

# Visual Communication Division Biennial Report for the International Communication Association

*Submitted in October 2022*

List any accomplishments, concerns and/or future initiatives you wish to highlight:

## **Travel fund:**

- Approve the travel fund named for Paul Messaris and work with headquarters for its administration.

## **Outreach:**

- Develop more relationships with scholars in global majority countries

## **Integrating Mentoring and Member Support into Programming:**

- Sustain the quality of our reviewing and our program. Work to ensure conference participants have the best experience whether they attend in person or online.
- Continue to support student and early-career scholars with mentorship and awards.

## **Communication:**

- Continue to build the website and enhance its relevance to members. The website now serves as a central repository of key news and (archival) information about the division. Our bylaws are there, along with information about our current and past pre-conferences and other resources. Division leaders hope to continue to construct a site that is vibrant, supportive and useful to the membership.

**Please consider and describe the division/interest group leadership, including concerns over recruiting officers to stand for election, initiatives to create new positions, and changes to the allocation of duties:**

**Our leadership team represents three global regions and is well balanced in terms of gender. The people running for vice chair/chair-elect this year also include a woman from Egypt, a man from the U.S. and a man from Israel, so we remain on track for gender balance. It would be nice to recruit more members from South America, Asia and Africa in order to help new talent develop and eventually seek leadership positions.**

**This past year, the leadership team considered establishing a professional liaison position. This person would help the division network with professional photographic and design organizations, archivists, and other non-academic institutions related to our field. We decided against establishing another elected post, however, given that our 2021 election for secretary, international liaison and student/early career representative only**

**attracted one candidate apiece. We decided that the division might need to grow more before we could cultivate enough talent and personnel to create an additional position.**

**Job descriptions for our leadership team are now published as part of the bylaws, ratified in 2021.**

**Please consider and describe membership for your division/interest group, along with any notable trends, concerns, or initiatives for growth or diversity:**

The VCSD division has traditionally been a welcoming venue for students and early-career scholars, while also maintaining the highest standards for research quality. We encourage high-quality reviews with useful feedback, encourage students to participate as presenters and reviewers, and build our pre-conferences around the needs of early-career scholars. Most of our members are from North America and Europe. We hope to continue to build an increasingly international membership, especially extending our global reach to include currently under-represented regions such as South America, Africa, and Oceania.

Financial constraints, vaccine availability and uptake, language issues, visa and other travel restrictions and time zone challenges continue to pose significant barriers to full participation for scholars in global majority nations. To that end, the division has taken the first steps necessary to establish a travel/international development fund for students and Tier B/C nations. The fund will be named for the late Dr. Paul Messaris, an early pioneer in visual studies. The Annenberg School at the University of Pennsylvania and Carla Sarett, Dr. Messaris's widow, have each pledged a thousand dollars to start the fund. Members will have a chance to ratify this fund in 2022. If ratified, the division should be able to distribute travel grants for the 2023 conference in Toronto or for other internationalization efforts as determined by the executive.

Another idea to be discussed with members during the May 2022 business meeting will be to establish a session in the regular program for new global voices – people who have never attended or presented previously at ICA, with a preference for submitters from Tier B/C nations. We hope that our planned escalator session, which will feature mentors for the new arrivals, will help us advance this goal.

We gained more than 50 members in the past two years, from 141 in August 2019 to 198 at the same time in 2021. This good news is likely the result of concerted social media and internationalization efforts. (Enthusiasm for Paris likely helped as well.) To foster division identity, the executive committee has made a concerted effort to stay active on social media. International Liaison T.J. Thomson established a "Spotlight" series for members to publicize their work on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter (platforms on which we have a combined follower count in excess of 1,000).

The division sends out a monthly newsletter as well as essential messages regarding the conference, reviewing, and other essentials. The division has improved its website in order to

provide more relevant information and resources for members. The newly ratified bylaws are there, as is a “members bookshelf” page that publicizes recent books by division members.

The VCSD voting rate went down, unfortunately, in 2021. This may be, in part, because there were no contested elections for executive positions. Division leaders used Twitter, Facebook and multiple email messages in order to encourage the membership to vote; however, only fourteen percent of the division’s members voted in the past year’s election. The 2022 election is competitive, with three people running for vice chair/chair elect, and so our turnout should be better. We continue to promote the election on social media.

While voter participation was low, in 2021, the ratification of the bylaws was no small accomplishment. These bylaws clarify the division’s scholarly focus; describe the roles of elected positions, and establish the protocol for the division’s annual business meeting. Former chairs Catherine Preston and Jelle Mast worked tirelessly to write the bylaws in coordination with ICA executive leadership and deserve credit for bringing the division into compliance.

**Please consider and describe trends in conference submissions/acceptances; identify any concerns. Describe the outcome of any experiments with alternative submissions and/or session formats:**

As in 2021, the division assigned three reviewers to each paper, and was able to limit nearly all reviewers to three papers each. Not all reviewers were able to submit their scores, but each paper was scored at least twice, and anytime a paper had two reviews in disagreement, volunteers came through to help break the ties.

In 2022, ICA accepted papers in languages other than English, and several VCSD reviewers put in extra time and effort to assist with those submissions. The division will also edit its panel call for 2023, to require panel organizers to consider and justify the geographic diversity of panelists.

Finally, Division leaders are planning to create a more formal reviewers guide to promote fairness, internationalization efforts, and a supportive culture. Reviewers will be advised to avoid feedback on matters pertaining to nationality, political statements or geographic context. Reviewers will also be reminded that ALL reviews must include qualitative feedback.

ICA’s policy of putting all submitters into the reviewing pool (excepting students for divisions that do not allow students to review) has enhanced the overall reviewing process. Each paper and panel was assigned to three reviewers, and only one student was assigned to any submission. For the most part it was possible to limit the number of assignments to three per reviewer, though some volunteers exceeded that number

**Please consider budget planning goals or concerns:**

Our annual budget has allowed us to hold the social events and pre-conferences we've planned. In Toronto, we will probably request that Tier A/full members contribute toward our annual luncheon – a division-only event that our members really seem to enjoy.

Money continues to be a significant barrier to scholars from Tier B/C nations. Our new travel fund will help, but the larger issue of global inequality will remain an impediment for our division and ICA generally.

ICA has made some changes to address these financial concerns. The organization has a three-tiered system for dues structure following the UN model for A, B, and C countries, based on the World Bank's indicators of Gross National Income. Historically, residents of B-tier countries have paid 75% of the A-tier price and residents of C-tier countries paid 50% of the A-tier price. **Effective 1 July 2022, dues for members residing in Tier B countries will be further reduced as follows: residents of B-tier countries will pay 30% of the A-tier price and residents of C-tier countries 15% of the A-tier price. We look forward to watching the impact of this welcome initiative.**

**Please describe which awards you give out on an annual or multi-annual basis and consider any trends or concerns over the past two years:**

We give an award every year to our "rock star reviewer" – who receives a conference registration waiver. (Our 2022 rock-star Giorgia Aiello of the University of Leeds.

We also grant a Top Faculty Paper award, a 2nd Place and 3rd Place faculty award, a top student paper award.

In 2022, waivers were granted to the three top faculty paper award winners, the student who wrote the top student paper, and a Tier B/C nation student who wrote a full paper. This year we plan to give cash awards instead so that waivers can be used for members from Tier B/C countries.

The division also hosted a dissertation competition with a \$100 cash award, but in 2022 we only received one entry and it was not of the quality worthy of an international award. We will hold the competition again this year and keep it open to dissertations completed in the past three years.

**Reflect on the past goals outlined in our annual reports and how you have addressed or not addressed these goals. What successes have you had, challenges, or roadblocks have you faced:**

We made considerable progress with international outreach, though that has not necessarily changed our membership numbers.

The VCSD International Liaison, T. J. Thomson, formed and chaired our Division's Internationalization Task Force, and helped to organize two events designed to enhance the division's relationships with scholars from global majority countries. Our incoming internationalization liaison, Anat Leshnick of the University of Colorado, Boulder, will benefit from T. J. Thomson's leadership and should be able to continue the many efforts he started, such as partnerships with other entities within and outside ICA.

In April 2021, VCSD and Daystar University in Nairobi, Kenya, co-sponsored a mentoring session for African (Communication) Graduate Students that involved scholars across the ICA and addressed topics such as establishing a writing routine and research agenda; communicating your research to non-academic audiences; making the most of conferences and scholarly associations as a graduate student or early-career scholar; and publishing tips and strategies.

The event attracted more than 185 graduate students from 18 institutions across the continent. VCSD also partnered with Daystar University in September 2021, to host a session on Visual Research Ethics moderated by Dr Kyser Lough (Division secretary) and featuring members Profs Pat Aufderheide and Lyombe Eko. The task force continues to meet at least once per year and to suggest action items to the executive that can increase the value and relevance of VCS Division membership and improve the Division's functioning.

For example, our members bookshelf feature, our "Why Join the VCS Division" one-page flyer, adding the VCS Division to the ICA's 'Donate' page (<https://www.icahdq.org/donations/>), proposing an additional officer role (a "Partnership and Engagement" officer), proposing a reviewer best practices guide, and our weekly members spotlight all arose through the task force's meetings and discussion.

We tried something new to try to promote videos for the 2022 conference but no one – not a soul – participated. We established a drawing for anyone who created a 30-second TikTok/Reel-style video about their presentation in advance of the conference. Members were encouraged to submit a link to their video and then spread it through social media using ICA's hashtag on Twitter is (#ICA22), and the division's #ICA\_VIS. This was announced in multiple newsletters and yet – no one participated. It may be that for many academics, asking them to become video producers – on top of doing research, on top of teaching, on top of everything else they do – is a reach.

**Consider goals for the next four years for your division/interest group. What do you wish to accomplish or develop:**

The division is committed to increased global engagement, the development of student and early-career scholars, and research that is not only of the highest quality but reflects today's digital sphere.

Division leaders continue to work on initiatives for engagement with scholars in global majority countries. Members of the executive committee participated in two events with the Daystar Institute in Kenya in the past year, and we hope to coordinate more of this kind of engagement.

Division leaders hope to continue to encourage creative, innovative and/ or interactive presentation formats beyond the traditional submission types. In some ways, the hybrid conference format has already ushered in new presentation formats. Digital programming will assist the division with its global engagement efforts, as online meeting spaces make it possible to network without airfare. Going forward it will be important for VCSD's leaders and members to shape conference events that cultivate academic relationships by making the best use of available technologies while retaining the humanity that makes our division warm, welcoming, and encouraging.

### **Program Data:**

2022 Conference Competition: We received 112 abstracts and papers; 52 were accepted for a rate of 46%. Of those, 54 submissions were from students, and 25 were accepted (29 declined.) Our submitters were largely from Asia, North America and Europe.

We received two submissions from Oceania but neither paper was accepted in 2022 based on reviewer scores. We received support from 185 reviewers; 46 from Asia, 52 from Europe, 82 from North America, two from South America and one from Oceania. Panels: We received nine panel submissions and accepted five.

Of the participants, 15 were from Europe, 17 North America, (15 US + 2 Mexico), 4 Middle East (3 from Israel, one from Qatar), TWO from South America, ZERO from Asia, and ZERO from Oceania.

The accepted panels include 11 people from Europe, two people from Israel and 10 from the US. Panel reviewers = 6 from Europe, 8 from North America (all U.S.), one from Africa (Egypt), one from Oceania, and one from Asia. In terms of geographical diversity, the VCS Division continues to attract most submissions from a wide range of nations, mostly representing North America, Europe and Asia. The division is committed to increasing both submissions and acceptances from Africa, Oceania, and South America.

The prospect of a face-to-face conference in Paris may be one reason the number of submissions for VCSD jumped from 70 in 2020 (for the 2021 conference) to 112 in 2021 for the 2022 meeting.