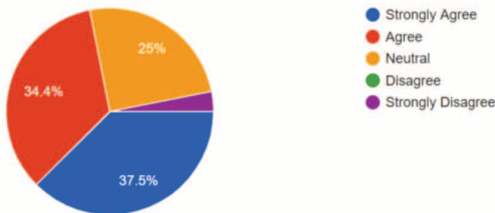
Diversity & Inclusion Wheel
For PR Practitioners



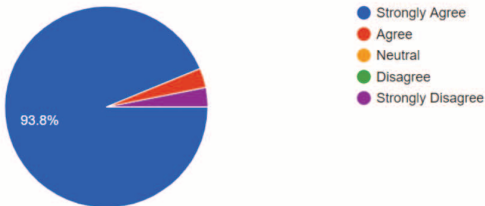
Appendix B

Note: The instructors collected the following data as a pre- and post-test attitudes over eight semesters in campaigns courses. Below are the results with regard to *Student Attitudes and Perceptions of DEI in the PR Classroom*.

1. PRE: I feel prepared to learn and effectively apply new material from textbooks, journal articles, blogs, etc. without classroom review on matters related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in public relations.



2. PRE: I wish there was more offered in my public relations curriculum that addressed diversity, equity, and inclusion issues.



3. POST: When thinking about applying diversity, equity, and inclusion principles to campaigns, do you feel well prepared to practice? Do you think your educational experience so far has equipped you for success in these areas? Why or why not?

Among student comments: I feel better prepared to practice. I partially feel as though when considering my educational experience applying DEI could have been better. There are some classes that don't find the topic or the matter to be as important as it truly is. I'm glad I have a tool now in order to be deliberate. Thank you!

Faculty Bios: Adrienne A. Wallace is an associate professor of advertising and public relations in the school of communications at Grand Valley State University (Michigan). Her research is inspired by the student-to-professional journey, social media and public relations pedagogy excellence, and the impact of social media on society. Wallace is an award-winning experiential teaching/learning educator and adviser who loves collaborating on projects to solve wicked problems. She is the author of *Social Media and Society: An Introduction to the Mass Media Landscape*, *Digital Strategies: Data-Driven Public Relations, Marketing, and Advertising* and a prolific presenter.

Regina Luttrell is a professor of public relations and social media and associate dean for research and creative activity at Syracuse University. Her research interests focus on public relations, artificial intelligence, data analytics, a multi-generational workforce, and the intersection of social media with society. She is the author of *Social Media and Society: An Introduction to the Mass Media Landscape* and *Gen Z: The Superhero Generation*. Recognized as an innovative educator, Dr. Luttrell is a distinguished scholar and an experienced academic leader with a track record of supporting cross-departmental and interdisciplinary collaboration, leading complex research projects, and advocating for faculty in multiple capacities.

THIRD PLACE

Outside the Box

Harrison Hove,
University of Florida

Abstract: Outside the Box is a multistep, scaffolded exercise designed to build a broadcast journalism student's technical skillset and soft skill competencies. The exercise helps a student enhance storytelling skills while intentionally creating a space to examine self-biases and the intentionality behind highlighting communities and people different from ourselves. The four-step activity allows students to reflect, discuss, connect, and create which enfranchises multiple learning modalities at various levels of Bloom's taxonomy. This activity has guideposts and check ins, allowing an instructor to offer feedback, advice, and nudge students to lean into assignment goals that enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in journalism.

Rationale: My institution recently collected data from the International Critical Thinking and International Communication Attitudes and Beliefs Survey. The self-reported student data highlighted perceived weaknesses in our students' abilities related to internationalization, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our students rated themselves lowest when faced with the following statements: I feel comfortable discussing international issues. I often ask questions about culture to members of other cultures. I am able to communicate effectively with members of other cultures. I actively learn about different cultural norms.

These results were troubling. They produced a lightbulb moment and acted as a catalyst to examine my own teaching. Developing a student's technical skillset is critical, but this alone does not adequately prepare students for success in our field. Instead, I wanted to be much more intentional, using my power and privilege as an instructor, to lean into these student deficiencies. Not only does this activity help my students examine their own beliefs and pre-conceived notions, but it creates a space to discuss how and why journalists can use their position of privilege to serve all corners of a community. Investing in these critical conversations and steps in this activity prepares my students to succeed in a globalized world, but also advances the institution of journalism by prioritizing inclusivity, a diversity of sources and ideas, as well as the concept of servant leadership- elevating all- through our profession.

Explanation of the teaching practice and activity: Before jumping into this activity, I must highlight the importance of building a classroom community and relationships with your students. The topics we are about to wade into can be scary for many students. There is always a degree of vulnerability in learning, but that is doubly important when tackling very personal and sensitive topics that require an examination of self. Without these key relationships and a positive classroom community, student growth could easily be stunted and learning outcomes unrealized.

When multi-step activities are designed, it is important to enfranchise many different ways and levels of learning. I ask students to reflect about their own experiences privately to start this activity. I provide guiding questions to help a student initiate the self-examination process. This low-stakes assignment is really designed to prime students' minds and get them thinking about applying issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in ways they might not have previously considered. Part 1 also affords me an opportunity to privately offer feedback, advice, coaching, and support to my students through this potentially challenging process.

After this initial self-reflection, students are called to action. They are asked to engage with people from different cultures by attending an event, gently nudging them outside of their comfort zones. They are prompted to use this as an opportunity to feel and connect. Importantly, students are asked to engage and converse with others attending a given event. This is framed as an opportunity to connect with community members and develop relationships with potential sources that you likely would not encounter otherwise. This part of the activity helps students understand the value of developing a network for reporting while also assisting them in intentionally trying to diversify the pool of sources they draw from. The next step in this activity is digesting and reflecting on this experience. The students do this through two avenues. Again, students have an opportunity to reflect on this experience privately with me (written). Because this topic is so personal, I want to offer additional feedback, guidance, coaching and support as needed. However, it is important to begin voicing experiences and talking about tough topics. This is why I also facilitate a group discussion and debrief in class. Students are asked to share their unique experiences with one another. Classroom community is critical as we listen, support, give one another the benefit of the doubt, and acknowledge everyone's lived experience. These conversations often highlight personal growth, the desire to elevate marginalized communities, how one can support diverse communities without tokenizing, and avoiding stereotypes in reporting.

The last step in this activity forces students to operate at the highest level of Bloom's Taxonomy by creating a video news story based on a story idea that bubbled up during conversation with a new source they met during Part 2. This allows students the space to have an aha moment centered around the importance of building sources to cultivate story ideas (which many students struggle with). In an effort to avoid tokenization, students are encouraged to pursue a story idea that is relevant to a given community and not necessarily confined to highlighting one's difference or status. The story could focus on a program specifically designed to teach English to non-native English speakers. But, a story that a source highlights about high utility costs, for example, also has value to the community. More specifically, I steer students away from the idea that (as an example) LatinX sources should be pursued for "LatinX stories" only. I try to normalize the idea that sources in ALL stories should represent a broad range of lived experiences as well as appearance and thought.

Outcomes: This activity is designed to help students investigate their own feel-

ings toward different groups, force them out of their own personal comfort zone, and help them gain confidence and experience interacting with people who share a different set of experiences. The goal is to help them gain cultural competencies, develop empathy and compassion, and explore the importance of highlighting all aspects of a community (as a journalist). All of this is done while helping students develop sources, build a professional network, and create content they can use to showcase their abilities for jobs and internships.

Outside the Box: Student Handout

Purpose:

This activity is designed to help you investigate your own feelings toward different groups, force you out of your own personal comfort zone, and help you gain confidence and experience interacting with people who share a different set of experiences. The goal is to help you gain cultural competencies, develop empathy and compassion, and explore the importance of highlighting all aspects of your community (as a journalist).

Part 1:

This portion of the activity is a pre-reflection. Assess and explore your ability to interact with people from different groups. What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? What are your fears when interacting with people different than you? Do you have experience with international populations? These are guiding questions that you may choose to answer or you can make up your own that help guide this pre-reflection. Your pre-reflection should consist of at least 250 words in a Word document that is uploaded to Canvas. **Due Friday, January 21 at 5:00pm Eastern.**

Part 2:

Attend a cultural or internationalized event that you have no previous experience with. Examples might be a Hispanic Heritage Month event, an Indian Student Association event, a support meeting for non-native English speakers, etc. Choose something that is outside your comfort zone. Observe, interact with others, participate, and learn. Attending could occur in person or via Zoom (or some other remote connection during the pandemic).

Part 3:

After attending the cultural or internationalized event, write a reflection on your experience. How was your experience? What did you take from the experience? Was this experience helpful to your growth as a journalist? Why or why not? Did you learn anything? What are some topics or issues that might be on your radar that you did not really know about before? **Due Friday, February 11th at 5:00pm Eastern.**

Part 4:

You must generate a story idea related to the group you learned about in Part 3 of this exercise. This story idea will be used for your mini project. So, utilize your interactions to build sources and figure out potential story ideas relevant to this community that you could cover for your upcoming mini project. (Please note there is a separate rubric for part 4).

Excerpts of Student Reflections

"This experience was helpful to my growth as a journalist. I was introduced to a whole new community that I did not know existed in [name of city]. While I have been exposed to many different groups of people since coming to [name of institution], I feel like I still tend to meet people who are very similar to me and share my beliefs – or at least have beliefs I am familiar with. Yogi James showed me a completely different side of spirituality and Chinese culture. Tai chi is a form of martial arts, and its roots go back to ancient China. Now, I am aware of a new practice and community that exists here."

"In the four years I lived in [name of city], I'd never been to an event with so much diversity. The How Bazar's mission is to uplift and unite the community through different art forms, while also providing a safe space for minorities and the LGBTQ+ community. I went into this event wanting to find an LGBTQ+ related story, but I came out of it with a completely different story in mind—a business related story. I have yet to write a business or a gender and sexuality story, but I want to."

"This opportunity helped me grow as a journalist because I got more comfortable with being in the spotlight and introducing myself, as a complete outsider, to a room of people I don't know. I will definitely keep their perspectives in mind when looking for stories. Their struggles and accomplishments will stay on my radar. I'm going to keep up with this group and tell their story as they work to bring Argentine traditions to campus and introduce their culture to others."

"I'll admit that I was a bit rattled when I first walked in since I was essentially the only non-Indian at this event and everyone there didn't look like me. After sitting in and hearing from a few members and organization leaders, I felt incredibly comfortable and enjoyed my time at the GBM. What stood out the most to be at this GBM was the turnout (at least 50 people came out on a Thursday night) and the passion that the members displayed while in attendance. Everyone who was there bonded over their similar cultural backgrounds and made me feel welcome by bonding with me as a fellow [name of institution] student."

"While I was watching a traditional African style dance with music from instru-

ments not typically seen in the United States, I couldn't help but get totally absorbed into the performance. Just seeing the joy in everyone's face when they were watching something totally different than the "norm" showed the appreciation everyone has for cultures other than their own.... Going into this experience with my journalist cap on and not just my visitor cap didn't hinder me from enjoying the event. I was still able to watch and appreciate everything that was going on but also approach it in an investigative way. Wanting to know about African culture and the importance of this event as a journalist encouraged me to ask questions and take the time to learn more about everything. It showed me that everything can have a story if you look and think critically enough."

Faculty Bio: Harrison Hove is a Lecturer and Associate Chair in Journalism at the University of Florida. He was named the 2020-2021 University of Florida Undergraduate Teacher of the Year. He teaches courses focused on broadcast journalism. Harrison also produces special projects with student journalists for WUFT-TV. Since 2018, his students have earned national recognition from Hearst Journalism Awards, RTDNA, BEA, SPJ, and NBS. Before arriving at UF, Hove spent more than a decade in local news serving in roles as news anchor, reporter, and meteorologist. Hove has earned 7 regional Emmys and 21 nominations for his work.

HONORABLE MENTION

Rural Community Engagement: Understanding Difference Through an Experiential Communications Course

**J. Caleb Walters,
The University of West Alabama**

Abstract: Within the communications curriculum, students learn tangible skills that can be used to help organizations of all types, including those in the non-profit sector. These organizations serve a vital role within communities, often assisting individuals marginalized due to circumstances of class, socioeconomic level, age, cognition and ability. By leveraging a communications skill set to assist community-based nonprofit organizations, students gain direct exposure to individuals with different backgrounds and circumstances while also engaging and becoming more immersed in their own community.

Explanation of Practice: Within an elective course titled Community Engagement Strategies, designed and cross-listed for upper-level undergraduate students and graduate students, students are directly responsible for producing work for nonprofit and community-based organizations. The course begins with discussions and readings on fundamental principles to broaden students' understandings of privilege, difference, equity, and marginalization. Additionally, discussions on the vital nature of nonprofit organizations and the services they provide to typically marginalized communities are had, and students conduct research about organizations within the local area that address some of these aforementioned issues. Once students have grasped the fundamental nature of these things, the course pivots into a hands-on, agency-type environment in which the students work directly with nonprofits to produce promotional work for them.

Working directly with our local chapter of The United Way, we select clients based on promotional need. Typically, the students are split into teams of three or four, depending on enrollment, to produce content for their respective organization. Students are assigned to a nonprofit that they have ranked as important to them personally, which provides an initial level of investment from the start. Typically, teams are directed by a graduating senior or graduate students, who serve as the organization's account manager for the duration of the term. From there, immersion opportunities are planned for each group to see the organizations and the work they do firsthand. Students are allowed class time to volunteer with their organization to get to know the clientele and begin to break down their preconceived ideas of difference. Past and current nonprofits the course has worked with include those related to literacy, neurodivergence and mental health, the foster care system, food insecurity, disaster relief, and poverty reduction.

The semester concludes with the students presenting the work they've produced to their respective organizations, as well as other faculty mentors in their degree program. Ideally, the work is ready-to-go and will be implemented by the organizations to the best of their abilities.

Rationale: At their core, nonprofit organizations find their mission in resolving social problems; strategic communication and marketing can play a beneficial role in reaching that mission (Bünzli & Eppler, 492). Despite the important work these organizations perform, most find themselves lacking necessary resources regarding staffing, finances, and overall workload (Cadet & Carroll, 6). Nonprofits also face many pressures when it comes to promoting their programs and services, with some arguments coming down to whether not to attempt to promote themselves at all. Additionally, most marketing decisions made by nonprofits are made with little to no expertise or understanding of promotional strategies (Jungbok).

Knowing all of this, we can clearly see that nonprofits often struggle when it comes to promoting themselves and the vital services they offer. To help eradicate the social problems addressed by nonprofit organizations, the messaging and promotions published by these organizations must be targeted and effective. The students' communications skill set of crafting effective written and visual messaging is directly beneficial in this case. Directly working with these nonprofits and the clients who utilize their services exposes students to individuals from different backgrounds; this exposure will ideally broaden students' perspectives in relation to diversity, equity and inclusion and make them feel more engaged with their respective communities.

Outcomes: Outcomes for the Community Engagement Strategies course are numerous, both for the students and the nonprofit organizations. Though there are certainly tangible outcomes, those that are intangible are often more exciting and meaningful.

For the nonprofit organizations:

- Targeted, well-crafted communication messages and collateral materials
- Sustainable practices for future promotions
- Enhanced promotional presence within the community
- (Potentially) Increased utilization of their services as a result

For the students:

- Direct experience working with nonprofit organizations
- Direct exposure to individuals of different backgrounds and circumstances
- Career exploration in the nonprofit sector
- Client relations and account management experience
- Portfolio-ready work samples
- Increased understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion

Supporting Materials

Thank you note from Larry Deavers, Executive Director of Family Counseling Services (2019)

*Kimberly, Kylee + Michelle,
all of us at Family Counseling
Services are so grateful for
the energy and creativity you
put into revitalizing our
website, social media and
print materials! Your team
did an amazing job (I love
the changes to the website!)
and the other detailed
instructions you gave will be*

*a huge asset in our social
media presence throughout
next year, and beyond.*

*Obviously, everything you created
represents a big investment on
your part. We appreciate
all of your hard work!*

*Larry Deavers,
Executive Director*

Volunteering and student work



Letter of support from SCA-WA (2021)



**Sickle Cell Disease Association of
America
West Alabama Chapter**

P.O. Box 3151, Tuscaloosa, AL 35403
700 Energy Center Blvd Ste. 403, Northport, AL 35473
Phone: (205) 758-1761 Fax: (205) 758-1781
Email: sicklewestala@gmail.com

May 12, 2021

RE: University of West Alabama, Community Engagement Strategies

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter on behalf of the University of West Alabama (UWA) Community Engagement Strategies students. During the Fall of 2019, the Sickle Cell Association – West Alabama Chapter, Inc (SCA-WA) had the pleasure of working with the entire classes, consisting of both graduate level and undergraduate level student, for a stimulated work environment project.

SCA-WA is a small, medical advocacy nonprofit in West Alabama. We work with individuals, families, and professionals to provide relevant and current sickle cell related information. It is important to expand our reach with communication and through social media outreach. Unfortunately, our organization does not have a budget for a communication staff member. We were pleased to be offered an opportunity to work with the Community Engagement Strategies students to fill this void.

Meeting with the students, they were engaged and inquisitive. They were able to make connections about the work that we do and, both, our need and ability to effectively communicate this to our clients and the public. The students narrowed down three areas in which to work and created workgroups for each area to complete their tasks.

The primary focus of the project was to integrate our social media platforms with our new website. The students showed attention to our agency's unique needs and devised a social media plan that was doable and understandable. This plan allowed us to streamline our information for each client group that we needed to reach. The students also took over our social media platforms to post content for our agency.

SCA-WA was able to have the benefits of a communication team through the University of West Alabama Community Engagement Strategies. The students were responsive in meeting deadline and goals. The work that they did was beneficial to our organization and continues to help SCA-WA met our mission. The real life application of this stimulated work environment will benefit SCA-WA for years to come.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Harris, JD
Executive Director

Works cited:

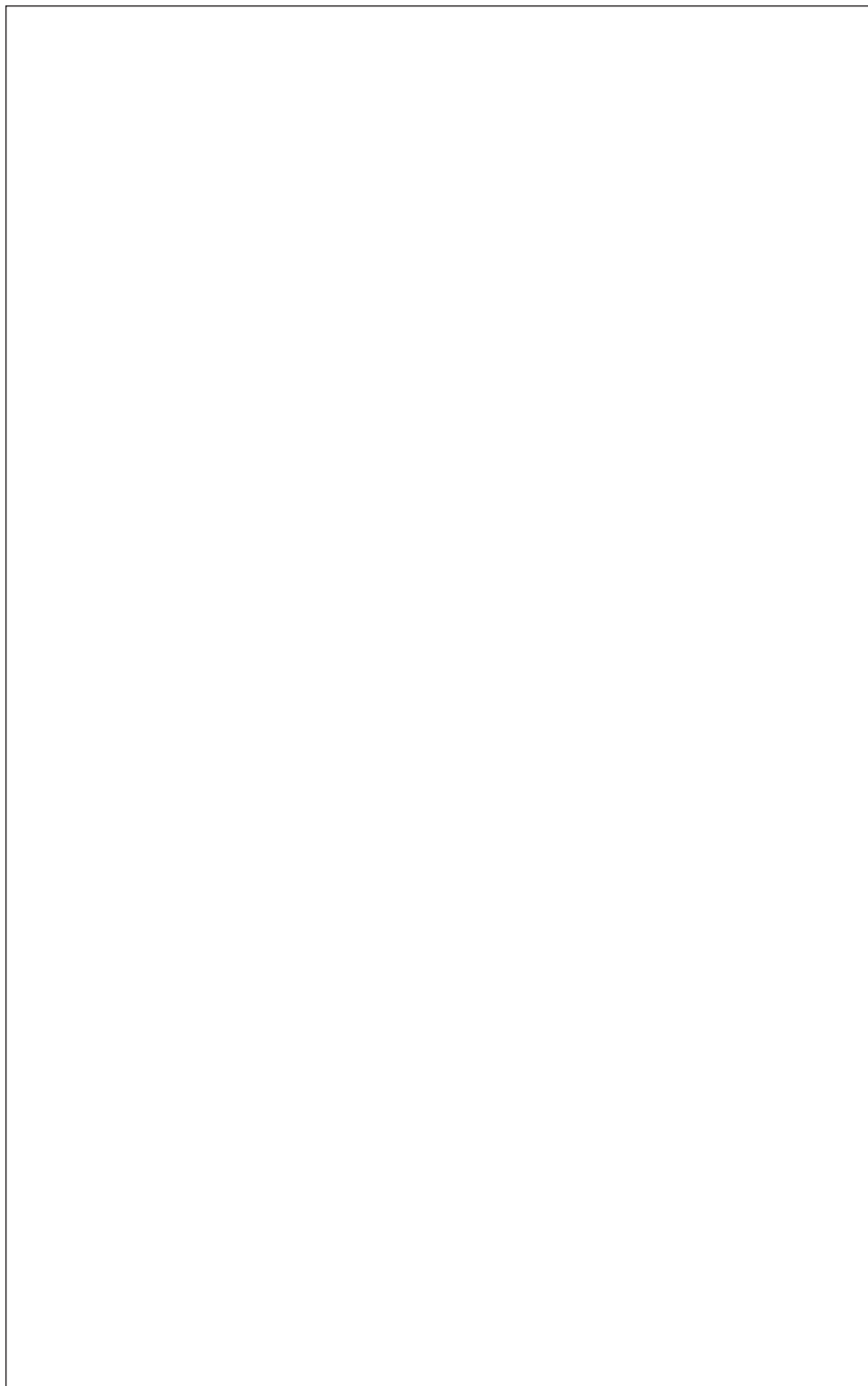
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Faculty Bio: J. Caleb Walters is an Assistant Professor of Digital Communications at The University of West Alabama. He has been a full-time faculty member at UWA since 2016, teaching both undergraduate and graduate courses within the cutting-edge integrated marketing communications (IMC) degree program. Specifically, his course offerings include introductory and advanced visual media, photography, graphic design, and advertising for on-campus and online learners. He is also the advisor for Lambda Pi Eta national honor society, as well as the University-wide undergraduate Honor's Program.





**Best Practices in Teaching:
Incorporating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
into the JMC Classroom**