

A Fellowship Emerges: The Weinels' Promise for Signage Research and Education

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most important endeavors for AACSB is the Emerging Fellows program. The program supports and encourages researchers who have demonstrated promise and/or success in conducting research related to issues of on-premise signs.

In 2016, the new AACSB board created the first committee to initiate a “distinguished fellows” program, led by Dawn Jourdan. To point attention to the “promise” of scholarship, the program was entitled “Emerging Fellows,” with eligibility for pre-tenure faculty, post-doctoral, and graduate student applicants. The committee developed the structure for the program and outlined the first Call for Proposals. The “AACSB Emerging Fellows Class of 2017” was introduced in March of that year.

The implementation of “fellowships” indicated the specific purpose of introducing a new generation of researchers and educators to advance signage issues in their own fields. However, the Emerging Fellows program is unique in that eligible applicants may come from any academic discipline that can bring a scholarly perspective to on-premise signage, visual communications, or wayfinding. The research outcomes can reach across scholarship of signage-related technologies, legal issues, art, engineering, and business. Each Emerging Fellow holds the title for two years and can receive up to \$10,000 per year. Under the current guidelines, the Fellowships are portable, in that they are awarded to an individual, rather than to an institution. This feature has already allowed fourth- or fifth-year PhD students to arrive at their new employers with research funding in-hand. The funding directly supports their research and its dissemination. Emerging Fellows have used the funds for data collection, creative interventions, surveys, and

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expenses for conference presentations and other outlays necessary for any new science or concepts.

Research is a long-term and high-risk process, but a retrospective of only five years produces an impressive list of scholarly works that have already been derived directly from Emerging Fellows funding:

McClellan, Kelsey Dalton. "Return on Investment: Business Model Project for Heart & Bone Signs." PhD dissertation, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2017.

Sundar, Aparna, Flavia Gonsales, and Gracie Schafer. "Synchronicity in signage promotes a sense of belonging." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Signage and Wayfinding* 2, no. 2 (2018): 30-40.

Sundar, Aparna, Ruomeng Wu, and Frank R. Kardes. "Faded Fonts: How Difficulty in Image Processing Promotes Sensitivity to Missing Information." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Signage and Wayfinding* 3, no. 1 (2019): 16-27.

Henderson, Conor M., Marc Mazodier, and Aparna Sundar. "The color of support: The effect of sponsor–team visual congruence on sponsorship performance." *Journal of Marketing* 83, no. 3 (2019): 50-71.

***Special issue:* Sundar, Aparna, and Hélène Deval. "Introduction." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Signage and Wayfinding* 4, no. 2 (2020): 1-6.**

Peña, Alyssa, Eric Ragan, and Lane Harrison. "Memorability of Enhanced Informational Graphics." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Signage and Wayfinding* 4, no. 1 (2020).

Rahman, Muhammad, and Vikas Mehta. "Signage Form and Character: A window to neighborhood visual identity" *Interdisciplinary Journal of Signage and Wayfinding* 4, no. 1 (2020).

Hong, Jennifer, and Mathew Isaac. "Location, Location, Location." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Signage and Wayfinding* 5, no. 1 (2021): 26-40.

Wu, Ruomeng, Xiaoqi Han, and Frank R. Kardes. "Special fonts: The Competing roles of difficulty and uniqueness in consumer inference." *Psychology & Marketing* 38, no. 1 (2021): 86-100.

In an academic context, these publications represent a direct and enduring contribution to our understanding of the roles of signage in society. Indirectly, and beyond this singular contribution to academic literatures, this early encouragement can influence an individual researcher's professional development and subsequently their entire career. First, the title of "Emerging Fellow" alone indicates a standing of prestige and recognizes an area of expertise. Second, AACSR provides a network for collaboration for those who may be new to the study of on-premise signage issues. Emerging Fellowships are awarded to small cohorts, one year apart, such that researchers in one academic discipline may find that they share interests with researchers in other disciplines. For example, a Fellow specializing



AACSRE Emerging Fellows

Top row: (L-R) Jennifer Hong, Aparna Sundar, Eric Ragan, Riley Krotz;
Bottom row: (L-R) Muhammad Rahman, Rita To, Ruomeng Wu, Adekunle Adebisi.

in urban planning may find concepts from a consumer behavior researcher that help explain the impacts of planned environments on shopping behaviors. This cross-pollination of ideas is a key benefit of the program. Of course, the ongoing research is presented to AACSRE meetings, departmental seminars, and professional conferences. Some research may have potential for commercial application, and AACSRE can facilitate relationships with non-academic audiences.

The productive scholarship from our Emerging Fellows enriches the AACSRE organization as well. University communications and external relations offices share news about the Fellowships and subsequent publications, raising awareness of AACSRE activities. Also, the simple fact that scholarship for new and promising topics keeps the subject matter fresh for AACSRE members. This helps AACSRE participate in the true cutting edge of on-premise signage research. From an administrative standpoint, awarding the Fellowships requires AACSRE to be flexible and work with a wide variety of university institutional structures to

maximize the funds that get into the hands of the researcher. The Emerging Fellows program is more than just something that AACSRE provides; AACSRE benefits in many ways from the program.

It is easy to anticipate some near-future growth for Emerging Fellowships to continue to support a range of activities that advance research and education for signage issues. The potential to expand support for stipends (to provide researchers the time as well as the materials), for international contributors, or for any other of a range of sponsorships and financial assistance to validate the research of more senior researchers.

AACSRE's primary mission is to engage independent thought leadership in an interdisciplinary space to enhance research and education regarding signage. The Emerging Fellows program prompts recipients to "do something exceptional." The Fellowships provide promising researchers with resources, decision making support, and professional networks so they can pursue goals that might

not otherwise be attainable. The crossdisciplinary nature of the research that is supported by these fellowships is exciting and is manifestly consistent with AACRE's mission to advance the science and technology of on-premise signage. Further, the Fellowships cultivate leadership in research and education that can have an influence on individual disciplines.

The Emerging Fellows program has already had an impact on conceptualizations of signage and has expanded definitions and understanding of our research domains. The program has almost immediately influenced teaching and training efforts. We express our gratitude to Jim and Sharon Weinel for their vision and to former AACRE President Dawn Jourdan and former AACRE Executive Director Patty Herbin for their efforts to foster this remarkable program.