SPEAKING OF

food
Spectra, the magazine of the National Communication Association (NCA), features articles on topics that are relevant to Communication scholars, teachers, and practitioners. Spectra is one means through which NCA works toward accomplishing its mission of advancing Communication as the discipline that studies all forms, modes, media, and consequences of communication through humanistic, social scientific, and aesthetic inquiry.

NCA serves its members by enabling and supporting their professional interests. Dedicated to fostering and promoting free and ethical communication, NCA promotes the widespread appreciation of the importance of communication in public and private life, the application of competent communication to improve the quality of human life and relationships, and the use of knowledge about communication to solve human problems. NCA supports inclusiveness and diversity among our faculties, within our membership, in the workplace, and in the classroom; NCA supports and promotes policies that fairly encourage this diversity and inclusion.

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More than 50 sessions will focus on food-related topics at the upcoming NCA 105th Annual Convention, to be held November 14–17, 2019, in Baltimore, MD. For full program details, visit natcom.org/convention.
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

More than a Seat at the Table

By Star Muir, Ph.D.

Having a “seat at the table” is often taken to mean having some voice in a decision-making process. For many years, this has been a focus for diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts—bringing diverse peoples and perspectives “to the table” for rich discussion. Yet some of our rhetorical touchstones might caution us about the metaphor, and impart limitations of the frame. The Arthurian legend of the round table, embracing the absence of a “head” of the table as an equalizing democratic structure, is romantic and intriguing, but nonetheless presents a very real cultural predicament: an egalitarian structure totally belied by the elite qualifications for access as a male warrior. Even Judy Chicago’s striking triangular “Dinner Party,” which offers a rich celebration of women’s history by bringing famous women to the table, has drawn some criticism as “second wave” or triangulating the absence of a “head” of the table as an equalizing democratic structure.

For many years, this has been a focus for diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts—bringing diverse peoples and perspectives “to the table” for rich discussion. Yet some of our rhetorical touchstones might caution us about the metaphor, and impart limitations of the frame. The Arthurian legend of the round table, embracing the absence of a “head” of the table as an equalizing democratic structure, is romantic and intriguing, but nonetheless presents a very real cultural predicament: an egalitarian structure totally belied by the elite qualifications for access as a male warrior. Even Judy Chicago’s striking triangular “Dinner Party,” which offers a rich celebration of women’s history by bringing famous women to the table, has drawn some criticism as “second wave” or triangulating the absence of a “head” of the table as an equalizing democratic structure.

for the association in terms of developing the strength and breadth of our community. This was part of my initial campaign, the tone of my convention theme, and a continuing thread of my columns. Within the limits of my bracket, I see the diversity, equity, and inclusion concerns as very closely intertwined with how people experience the community of NCA. If you are disparaged, harassed, denied opportunities, or derugated, then the community is not providing a safe or inclusive space. If you find shared interest, feel you can be yourself, and are supported and appreciated by a community, then you will more likely feel included and respected. Fostering a strong sense of community is not the only way to change member experiences, but it is certainly very powerful, as broader and richer connections enhance inclusion while also sustaining teaching innovation and supporting the creation of new knowledge.

Reflecting on the state of our community, I prefer to think of this time as one of high energy and commitment, rather than as any kind of crisis or emergency. An outpouring of reflection and critique is momentous, opening up possibilities, and pointing us toward more research, engagement, and action.

As my bracket [white, male, cishet, 60, associate professor, UU, he/him] shows, I am well-served by personal observations as we journey a while together. As my bracket [white, male, cishet, 60, associate professor, UU, he/him] shows, I am well-served by personal observations as we journey a while together.

To the use of gender-appropriate language in NCA public messages and working actively over the last five years to expand diversity, inclusion, and equity at our Annual Convention experience (providing all-gender bathrooms, a lactation room, transportation assistance, signage and registration changes for safety from harassment, and other support). I generally avoid crisis mode activity, because mistakes are easier to make, and perspectives are easier to flatten, when one rushes, but these concerns have become and will continue to be a consistent and significant intertwined part of what we do. It is an amazing time to be a leader in NCA, and it is quite thrilling to see the commitment and passion that will sustain us through needed changes. With increasingly diverse voices raised in our community, and seated at the table, we do not move in haste, but we do move forward with determination and dispatch.

One aspect of sitting at the table that is particularly important for the theme of this issue of Spectra is the breaking of bread and the sharing of food. Food is a fundamental aspect of human cultures, and it is intertwined with economics, entertainment, health, politics, and race in ways that can both strengthen and undermine individuals and communities. One of the experiences I treasure is sharing food during sessions of the Executive Committee. For a brief time, we set aside NCA concerns and share our lives, our passions, and our mishaps to laugh, offer and receive advice, and commiserate before returning to our work. Understanding how communication and food work together to determine critical aspects of health, lifestyle, identity, community, and culture is another reminder of the powerful insights and actions available to scholars and students of our discipline.
Spotlight

PUBLIC PRESENCE
NCA Participates in Research Exhibition on Capitol Hill

The Coalition for National Science Funding’s (CNSF) 25th Annual Exhibition and Reception was held on Tuesday, April 30, 2019, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. This annual event is designed to encourage members of Congress to support the National Science Foundation (NSF) by showcasing research and educational projects made possible by NSF funding. This year’s CNSF exhibition theme was “Building the Future: Federal Investments in Science, Engineering & Education.”

Researchers from 34 institutions spoke with congressional leaders and their staff members, university scholars, and NSF liaisons. Among these researchers was Communication scholar Joshua Barbour of the University of Texas at Austin, who spoke about his work with the Automation Policy and Research Organizing Network (APRON), which advances Communication research focused on the future of data-intensive, automated work. The APRON lab currently focuses on health and health care analytics, which was the topic of Barbour’s presentation, “The Future of Work in Health Analytics and Automation.”

IN OUR JOURNALS

This article examines the rhetoric of religious freedom in the context of a 2013 incident where small business owners refused to make a wedding cake for a same-sex couple. The author lamented the use of religious freedom as a strategy to defy full and fair execution of equality laws. West explains that conservative media and the discourse surrounding small businesses, religious freedom, and wedding cakes create an environment that enables this injustice.

West stresses that small businesses have an obligation to adhere to specific rules and regulations that prevent the discrimination of protected classes. Regardless of the meaning behind a wedding cake, West writes, it is a good available in a marketplace that is subject to state and federal laws. The article concludes by stressing that our rights to equality are fundamental to American law and that we must ensure these principles are upheld.


This article highlights the significant role that Public Chef intellectuals play in cultivating a more sustainable food culture. Eckstein and Young examine this phenomenon through wastED, a 2015 experimental pop-up restaurant used as a rhetorical strategy to underscore the unnecessary food waste that plagues society.

The restaurant’s glossary, design, and plate were used as tools to bridge the gap between farm and table, and expose the fine line between food and waste. According to the authors, although a small percentage of the population had the opportunity to dine at wastED, its existence created a platform for necessary conversation about the topic of food waste, which is often ignored. Eckstein and Young suggest we pay closer attention to the choices we make about our food and other daily habits, as these are inherently political decisions that shape who we are.


In this article, the authors explore the culture-centered approach in the context of their collaboration with dalit women farmers who have organized to resist the corporatization of agriculture in South India. The authors explain that corporatization in farming culture has created market dependence and has disrupted community life, food security, and access to local health resources. The female farmers have resisted the expansion of neoliberal cash crop agriculture by spreading local knowledge that is based on seed sovereignty, advancing local ownership of land, and promoting community-based health care. The authors emphasize that the work of the dalit farmers is grounded in communicative sovereignty and offers a framework for withstanding other struggles of oppression.

NCA and Shenzhen University of China Hold Forum on “Communication Innovation, New Media, and Digital Journalism”

Numerous NCA members participated in “Communication Innovation, New Media, and Digital Journalism,” a conference held June 27-29 in Shenzhen, China. Co-hosted by NCA and the Shenzhen University of China, the conference brought together Communication scholars and media practitioners to engage in conversations about cutting-edge communication-based issues.

The conference explored communication in three tracks: “Experiments in Communication Innovation,” led by Koilen Susanne Hoyng (Chinese University of Hong Kong) and Chen Changfeng (Tsinghua University); “Intersections in New Media and Health Communication,” led by Amy Hasinoff (Colorado Denver University); and “Quantitative Research in Communication (QRC)”, led by Qirong Gao (Shenzhen University of China) and “Digital Journalism Challenges,” led by Qirong Gao (University of the Pacific) and Xiaoqiu Gu (Shenzhen University of China). In addition to conference presentations and workshops, participants engaged in a pre-conference workshop on international communication and visited one of the world’s largest social media companies, Tencent.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
NCA Doctoral Honors Seminar Held at University of South Florida

The annual Doctoral Honors Seminar was held July 21–24 and hosted by the Department of Communication at the University of South Florida. Thirty doctoral students from more than 20 Communication doctoral programs attended the DHS, where they worked with distinguished researchers to discuss current topics and research within Communication Studies, Media and Society, and Rhetoric and/or Performance Studies. This year’s DHS, themed “Communication, Engagement, and Social Justice” was led by faculty seminar leaders Erin Donovan (University of Texas), Rachel Griffin (University of Utah), Matt McAlister (The Pennsylvania State University), Mark McPhail (Indiana University), James Olufowote (University of Oklahoma), Belinda Stillion Southard (University of Georgia), Tracy Stephenson Sharffer (Louisiana State University), Jan Van den Bulck (University of Michigan), Thomas Endres (University of Michigan), and Heather Zoller (University of Cincinnati).

Denison University Hosts NCA Institute for Faculty Development

The NCA Institute for Faculty Development, also known as the “Hope Conference,” was held July 14–20 at Denison University in Granville, Ohio. Forty-five members representing 21 states participated in the annual conference, which is designed for undergraduate Communication faculty who want to build collaborative research and pedagogical relationships, learn about new directions in theory and pedagogy, and develop new course area expertise. This year’s seminars included “The Collaborative Turn: The Communication-Based Reformulation of Decision Making in Organizations and Communities,” led by Stanley Deetz (University of Colorado Boulder); “Place Matters, Communication, Rhetoric, and the Centrality of Place in Cultural Life,” led by Greg Dickinson (Colorado State University); “Take(s) Heart! Writing, Teaching, and Researching with Care and Compassion,” led by Carolyn Ellis (University of South Florida); “Creativity, Aesthetics, and Dialogue in Everyday Communication,” led by William Rawlins (Ohio University); “Rhetorics and Cultures of the Visual,” led by Claire Sisco-King (Vanderbilt University); and “Becoming a Resilient Scholar,” led by Catherine Squires (University of Minnesota). Laura Ellingston (Santa Clara University) served as the 2019 Scholar-in-Residence.

NCA Hosts 2019 Chairs’ Summer Institute

NCA hosted its Chairs’ Summer Institute June 13–15 at The Hotel at the University of Maryland. This year’s theme, “Chairperson Leadership: Advocating, Mentoring, and Managing,” attracted more than 20 department chairs to the DC area for a workshop designed to help department chairs better understand and address a variety of issues within their departments and larger university communities. Session topics included the role of administrator, negotiating identity as a chair and administrator, and balancing research, teaching, and administrative responsibilities; managing issues of faculty mentoring and advocating for the department and faculty; identifying a departmental vision, goal-setting, generating faculty buy-in, and strategic planning; recruiting, hiring, and evaluating faculty; and managing department and campus crises.

Seminar leaders included John Caughlin (University of Illinois), Thomas Endres (University of Northern Colorado), Maurice Hall (The College of New Jersey), Kent Ono (University of Utah), and Helen Sterk (Western Kentucky University).
COMMUNICATION FOR survival

AN INTRODUCTION

MAKE PLANS NOW TO ATTEND THE NCA 105TH ANNUAL CONVENTION!

November 14–17, 2019 • Baltimore, Maryland

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- NCA Opening Session: Race Relations in Charm City: Communicating Social Justice, chaired by Kimberly R. Moffitt, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and featuring panelists Dottie Burt-Markowitz, Baltimore Racial Justice Action; J. David Cisneros, University of Illinois; Ranjani Gudlavalleti, Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition; Mark C. Hopson, George Mason University; Karsonya Wise-Whitehead, Loyola University Maryland; and Janelle Wong, University of Maryland. Sponsored by The Waterhouse Family Institute for the Study of Communication and Society.


- NCA Presidential Address and NCA Awards Presentation: The Coming Dark Age and the Future of Scholarly Associations, delivered by NCA President Star A. Muir, George Mason University, followed by presentation of the 2019 NCA awards. Sponsored by Routledge, Taylor & Francis.

LOCATION HIGHLIGHTS

- The Baltimore Convention Center is located in Baltimore’s beautiful Inner Harbor, just 15 minutes from the Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport.

- The Inner Harbor is surrounded by renowned attractions, a variety of restaurants, unique shopping, first-class hotels, and the Baltimore Visitor Center.

- Many of Baltimore’s one-of-a-kind neighborhoods, museums, and attractions are easily accessible via the free Charm City Circulator hybrid buses or the Baltimore Water Taxi.

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AN INTRODUCTION

food

SPEAKING OF

W e talk about food, we connect with one another over food, and really good food speaks to us in the same way that a piece of fine art might. The very act of consuming food is communicative. However, as Sheril Kirshenbaum writes in the opening article to this issue of Spectra, few of us really understand the complicated relationship people have with the food we eat. “While much of our lives revolve around meals,” Kirshenbaum writes, “the vast majority of us are unengaged with and misinformed about both production and nutrition.” Kirshenbaum calls on communicators and Communication scholars to “help cultivate a culture where more people recognize our foods’ origins, as well as our personal and collective ‘food print’ on the environment.” In recent years, the television industry has helped us explore the cultural complexities of global food pathways. While Casey Kelly writes that food television has become a “genre for consuming the Other while eliding... global economic inequalities, histories of colonialism, and narratives of cultural survivance,” he also notes that recently, people of color within the culinary industry have created “in-depth, documentary-style programs that approach cuisines as windows into the experiences of the people who cook and eat them.” According to Kelly, “Food television has transformed American audiences’ perception of culture and place.” Yet some food-related misperceptions remain strongly imbedded in the public imagery, especially stereotypes that are related to race and body image. “Foods, after all,” writes Psyche Williams-Forson, “are cultural products that invoke a range of individual and collective practices and memories. They reveal cultural traditions and culturally transmitted values that govern societies far and wide.” “So,” Forson notes, “while every culture experiences food shameing, African Americans have experienced histories of demonizing and degradation, most often under the guise of having their lives saved and their health ‘improved.’” Forson concludes that “Finding better communication strategies that consider the expressive variables that help to sustain us seems both ethical and logical.”

According to Amber Kinser, we certainly need to explore and strategize around the ideal of the family meal, the positive impacts frequent family meals have on child outcomes, and the pressure public messaging around family meal frequency places on parents, especially mothers. There are, Kinser notes, multiple and significant barriers to frequent family meal sharing. “If, in fact, increasing family meal frequency is a goal worth pursuing in support of healthy children,” Kinser writes, “then families need to be differently positioned, and institutional and societal levels are where that change must be initiated.”

We hope you enjoy these authors and their insights, and we look forward to greeting you (and sharing meals with you!) at the upcoming NCA 105th Annual Convention in November.
We are a nation of self-proclaimed “foodies,” with very little understanding of how food gets to our plates or its impact on our bodies and the environment.

By Sheril Kirshenbaum, M.S.

A mericans like to eat. Food unites families and communities in myriad ways. We gather around the dining room table to celebrate births and return for comfort during life’s most difficult challenges. We pass down time-honored recipes and plan holiday travel around opportunities to sample unique cuisines. Our diets shape us personally, while our collective choices and agricultural practices chart the course for Earth’s future.

Americans also have a very complicated relationship with food. We are a nation of self-proclaimed “foodies,” with very little understanding of how food gets to our plates or its impact on our bodies and the environment.

While much of our lives revolve around meals, the vast majority of us are unengaged with and misinformed about both production and nutrition.

In fact, the United States is further removed from agriculture than ever before. Less than 2 percent of Americans currently live on farms, as the population shifts from rural areas into cities and suburbs. According to Michigan State University’s national Food Literacy and Engagement Poll, half of us say we never or rarely seek information about where our food was grown or how it was produced. This lack of interest and attention has created unique social and policy challenges with which we must grapple as a nation.
For example, 37 percent of Americans do not know that all food contains genes, even though genetically modified organisms, often called “GMOs,” are a hotly debated topic. Americans are largely unfamiliar with genetic engineering, and we cannot begin to have serious regulatory discussions about emerging gene-editing technologies until more people are informed about the science that is vitally important to this conversation.

On less divisive subjects, much of what we think we know about food is wrong. For example, contrary to popular belief, there’s no scientific link between sugar and hyperactivity in children. Local and organic foods aren’t always best for our bodies, farm animals, or the environment. And, even though 61 percent of consumers look for the word “natural” on food labels, the term is not always synonymous with healthfulness or what’s necessary best for our bodies. Arsenic occurs naturally, after all, but we should not eat it.

Making matters worse, modern food labels frequently drive consumers to pay high prices for meaningless terms or even dangerous substances that capitalize on our drive consumers to pay high prices for meaningless terms or even dangerous substances that capitalize on our drive for cancer. Yet B17 is not really a vitamin; rather it’s amygdalin—which naturally contains cyanide and can pose a health risk. In such instances, marketers sell false hope by promoting pseudoscience, which fosters mistrust of experts and further complicates the conversation around food. This mismatch of information and priorities influences social norms and can reinforce false beliefs. The results add to the mountain of misinformation already plaguing the food industry and can take a toll on our bodies and our bank accounts.

Unfortunately, Americans also do not trust experts when it comes to information about nutrition, food safety, and sustainability. Just 52 percent say they trust academic scientists, 48 percent trust government scientists, and only 33 percent trust industry scientists.

When studies about nutrition make headlines, they are often unreliably reported. The people and companies with the loudest voices on and off line dominate public discourse and sway popular opinion on diet and health, while those with credentials rarely have the platform they would need to reach a wide audience.

As a result, the public is all too often spoon-fed lies about the best ways to eat. Popular magazines and blogs make it nearly impossible to separate truth from hype, especially because the vast majority of Americans do not have immediate access to scientific journals or people with real expertise.

Our click-driven news environment focuses on recommendations that offer quick fixes for weight loss, while starving our bodies of the fuel we need to stay healthy. A current trend involves celebrities promoting diets that cut out glucose, a simple sugar and important energy source our bodies need. These “influencers” encourage followers to adhere to restrictive plans that reduce or eliminate carbohydrates, while bing on saturated fats that clog arteries and damage hearts.

When it comes to our bodies, bad advice can cause real harm. The “clean” craze is one example that’s currently popular with affluent and so-called “aspirational” millennials. Clean eating began with good intentions, based on research, to eat minimally processed, plant-based, nutritious foods. That was fine, until a bevy of social media stars became interested in adopting a “clean” lifestyle, loosely reinterpreting this term to mean extreme restriction. In many documented cases, self-proclaimed “clean eaters” experienced malnourishment, hair loss, and vitamin deficiencies rarely seen in the developed world.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, advertising campaigns have added weight to the already oversized American obesity epidemic. Large, multinational corporations target America’s youngest and poorest populations by offering easily accessible, inexpensive, and highly processed foods that are saturated with fat, sugar, and sodium. Today, more than two-thirds of U.S. adults are considered overweight or obese, according to the National Institutes of Health.

It’s time to change the way we communicate about food.

We cannot expect consumers to understand food unless scientists work to foster trust and make the science accessible. And there’s more at stake than our individual health during this time of global change. In the coming years, scientists and agricultural producers must figure out how to feed as many people as possible, with ever more limited resources resulting from increasingly extreme storms and temperatures.

Around 2050, it’s estimated that there will be about 9 billion people living on Earth. Agricultural yield will need to increase by 70 to 100 percent to meet anticipated food demand. That means changing the way we harvest, consume, and waste food, both personally and globally.

Thankfully, some solutions are already available. Plant breeders are developing modern varieties of crops that can grow without fertilizer and survive though flooding. Plant-based meat alternatives and cell cultured meats are swiftly entering the global marketplace; these can have a less damaging environmental impact than their traditionally produced beef counterparts. And, advances in genetic engineering have allowed scientists to modify starches to supply vital nutrients to the world’s most vulnerable populations. Modern advances like these are encouraging and will help us prepare future generations for conditions on a changing planet, but the lack of public awareness, appreciation, trust, and support for the research involved will hinder scientific progress.

There are also solutions that do not involve technological innovation but can have a significant influence on global food security and sustainability. Food waste accounts for one-third of all food produced for human consumption and takes up 28 percent of the world’s agricultural lands. Such waste costs an estimated $9.2 billion every year in the United States (or $4,860 on average for a household of four). At a time when we are looking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, food waste generates enough methane to rank it number three in emissions were it a country, behind only the United States and China.

Still, Americans are aware of food waste and seem interested in taking steps to reduce their “food print.” Eighty-eight percent of Americans say they try to reduce food waste at home, and 40 percent would be willing to buy a GMO-derived fruit or vegetable that stayed fresh longer.
Communicators must help cultivate a culture where more people recognize our foods’ origins, as well as our personal and collective “food print” on the environment.

We also need to work to improve the quality of health, diet, nutrition, and environmental information that makes its way out into broad public discourse. That means bringing academics out of the ivory tower, producers off the farm, and health professionals into an exchange of civic discourse that quells mistrust and promotes mutual understanding. It requires that research institutions and storytellers become less siloed and more collaborative. Most of all, we must take the time to build these relationships, thoughtfully communicate, and listen to one another.

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than currently available produce. While so many policy and public discussions about resource scarcity focus on new innovation and technological progress, we can work to reduce what we waste immediately.

To have an impact, food communication must foster trust in experts while improving food literacy among consumers, policymakers, and the public. Communicators must help cultivate a culture where more people recognize our foods’ origins, as well as our personal and collective “food print” on the environment.

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Communicators must help cultivate a culture where more people recognize our foods’ origins, as well as our personal and collective “food print” on the environment.
You Are What You Watch:
Food Television’s Culture War

By Casey Ryan Kelly, Ph.D.

I just want people to understand that a taco is not just a taco. A taco is culture, a taco is history, and a taco is migration, a taco is resistance, politics, all that stuff. But it’s hard because too often in foodie culture, people just want to eat. They don’t want to think about what they eat.”
—Gustavo Arellano, Author of Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America

In episode 2 of the Netflix series Ugly Delicious, food writer Gustavo Arellano leads chef David Chang and food critics Peter Meehan and Jonathan Gold on a culinary tour of Los Angeles’ best taco trucks. Although the episode delivers a sumptuous homage to a diverse and beloved street cuisine, the group’s culinary adventure is much less about providing hungry viewers with a tourist map of where to eat “authentic” regional Mexican food than it is an erudite inquiry into what the taco represents.

In fact, the episode diverges from much of cable and broadcast food television by approaching the taco as a cultural text that illustrates the lived experiences of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and immigrants who settled in Mexico throughout the 20th century. The rich diversity of taco recipes conveys the unique hybridity and survivance of Mexican and Chicano cultures around the world. For instance, masa and tortillas illuminate Mexico’s Mesoamerican ancestry, regional ingredients explain
Food television has become a genre for consuming the Other while eliding the global economic inequalities, histories of colonialism, and narratives of cultural survivance that are indexed by global foodways.

the heterogeneity of Mexican identities, and fusions, appropriations, and adaptations of the taco evidence both the legacy of Spanish colonization and the contemporary travails of Mexican immigrants who are trying to build community in the United States.

Hence, the Arellano quote above demonstrates how cuisines constitute living artifacts of cultural experience, struggle, memory, and history. As Roland Barthes contends in “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption,” food is never simply nourishment and energy, but instead is “a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior.” Despite the fact that food, culture, and communication remain inseparable, Arellano notes the cold indifference of foodie culture to such nuanced thinking. Most of the time, he laments, foodies are averse to thinking critically about what foods represent, where they come from, and how their consumption is implicated in larger political struggles. Put differently, most seek enjoyment, not understanding. They just want to eat.

Arellano’s comments resonate with me because they capture part of the argument I advanced in Food Television and Otherness in the Age of Globalization (2017). In the book, I argued that the recent proliferation of food and travel television has transformed global foodways into commonsense representations of cultural difference that distinguish the “exotic” eaters of Asia, Africa, and South America from the normal and elevated eaters of the United States and Europe. Food television has become a genre for consuming the Other while eliding the global economic inequalities, histories of colonialism, and narratives of cultural survivance that are indexed by global foodways.

I share Allerano’s concern that foodie culture, so profoundly influenced by the sudden ubiquity of the televised food adventure, separates the act of consumption from the people and cultures that produce cuisine. I found that the Scripps-owned Food Network, The Cooking Channel, and The Travel Channel were largely invested in portraying the vicarious consumption of newly discovered global cuisines—dishes elevated by their endorsement from celebrity chefs and travel writers. For the shows’ largely white affluent audience, the globe represented a virtual emporium of exotic edibles and mysterious lands awaiting yet another colonization by cosmopolitan Western foodies looking to.space up their own travel experiences. But, a taco is not just a taco; it is also a site of struggle over the meaning of and right to define Mexican and Chicana identity at a political moment fraught with racial tensions between xenophobic nationalism on the one hand, and cosmopolitan reverence on the other. The same could be said for all the cuisines that are the subject of what I have dubbed the “televised culinary adventure” —a genre that celebrates global differences even as it maintains distinctions between the clean and orderly food rituals of the West and the strange, primal, and uncanny cuisines of the rest of the globe.

But since the publication of Food Television, I have also observed what amounts to an emerging culture war within the television industry over how to represent domestic and global foodways. This culture war concerns whether food will serve as an aperture into broader political struggles of race, class, nationality, and gender, or as a mechanism to appropriate and consume the experiences of others for the vicarious enjoyment of U.S. television audiences. I have argued that the late Anthony Bourdain deserves credit for creating some of the first programs (A Cook’s Tour, No Reservations, and Parts Unknown) that resisted the shallow tourism, kitsch, and racial exoticism that one regularly encounters throughout the programming of Scripps-owned networks. Although no show is perfect, Bourdain’s programs always featured well-developed portraits of food cultures that offered humanizing commentary on political and cultural struggles refracted through the prism of shared meals.

It has been the labor of people of color and their accomplices within the culinary industry who have pushed back against television’s exoticization of difference.

In part, the new dominance of television streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, and others has amplified the voices of people of color within the culinary industry. Streaming networks have done so by producing in-depth, documentary-style programs that approach cuisines as windows into the experiences of the people who cook and eat them. By and large, streaming networks have dispensed with the exoticizing gaze I critiqued in shows such as Andrew Zimmern’s Bizarre Foods, a program that invites audiences to gawk, fetishize, and even recoil in horror at the backward cuisines of non-Western nations.

For example, Chang’s Ugly Delicious is a show that explicitly addresses the racial and cultural entailments of specific dishes, such as tacos, fried rice, barbeque, and fried chicken. Over shared meals, Chang invites his guests to discuss how stereotypes and racism operate through differences in what and how we eat. In one episode, Chang solicits the personal experiences of Chinese Americans in the food and restaurant industries to illustrate how Chinese-American food, and consequently Chinese Americans, have been historically maligned as dirty and dangerous. As a Korean American, Chang empathizes by sharing his own childhood stories of his white schoolmates in Virginia mercilessly mocking the strange cooking smells that emanated from his home kitchen. The show then traces how the belief that Chinese Americans eat domesticated dogs and cats and are averse to sanitary cooking practices can be traced back to the anti-immigrant xenophobia that accompanied Chinese migration to the United States in the mid-19th century. In another episode, Chang asks African-American restaurant owners and patrons about the fraught racial history of soul food in the American South. The episode traces the racial stereotypes associated with African Americans and fried chicken to the history of slavery, where slaves were sometimes permitted to keep and sell chickens for their own livelihood.

But Bourdain deserves only so much credit. It has been the labor of people of color and their accomplices within the culinary industry who have pushed back against television’s exoticization of difference. Such chefs include (upper to lower left) David Chang (Ugly Delicious, Mind of a Chef, Netflix), Tiffany Derry (Hungry Inventions, Paramount Network), Aaron Sanchez (Taco Trip, Cooking Channel), Patt Junich (Mexican Table, PBS), (upper to lower right) Eddie Huang (Huang’s World, Vice TV) Nikki Nakayama (Chef’s Table, Netflix), Ming Tsai (Simply Ming, PBS), and the list goes on.
Food television does not merely reflect contemporary political divisions; it actively shapes how Americans address cultural difference and relate to the rest of the globe.

As these examples illustrate, new programs such as Ugly Delicious challenge their audiences’ assumptions about the cultural experience of marginalized communities, contextualize food stereotypes in the broader history of racism, and educate audiences about the lived experience of those cultures whose foods they might enjoy or despise. Of course, Chang also gets to eat some pretty amazing food in the process.

The hosts and subjects featured in recent Netflix originals are also more racially and geographically diverse. For example, Netflix’s Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat not only offers a sophisticated take on the universal elements of global cuisines that unify rather than divide the globe, but also features a multilingual Iranian-American host (chef Samin Nosrat) and her personal and cultural relationship with different global cuisines.

Additionally, Netflix’s Street Food offers remarkably dynamic portraits of chefs throughout Asia who make a difficult living as street vendors. We learn less about chef Jai Fai’s Michelin-star crab omelet than we do about the precarity of women’s labor in Thailand, the personal tragedies and economic conditions that led Fai to become a street cook, and the painful effects of government crackdowns on street businesses in Bangkok. Moreover, the program treats cuisines in Asia with the same reverence and respect food writers once reserved only for haute French cuisine. Although there is a long way to go, these programs speak back to the shallow and highly commercialized portraits of global foods divorced from both people and culture.

At the same time, there still exists another food culture that engenders quotidian (white) American tastes. For example, Guy Fieri’s popular Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives explicitly defies health and gastronomic trends by championing the familiar eats of mass consumer culture. In his travels throughout America, Fieri inverts the logics of elite food culture by invoking nostalgia for the high-calorie treats of American diner culture, including hot dogs, cheeseburgers, chicken wings, milkshakes, and French fries. Fieri also presents himself as a plainspoken, working-class hero and, consequently, speaks to an audience that wants its pedestrian diner food to be treated with the same respect as elite cuisine. Fieri’s allure is that he does not bother his audience with too much history or context.

The Fieri brand is part of a much larger American nostalgia industry that sells products and sentiments that are associated with seemingly simpler and less divisive times. Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives presents food without the complications of politics, struggle, or cultural heterogeneity. Fieri represents the emergence of a kind of food populism in which the right to consume without thought, prohibition, or consequence is conceived of as a democratic ideal. In other words, ideal citizen-subjects are implicitly un raced and apolitical mass consumers. Here, people can innocently enjoy their cheeseburgers without the burdens of history or context—narcotized by the warm glow of nostalgia.

The stark contrasts between network and streaming content reflects broader national divisions between nationalism and cosmopolitanism; elitism and populism; open-mindedness and xenophobia. Food television does not merely reflect contemporary political divisions; it actively shapes how Americans address cultural difference and relate to the rest of the globe. Eric Wolf of the World Food Travel Association estimates that food tourism is a $150 billion a year industry. A recent industrial report on the market for culinary travel found that nearly three-quarters of American leisure travelers (131 million) can be categorized as culinary travelers, where food is the primary motivation for travel. Most within the restaurant and travel industries attribute the growth in culinary tourism to the advancement of food television and related food media, including food magazines, travel blogs, and social media sites such as Instagram. Food television has transformed American audiences’ perception of culture and place; perceptions that now also structure how viewers navigate and consume the world. It thus behooves us to consider what kinds of cultural assumptions about food, place, and difference circulate among viewers as they transform into participants. After all, a taco is not just a taco. Likewise, a food show is never just about food.

CASEY RYAN KELLY is Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. His broad research interests in rhetoric, critical media studies, and cultural studies include representations of global foodways, whiteness, masculinity, indigenous self-determination, and sexuality in film. He is author of four books, including Food Television and Otherness in the Age of Globalization (Lexington Press, 2017). His work also appears in Quarterly Journal of Speech, Critical Studies in Media Communication, and Communication and Critical/Culture Studies, among others. Kelly was the 2018 recipient of the National Communication Association’s Karl R. Wallace Memorial Award.
In May 2008, The Washington Post ran a five-part exposé titled, “Young Lives at Risk: Our Overweight Children.” Because I am interested in the intersections of food and society, many of the articles in the series caught my eye. I was struck particularly by the story of a young, dark-skinned, African-American girl named Latrisha Avery. Latrisha was then 12 years old and described as taller and more full-figured than her classmates. Most of the online segments of the young girl’s story deal with the ways in which she navigates the thorny terrains of her life. She is teased in school because of her height, weight, and skin tone, and she lives in a relatively impoverished community. Throughout the essay, we are shown pictures of various aspects of Latrisha’s life. We see her at school, walking home with friends across a parking lot backgrounded by liquor stores and fast food eateries, walking to church with her grandmother, and at home with family. While we see these images, we are not privy to many of the nuances of her young life. Implied but not detailed is that Latrisha has experienced a great deal of loss—we know nothing of her parents, her grandmother has recently passed, and, perhaps, more. It is further implied that feeling isolated and alone, Latrisha turns to food—specifically, to “soul food.”

In the photo gallery and slideshow that accompanies Latrisha Avery’s story, there is one image showing the young girl with a large salad of lettuce (seemingly iceberg), tomatoes, cucumber, a slice of red pepper, lots of raw broccoli, and a scoop of tuna salad. Latrisha is photographed picking the broccoli out of her salad, stacking it outside the takeout container. In another insert, we see the adolescent smiling before a plate filled with fried chicken, sliced beef and ham, collard greens, corn pudding, potato salad, macaroni salad, sweet potatoes, and iced tea. Sitting just beyond her elbow is a cake adorned with walnuts, waiting to be cut. Admittedly, the sheer variation (and volume) of food is hefty. But the indirect contrasts are more striking.

The article strongly suggests (as do some of Latrisha’s family members) that if the young girl would just try hard and eat more salads and “healthy” foods, she would lose weight, have friends, and, therefore, have a better life. Also,
Foods, after all, are cultural products that invoke a range of individual and collective practices and memories. They reveal cultural traditions and culturally transmitted values that govern societies far and wide.…

very much suggested by the images is that the “soul food” Latrisha is consuming stands in contrast to the lettuce and broccoli salad. Left unpacked and unsaid is that Latrisha’s preferred foods are part of a longstanding culinary cultural tradition practiced in African-American communities. This latter point may seem inconsequential until we acknowledge that Latrisha is not eating in vacuum. The article frames Latrisha as having a problem of will power and a very large appetite—especially for soul food. What we do not see is the power of food to convey a variety of meanings and messages, including food shaming and food policing, without any regard for the importance of culture.

My training in American Studies, working at the intersection of race and food, leads me to consider the ways food shaming and policing of African Americans often occurs under the guise of providing helpful health and nutrition information. The reality, however, is there is a constant policing of Black bodies generally; shaming and messages, including food shaming and food policing, are used as a controlling mechanism. To be sure, food is a constant policing of Black bodies generally; shaming and nutrition information. The reality, however, is there is a constant policing of Black bodies generally; shaming and messages, including food shaming and food policing, are used as a controlling mechanism. To be sure, food is a constant policing of Black bodies generally; shaming and nutrition information. The reality, however, is there is a constant policing of Black bodies generally; shaming and messages, including food shaming and food policing, are used as a controlling mechanism. 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African Americans have long been engaged in ideological warfare involving food, race, power, and identity… Stereotypes have been around for centuries and remain pervasive in the contemporary American psyche.

line—people (social), planet (environmental), and profit (financial). But, in focusing only on these three, we miss the importance of ritual practices and the ways in which people use food and other kinds of expressions to live in culturally healthy ways. So, knowing the various food histories of African Americans and those of broader communities of Black/African Diasporic peoples sheds light not only on our multicomplex food systems, but also on the ways in which gender is central to the furtherance of African-derived cultural traditions and practices, practices that developed under the oppressive conditions of enslavement and have continuously evolved since then.

So, food shaming—showing a young African-American girl with a large plate of “soul food” as her comfort and sustenance, food policing—thinking every African-American neighborhood should have a community garden, telling Black folk what they should eat to be healthy, and suggesting that “eat local” be a daily mantra should not be practices that we employ. As today’s version of the food movement gathers steam, everyone—from pundits to journalists, food scholars to enthusiasts—suggests that the mantra should not be practices that we employ. As today’s version of the food movement gathers steam, everyone—from pundits to journalists, food scholars to enthusiasts—suggestion that a grocery store is a cure-all solution to food shaming and food policing. In responding to the early 20th-century question “How does it feel to be a problem?” asked by scholar and activist W.E.B. Du Bois, Professor L. Jackson II rightly explains, “Black bodies were inscribed with a set of meanings, which helped to perpetuate the scripter’s racial ideology. Through these scripts, race gradually became its own corporeal politics.”

As I highlight in Building Houses out of Chicken Legs and elsewhere, these “scripts” extend to cultural products such as food. Stereotypes and images that have sought to denigrate African-American men, women, and children using images of chicken and watermelon continue to be pervasive, perpetuated through popular culture. As Jackson argues, these narratives that socially assign Black bodies to an “underclass” had their origins in the institutions of “slavery and the mass media.” Today, this includes social media and its ability to reach vast audiences with haste.

We risk critical and cultural misunderstanding when we forget that everyone’s lives and identities are composed of many overlapping stories. ’The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.’ Not only are they incomplete, they also generally are ideologically infused, often at the expense of common sense, historical context, and people’s everyday lives—people like Latrisha, who rather than being told she needs to give up all the foods that are important to her might simply need to have her portions adjusted. Finding better communication strategies that consider the expressive variables that help to sustain us seems both ethical and logical.
Family Meals and the Discourse About Them

By Amber Kinser, Ph.D.

As an academic trained in and teaching in the area of family communication, I am interested in how the mundane in family life is made meaningful among family members and through the interaction between family practices and meanings in the larger social world. As a feminist scholar, I view families and meaning through a feminist lens, examining the taken-for-granted assumptions that fix institutional and structural meanings in ways that discourage creative individual agency and restrict fluid performativity. As a motherhood studies scholar, I focus on how various definitions of gender, parenting, family, and social location impact women’s experience of maternal life. And, finally, as a person for whom food and family have taken on particular, if complicated, significance—as a daughter at my parents’ table, a mother with children for many years at mine, a partner who has the luxury now of being fed much more often than I feed—I am especially curious about family meals and how they shape and are shaped by the people who share them and the institutions that presume to direct them.

In recent years, I have found my interest piqued by the heavy-handed emphasis—among nutritionists, physicians, psychologists, educators, policy makers, celebrity figures, corporations, and news and other media—on family meals and the insistence that parents sit down most days of the week with their families for a shared meal. This insistence is rooted in more than two decades of research indicating that such practice will save children from low self-esteem, eating disorders, poor school performance, early sexual activity, alcohol and drug experimentation and abuse, disorderly behavior, poor nutrition, and other problems, including asthma and bullying.

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A number of non-academic books that extol the wide-ranging virtues and moral strength of family meals have been released with notoriety, including Miriam Weinstein’s The Surprising Power of Family Meals and Les and Leslie Parrott’s The Hour that Matters Most. Online news and information sources such as ABCNews.com, CBSNews.com, NewYorkTimes.com, EatRight.org, Health.com, NPR.org, Telegraph.co.uk, Time.com, USAToday.com, WashingtonPost.com, and WebMD, among many others, have urged parents to mitigate threats to their children’s optimal functioning by eating together more often. A vast array of brands, including Schwan Food Company, Tyson Meats, Safeway, and Kroger; the Dairy Councils of California, Oregon, and Washington State; restaurants such as Texas Roadhouse, McDonald’s, Wendy’s, KFC, and Chick-Fil-A; major enterprises such as Time Warner Cable, Bank of America, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; as well as the Harlem Globetrotters and the New York Mets, represent some of the vocal and visible corporate involvements in this discourse.

Nostalgia rhetoric abounds as these sources converge to urge a return to and reclaiming of the family meal, in response to the assumed tragic loss of this once-sacred and prevalent tradition, which, as historian Stephanie Coontz makes clear, neither contemporary nor historical U.S. families have known. The presumed decline of family meals functions in the discourse as a metonym for the erosion of the institution of the family, itself a metonym for the
It makes sense that positive family routines, daily intimate parent-child interaction, parents monitoring and facilitating nutritional intake and particular eating habits can, and probably often do, result in good stuff for kids…

...by the way the discourse and the interventions emerging from it repeatedly fail to focus on anything but the family itself, when what complicates meal provision and frequency are matters quite often beyond the family and its control. Even familial patterns that do stem from the family itself often are grounded in social structure. The heralding of frequency as the critical measure, without sustained attention to the many variables that confound both meal provision and child outcomes, has more recently been called into question by a few scholars, but still those confounding variables receive precious little attention in the literature.

In my own childhood home, an increase in family meal occurrence would have meant more arduous “second shifts” for my mother, to use Arlie Hochschild’s term. More opportunity for my father to wield ugly power and terrorize, and more lessons for the children in overeating by way of the “eat everything on your plate” rule. The only conversation that was permitted at our dinner table was that between my parents. It is doubtful that our family could have improved child outcomes, or that any given family could, by “simply” increasing the number of times we sat down to dinner as a family would have brought about any impressive degree of positive outcomes for us kids. Indeed, the two to three nights each week that my father was at the fire station and our dinners were decidedly unplanned and unstructured were the only nights of reprieve for the children and our mother. The idea that our family could have improved child outcomes, or that any given family could, by “simply” increasing the food labor of meal providers is deeply problematic, despite what the data say, and despite the archetypal image of happy families interacting around a dinner table that dominates the popular imaginary.

The tone of family meal discourse echoes that of other family well-being discourses in that it places, across an array of institutions, children’s struggles as not only the primary, often exclusive, focus, but also the primary and often exclusive responsibility of individual families. With few exceptions, family meal research has been characterized by a paucity of discussion about ways that frequent family meals might impact the adults—their eating patterns, their self-esteem, their school or job performance, their nutrition, their relationship satisfaction, or any other variable of their well-being—or the ways in which the practice of orchestrating frequent family meals has proven more executable by certain family configurations, and within particular socio-economic ranges. And, it has done little to examine how the practice unfolds in families with special needs family members. It has done little to investigate how disruptive or abusive family members impact outcomes. Nor has it earnestly investigated the variables operating when families who are not sharing meals frequently are experiencing positive child outcomes.

Further, public education efforts have targeted “parents,” to which, given the abundant and well-established assemblage of research showing that women remain responsible for family feeding work, mothers are most likely to be responsive. The rhetoric of “families and parenting” functions here much like the rhetoric of “shared parenting” in family law. That is, as law professor Susan Boyd has argued, such language obscures the gendered patterns that mark these labors, and thereby fails to prompt any interrogation or equitable distribution of them. Such obscuring ensures that the discussion of family meals in public, professional, and policy domains will be incapable of speaking to the actualities of family meal provision and its myriad related variables. Consequently, it will be ineffectual, finally, at minimizing costs and maximizing benefits of family food provision, and ineffectual at meeting even its own goal of increasing family meal frequency.

Perhaps it is not surprising that family meal research has been slow to challenge the ideology of family meal-as-panacea, given the strength and pervasiveness of neoliberal thought and its assumptions that problems with any component of the family is wholly solvable by the family. Research that more effectively nuances the questions it aims...
Increasingly intense employment, parenting, and elder care demands are matters that need attention from their corresponding industries and institutions, as well as policy and social service support.

If, in fact, increasing family meal frequency is a goal worth pursuing in support of healthy children, then families need to be differently positioned, and institutional and societal levels are where that change must be initiated.
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Assistant Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences

The Pennsylvania State University

The Department of Communication Arts and Sciences (CAS) seeks to hire a tenure-track assistant professor who will build capacity in the Communication, Science, and Society Initiative (CSSI), a joint undertaking of CAS and the Huck Institutes of the Life Sciences.

The full-time position will be filled by an assistant professor who complements the CAS department’s mission with regard to either the scientific study of communication or the study of rhetoric. The successful applicant will also contribute to theory and research that advances the goals of the CSSI: (a) to improve the individual and collective well-being of humanity through Communication scholarship in collaboration with life scientists, (b) to foster transdisciplinary collaboration, especially with the life sciences, driven by concrete social exigencies and opportunities, and (c) to exercise national leadership in communication theory, research, and practices through these activities.

The Huck Institutes’ mission is to catalyze and facilitate excellence in interdisciplinary research in the life sciences at Penn State. The Huck Institutes include research centers that promote cutting-edge, interdisciplinary science on topics such as neuroscience, biological embedding of stress, ecological systems, genomics, and biomedicine and health sciences, including reproductive health. It is imperative that the applicant identify the research unit in which they could participate and elaborate on their fit with that unit. A list of Huck research centers and institutes, graduate degree programs, and core facilities can be found at https://www.huck.psu.edu/.

The successful applicant will have a demonstrated record of scholarly achievement, be well-grounded in the Communication discipline, complement and strengthen core interests of faculty in CAS, and be willing to collaborate with the broader university community, especially the Huck Institutes. A Ph.D. in a related field is required at the time of appointment.

Candidates should provide clear evidence of scholarly and teaching excellence and service to the discipline. In addition to conducting research and teaching undergraduate and graduate courses, responsibilities include course development in the area of specialty, supervision of theses and dissertations, and involvement in other departmental activities. Additional considerations in reviewing candidates include interest in grant-based research, the desire to engage in interdisciplinary research, and an appreciation for working alongside diverse colleagues in the humanities, the social sciences, and the life sciences.

Applications must include a letter of application describing research, teaching, and any graduate mentoring experience, along with a CV, representative publications (typically three), evidence of effective teaching, and the names of three or more references who may be contacted to provide letters of recommendation. Inquiries may be sent to Professors Bradford Vivian at bjb113@psu.edu or James Dillard at jbd16@psu.edu.

Review of applications will begin August 1, 2019 and continue until the position is filled. The start date for the position is August, 2020.

Apply online at https://psu.jobs/ jdb8682

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Penn State is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer, and is committed to providing employment opportunities to all qualified applicants without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability or protected veteran status. This institution does not offer domestic partner benefits.

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Bentley University invites applications for a tenure-track position in the areas of Public Relations and related fields to start in fall 2020. We seek a dedicated scholar and strong teacher who would join the interdisciplinary faculty of Bentley’s department of Information Design and Corporate Communication.

The reputation of our undergraduate programs is grounded in educating students in new and existing forms of digital and social media PR and its application to communication strategy; public relations practice by business, government, nonprofit, PR writing, creative thinking; the creative industry sector; the intersection between PR, organizations and society.

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Candidates must have evidence of research ability and experience with teaching. A Ph.D. is required. Dedication to scholarship in the field is necessary for promotion and tenure.

Special Instructions to Applicants:

Applicants will be required to submit a cover letter and CV upon application. Please note that applications are evaluated on an ongoing basis. This institution offers benefits to same-sex and to different-sex domestic partners. This institution offers benefits to spouses.
HOST NAMED FOR NEW

NCA Center for Communication, Community Collaboration, and Change

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO’S (UNCG) DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION has been selected to serve as the host of the new NCA Center for Communication, Community Collaboration, and Change (CCCC).

The CCCC is a two-year project aimed at facilitating partnerships with community-based organizations that create sustainable change for underrepresented and/or vulnerable communities through the production and application of communication-related scholarship and practice. The Greensboro community is confronted with issues of racism, racial inequality, voter suppression, a lack of affordable housing, and inaccessibility to food and health care. As a result, the CCCC will work with community partners to improve issues related to race, poverty, and sustainability.

UNCG Communication Department Chair Roy Schwartzman submitted the proposal to host the CCCC, and will help launch the new effort. Communication Professor Spoma Jovanovic, whose teaching and research focus on methods of meaningful participation in civic life to advance social justice, will serve as the CCCC Director.