

SSCA NEWSLETTER



BIRMINGHAM 2026!

The **Southern States Communication Association**'s 96th conference invites you to **Birmingham, Alabama**. We are excited to share the joy of Birmingham's vibrant blend of history, culture, and Southern charm. The 96th Annual SSCA Convention in 2026 will mark the 8th time the conference has been held in Birmingham, Alabama, which holds historical significance as the site of the association's very first convention in 1930. Known as the "Magic City," Birmingham has fascinating history that comes alive at places like the [Birmingham Civil Rights Institute](#), where visitors can explore pivotal moments in American history. Food lovers will appreciate the city's booming culinary scene between the award-winning barbecue joints to upscale farm-to-table restaurants. Art and music aficionados can enjoy the [Birmingham Museum of Art](#), or you may be able to catch live performances in the city's revitalized downtown entertainment district! That is not all. If you are interested in nature, Birmingham offers outdoor enthusiasts a scenic stroll through the lush [Birmingham Botanical Gardens](#) or hiking trails at [Ruffner Mountain](#). We are thrilled to host the 96th Annual Meeting of SSCA where it all started. See you in Birmingham!

SSCA 2026
ELECTION RESULTS
Second Vice President
Dr. Eletra Gilchrist-Petty
Legislative Assembly Rep
Dr. Karen Hill

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

The **Sheraton Birmingham Convention Center** will serve as the perfect venue to explore this year's conference theme: **"Comm-AI-nity: Conversations in the Age of Intelligence."** This theme



blends the ideas of “community” and “AI,” emphasizing the evolving relationship between human and artificial intelligence in shaping communication. It encourages reflection on how communication fosters connection and shared understanding in an era

increasingly influenced by advanced technologies. Book your hotel room soon as **the SSCA special rate ends on March 17th**. Visit the SSCA website [conference page](#) for the most current program and other important information.

A WORD FROM OUR OFFICERS

It is their dedication to this organization that keeps SSCA running. Thank you for your hard work!

PRESIDENT – PATRICK G. WHEATON

GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

As we approach our annual convention to be held in Birmingham in April, let me state that it has been an immense pleasure to serve the Association as president this year. I also want to update you on what we have been working on this year. In addition to the elections for the next **Second Vice President** and the **Representative to the NCA Legislative Assembly**, the Association will appoint a **new SCJ editor** to succeed **Rebekah Fox**, whose term of service ends with the current volume. The **Publications Committee** issued a call last fall and is in the process of submitting their recommendation.



We have completed a new strategic plan; thank you for your input at our listening sessions last April and thank you to **Carl Cates** for getting that strategic planning process started. Finally, we are also looking to create a new ad hoc committee to **plan for our centennial in 2030**. *If you are interested in serving on that committee*, feel free to contact me.

I look forward to seeing everyone in Birmingham in April.

1ST VICE PRESIDENT - NARISSRA PUNYANUNT CARTER

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY



I am truly looking forward to welcoming everyone to Birmingham, Alabama for this year's SSCA conference. Birmingham is a city with a powerful history, a strong sense of place, and a growing cultural and food scene that invites conversation and connections. I hope you will have opportunities during the conference to explore the city and enjoy time together beyond our sessions.

The **96th Annual SSCA Convention** in 2026 marks the 8th time the conference has been held in Birmingham, Alabama, which holds historical significance as the site of the association's very first convention in 1930. Birmingham offers a unique backdrop for this forward-looking yet grounded theme. Known as the birthplace of the civil rights movement, Birmingham's legacy of community-building and social change underscores the importance of connection and understanding, making it a fitting location for this gathering.

Our conference hotel offers a comfortable and collegial setting that supports the spirit of SSCA. The convention spaces right across from the hotel are easy to navigate, and there are several inviting areas to gather, whether for informal conversations between panels or longer discussions over meals. These shared moments are often where some of our most meaningful connections happen.

This year's conference theme, "**Comm-AI-nity: Conversations in the Age of Intelligence**," invites us to think carefully and creatively about how communication shapes community in a time of rapid technological change. Throughout the program, you will see this theme reflected in panels,

workshops, and discussions that encourage thoughtful dialogue about scholarships, teaching, and the future of our discipline. We have worked intentionally to create a program that supports both intellectual engagement and genuine connection across career stages and research areas.

I am especially excited to share that our **Awards Luncheon keynote speaker** is **Dr. Kerk Kee**. His work and perspective speak directly to the heart of our theme, and I am confident his address will be both insightful and inspiring as we reflect on where we are and where we are headed as a scholarly community. The Awards Luncheon will also be a meaningful opportunity to **celebrate the accomplishments** of our members and to recognize the many ways colleagues contribute to SSCA through research, teaching, mentorship, and service.

I very much look forward to seeing everyone in Birmingham and to sharing another thoughtful, engaging, and welcoming SSCA conference together! Wishing you all the very best!

2ND VICE PRESIDENT & 2026 UHC PLANNER - LELAND G. SPENCER

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

I am excited to see everyone in Birmingham for the SSCA convention and especially for the 36th annual **Theodore Clevenger**

Undergraduate Honors Conference. We have 47 undergraduate papers and projects scheduled across 12 panels on Friday and Saturday at the conference. SSCA is known as a conference that enthusiastically welcomes undergraduate researchers, including first-time presenters. **I encourage you to attend UHC panels of interest as you plan your SSCA itinerary!**



We had a robust submission cycle for UHC, and it would have been impossible with many helpful volunteers. I **gratefully acknowledge** the following scholars who agreed to review, chair, or respond to UHC papers:

Aaron Dicker, Abby Brooks, Albert Junior Nyarko, Alyson Farzad-Phillips, Ann Burnette, Annette Madlock, Aubree Herman, Benjamin Bates, Brandon Inabinet, Brian Bowman, Caleb Micah Cates, Camille Lewis, Chandra Maldonado, David Nelson, Fola Olatunde, J. Dean Farmer, Jean DeHart, John Saunders, Joshua Guitar, Leah LeFebvre, Linda Manning, Mackenzie Mickavicz, Margaret Ndwandwe, Michelle Groover, Michelle Violanti, Missy Plew, Nick J. Scullo,

Patty Sotirin, Rebekah Fox, Renee Edwards, Roseann M. Mandziuk, Samantha Szczur, Shana Bridges, Thomas Socha, Todd Lee Goen, and Wesley Buerkle.

See you in Birmingham!

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – FRANCES BRANDAU

SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY

SSCA Moves to a Convention App



SSCA is excited to announce that we are moving to a mobile convention app for our upcoming annual convention. If you regularly attend the **National Communication Association** convention, this app will feel very familiar and easy to use. The transition to a convention app represents an important step forward in modernizing the SSCA convention experience. The app will provide attendees with convenient, real-time access to the full program, schedules, session information, and updates, all in one place.

In addition to improving the attendee experience, this move allows the Association to significantly reduce costs by eliminating the need to print and ship paper programs. These savings help SSCA steward member resources responsibly while investing in future programming and initiatives.

For this year only, SSCA will continue to offer a **limited number** of printed programs. [Please complete this form](#) by **March 19th** to reserve your paper copy to be picked up at registration.

We look forward to rolling out this exciting change and to welcoming you to a more streamlined, sustainable, and user-friendly convention experience.

An update from the Constitution Committee:

Please review the proposed amendments posted on the SSCA website and [here](#). We will be discussing this agenda item at our **Member's Breakfast Meeting** and look forward to your input.

EDITOR - REBEKAH L. FOX

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

The latest issue of **Southern Communication Journal** features a wide range of topics from a book review of Southern Cookbooks to articles on online dating, social media and politics, and several articles exploring controversial and pressing academic and campus issues.

Although many of these are available online now (members have access to the online journal in the *Members Only* area of the [SSCA website](#)), the articles in our next issue take on subjects ranging from faculty conflict, programmatic trends in communication education, digital social movements and the 2018-2019 Women's March, disclosure in Instagram relationships, international media framing of climate change, and an ethnographic study of a disability-focused workplace.



I look forward to seeing you all in April at the convention where we will announce our **Rose B. Johnson Article of the Year Award** winner, and the name of the **next editor** for Southern Communication Journal!

FINANCE CHAIR - NAKIA WELCH

SAN JACINTO COLLEGE



As Chair of the **Finance Committee**, I have been reviewing SSCA's financial records and practices to improve transparency, strengthen recordkeeping, and support long-term financial planning. This review included an analysis of organizational records to better understand current finances and anticipated challenges, including the long-standing reality that the annual convention operates at a loss.

Key issues identified include the absence of standard operating procedures for SSCA awards, including guidance on funding and recipient benefits; opportunities to improve recordkeeping practices;

rising food and beverage costs as pre-COVID contracts expire; and the need to reevaluate membership and convention registration fees.

I look forward to continuing these conversations with SSCA leadership and members and to further discussion in Birmingham at the annual convention as we plan for the organization's financial future.

RESOURCE CHAIR – MICHELLE GROOVER

GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Caring Connections: A small sticker with a big impact

If you've been to an SSCA conference before, you've seen stickers on some of the members' name tags and maybe wondered what they were. The stickers are called **Caring Connections** and are a way to acknowledge your colleagues, mentors, and others while supporting SSCA's awards. **Caring Connections** also strengthens bonds as academics welcome the undergraduate and graduate students to our organization. The **new sticker design** showcases the colors of SSCA and the collegial nature of communication through respect and acknowledgement.



There's still time to **pre-order** a **Caring Connection** for your colleagues. [Click here](#) by Thursday, **March 19th**, to place your pre-order. You can also purchase **Caring Connections** at the conference. Each Caring Connection is \$5 and supports the SSCA awards.

Other ways to support SSCA:

- Your department can showcase its programs to students by purchasing a table for the **Grad Fair** or the **Undergraduate Honors Conference** or by placing an ad in the program. Reach out to our Membership department at membership@ssca.net to reserve your space today.
- Your department can also become an **institutional member** for as little as \$100 a year, communicating your trust and confidence in SSCA. **Benefits** of this membership include being listed on the website and in the program; opportunities to post job announcements on the SSCA website and social media; and a complimentary one-year graduate student membership.

For more information, visit the SSCA website or [click here](#).

CONVENTION HOTEL INFORMATION

The **Sheraton Birmingham** is the conference hotel. The reservation cut-off date is **March 17th, 2026**, or when the room block is full - whichever occurs first. The special room rate for our convention is \$183/night plus taxes. Click here for [Conference Hotel Reservations](#)

THINGS TO DO IN BIRMINGHAM

[Learn more about museums, art galleries, food, sports, and other attractions here.](#)



SSCA 2026

Premium Affiliate Members

Auburn University - [School of Communication & Journalism](#)

Baylor University - [Department of Communication](#)

Clemson University - [Department of Communication](#)

Georgia Southern University - [Communication Arts](#)

Kennesaw State University - [Communication & Media](#)

Mississippi College - [Department of Communication Studies](#)

Samford University - [Department of Communication & Media](#)

Texas State University - [Communication Studies](#)

Texas Tech University - [Communication Studies: College of
Media & Comm Studies](#)

University of Memphis - [Department of Communication & Film](#)

University of South Carolina - Aiken

[Department of Communication & Emerging Media](#)

Valdosta State University - [Department of Communication Arts](#)

Virginia Tech - [School of Communication](#)

Thank you for your departmental support!

SSCA 2026
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New Mexico State University
North Carolina State University
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Thank you!

VISIT SSCA ON SOCIAL:

