

Jessica F. Sparks, Ph.D.

sparksj@auburn.edu | Auburn University | Tichenor Hall 106

EDUCATION

University of Florida | Gainesville, Fla.

Ph.D. in Mass Communications, 2020 – 2024

Dissertation: “Cues to Trust: An Experimental Analysis of Cues on News Media Trust”

Qualifying Exams: Defended April 2023

Defended: May 2024

Ball State University | Muncie, Ind.

M.A. in Digital Storytelling, 2008 – 2010

Thesis: “An Analysis of Community News Web Sites: A Comparison of Local News Web Sites to Indicate Industry Trends”

Project: *Alhur: The Free Ones* documentary about Iraqi refugees who are resettled in Indianapolis

Ball State University | Muncie, Ind.

B.S. in Journalism (News-Editorial) with Honors, 2003 – 2007

Minors: Political Science and Digital Media

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Graduate Research Assistant, University of Florida, Gainesville

August 2020 – August 2024

Advisor: T. Frank Waddell

- Initiated collaborative research with Frank LoMonte, J.D., Dr. Jay Hmielowski, Dr. Myiah Hutchens, Dr. T. Frank Waddell, Dr. Jieun Shin and Jane Bambauer, J.D.
- Produced original research for conference presentation and academic publication.
- Used research-specific software and applications including SPSS, R Studio, Qualtrics, and NVivo.
- Worked with the Institutional Review Board to ensure all research was ethically sound.

Assistant Professor of Journalism, Savannah State University, Savannah

August 2013 – June 2020

- Generated research on journalism pedagogy, online harassment, trust in journalism, and social media protesting.
- Conducted efforts to create more useful assessments of students for the purpose of analyzing learning achievement and creating departmental plans for growth and improvement.
- Assisted in the composition of ACEJMC self-study for reaccreditation using assessment data and research techniques.

Graduate Research Assistant, Ball State University, Muncie

May – December 2009

Advisor: Nancy Carlson

- Produced award-winning research based on survey of women in the television news industry.
- Produced web presence for documentary, “Movers and Stakers”

GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS

CJC Doctoral Dissertation Research Fund Award, College of Journalism and Communications, 2024
\$500 research grant

Michael Hoefges Research Fund Award, AEJMC Law & Policy Division, 2022
\$500 research grant

Presidential Mini-Grant Fund, Savannah State University, 2014
\$2,500 professional development grant

Back to the Newsroom Fellowship, International Center for Journalists, 2014

- Worked at the Wall Street Journal in New York City for 10 weeks to study data processing and visualization skills needed for student improvement.
- Provided feedback to the publication on ways they could improve diversity within the newsroom.
- Created a course in partnership with the Wall Street Journal to better prepare students for business reporting.

PUBLICATIONS

Academic Journal Articles

Sparks, J., Anderson, J., & Alarcon, A. (2024) Sounding the Alarm: Legal Implications of Evolving College Media Independence. *Communication Law and Policy*, 1-22. 10.1080/10811680.2024.2392103

Waddell, T. F., **Sparks, J.**, & Moss, C. (2024) Using Sex to Get the Story: Testing Reliability and Validity of a Scale Measuring a Sexist Stereotype of Female Reporters. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 68(3), 333-355. 10.1080/08838151.2024.2337878

Sparks, J. & Waddell, T.F. (2024). Easy to Read, Easy to Judge: Assessing readability as a heuristic for credibility in news. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 45(2), 229-246. 10.1177/07395329241242819

Sparks, J., LoMonte, F., & Rubin, A. (2023). How Covid-19 has affected college newspapers: A mixed-methods study. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 44(3), 251-275. 10.1177/07395329231170195

Sparks, J. & Hmielowski, J.D. (2023). At the Extremes: Assessing Readability, Grade Level, Sentiment, and Tone in US Media Outlets. *Journalism Studies*, 24(1), 24-44. 10.1080/1461670X.2022.2142646

Book Chapters

Smith, M. & **Sparks, J.** (2023). The Place Matters: A Case Study of How Short-Term Study Abroad Adds Measurable Change for Assessments in Pre-Existing Courses. In A.P. Stevenson & K. Abraham (Eds.), *The Half Yet Told: Study Abroad and HBCUs* (Chapter 8). The Forum for Education Abroad.

Trammel, J., Smith, M., Omunga, P., & **Sparks, J.** (2021). Understanding by Design (UbD) Framework to Explore Teaching and Learning Practices at an HBCU: An Interdisciplinary Approach. In J. Galle (Ed.), *Campus Conversations: Student Success Pedagogies in Practice* (Chapter 6). Rowman & Littlefield.

PRESENTATIONS

Sparks, J. & Hutchens, M. (2024, August). *PolitiTok: Testing the Credibility of Partisan Media Among TikTok Users* [paper session]. 107th Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Philadelphia, PA.

Shaughnessy, B., Pittet Gonzalez, L., DuBosar, E., **Sparks, J.**, & Hutchens, M. (2024, August). *Maybe They're Not So Bad: Political Discussion, Support for Partisan Compromise, and Affective Polarization* [paper session]. 107th Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Philadelphia, PA.

DuBosar, E., Romanova, E., Shaughnessy, B., Pittet Gonzalez, L., **Sparks, J.**, & Hutchens, M. (2024, August). *Watch the World Burn: Need for Chaos, Alternative/Hyper-partisan Media Use, and Believing Conspiracy Theories* [poster session]. 107th Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Philadelphia, PA.

Sparks, J. & Hutchens, M. (2024, June). *Leaking Trust: An examination of whether leaked documents from the U.S. Supreme Court impact the public's trust in the court and the media that covers it* [paper session]. 74th Annual International Communication Association Conference, Gold Coast, Australia.

Shin, J., Dagher, N., **Sparks, J.**, Wu, X., & Lewis, S. (2024, June). *Defining News Quality through Open-ended Survey Responses* [paper session]. 74th Annual International Communication Association Conference, Gold Coast, Australia.

Sparks, J., Rank, L., & Green, G. (2024, March 15). *Student Newsroom Independence: Threats, Trends, and Possible Solutions* [panel]. NYC24 College Media Association Annual Conference, New York City, New York.

Mitson, R. & **Sparks, J.** (2023, November). *What Female Leaders Read: A Thematic Analysis and Feminist Consideration of Women's Leadership Articles in Harvard Business Review* [paper session]. National Communication Association 109th Annual Convention, National Harbor, Maryland.

***Top Research Paper, First Place, Organizational Communication Division*

Sparks, J., Anderson, J., & Alarcon, A. (2023, August 7). *Sounding the Alarm: Legal Implications of Evolving College Media Independence* [paper session]. 106th Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, D.C.

Sparks, J., Louis, J.D., Mitson, R., & Shin, J. (2023, May 27). *Fake It 'Til You Make It: Linking Behaviors of Untrustworthy News Websites* [paper session]. 73rd Annual International Communication Association Conference, Toronto, Canada.

Bailey, R., Hmielowski, J., Hutchens, M., Ichiplani, P., & **Sparks, J.** (2023, May 27). *Using Primary Motivational Aspects of GMO Foods to Shift Attitudes* [paper session]. 73rd Annual International Communication Association Conference, Toronto, Canada.

Shao, C., Nah, S., Heffron, E., & **Sparks, J.** (2023, April 15). *Conceptualizing Trust: Causes, Components, and Consequences* [paper session]. Broadcast Education Association, Las Vegas, Nevada.
***Top Research Presentation, Open 2nd Place Paper*

Grover, R., **Sparks, J.**, Nguyen, M., & Johnson, B. (2022, August 2). *How a Little Goes a Long Way: Celebrating the Winning Research of the Inaugural Michael Hoefges Graduate Student Research Fund* [panelist]. 105th Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Detroit, Michigan.

Sparks, J. (2022, August 3). *News Audience Trust in Open Records: How Political Trust Moderates News Audience Perceptions of Credibility in Open Records used in Political Journalism* [paper session]. 105th Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Detroit, Michigan.

Sparks, J. & Waddell, T.F. (2022, August 5). *Is Readability a Heuristic? Assessing Readability Effects on Credibility Judgments in News* [paper session]. 105th Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Detroit, Michigan.
***Top Paper, First Place, Newspaper and Online News Division*

Sparks, J. (2022, May) *Man and Machine: Do Facebook Users Believe False Information Warnings More When They're Attributed to Algorithms than Fact-Checkers? Label Attributions* [paper session]. 72nd Annual International Communication Association Conference, Paris, France.

Sparks, J. & Hmielowski, J.D. (2022, May) *At the Extremes: Assessing Readability, Grade Level, Sentiment, and Tone in US Media Outlets* [poster session]. 72nd Annual International Communication Association Conference, Paris, France.

Sparks, J., LoMonte, F., & Rubin, A. (2022, March) *How COVID-19 has affected college newspapers: A mixed-methods study* [paper session]. AEJMC Midwinter Conference, Norman, Oklahoma.

LoMonte, F., **Sparks, J.**, & Rubin, A. (2021, October) *Surveying the College Media Financial Landscape* [Conference session]. Fall National College Media Convention, virtual, United States.

Waddell, T.F., **Sparks, J.**, & Moss, C. (2021, August). *Measuring Sexist Stereotypes about Female Reporters: Scale Development and Validity* [paper session]. Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, virtual, United States.

Sparks, J. and Birzer, D. (2019, February). *Twitter for Action: An Analysis of Twitter Use for Protest at a Southeast HBCU* [paper session]. Georgia Communication Association, Morrow, Ga.

Smith, M. and **Sparks, J.** (2019, February). *The Place Matters: How to encourage cultural interactions through study abroad* [paper session]. Georgia Association of International Educators, Savannah, Ga.

Gaede, F., Jorgensen, J., Rosener, A., Schultz, T., **Sparks, J.** and Starkel, A. (2017). *Using Storytelling to Share Research in a Time of Mistrust* [workshop presentation]. Triangle Scholarly Communications Institute, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Sparks, J. (2015). *Troll-Slaying: An analysis of the way two women handled comments and threats from people online* [paper session]. Biennial Women and Gender Studies Symposium, Augusta, Ga.

Kerman, J., Trent, M., Carlson, N. (2010). *The Mommy Factor: A survey of mothers employed in television newsrooms* [paper session]. Broadcast Education Association Conference, Las Vegas, Nev.
***Top Debut Research, First Place Paper*

Kerman, J. (2010). *The Alhurs* [poster session]. Multicultural Session, Ball State University, Muncie, Ind.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Auburn University | Auburn, Ala.

Tenure-Track Assistant Professor of Journalism

August 2024 - Present

Classes Taught: JRNL 3740: Editing and Design (in-person); JRNL 2210: Newswriting (in-person)

University of Florida | Gainesville, Fla.

Journalism Instructor of Record

August 2020 – December 2023

Classes Taught: MMC 4200: Law of Mass Communications (lecture), JOU 3346: Multimedia Reporter Lab (hybrid), JOU 3101: Reporting Lab (hybrid), JOU 4950: Applied Journalism (online-only/ teaching assistant capacity)

Savannah State University | Savannah, Ga.

Tenure-Track Assistant Professor of Journalism

August 2013 – July 2020

Classes Taught: COMM 4106: Practicum (hybrid), COMM 4201: Copy Editing (hybrid), COMM 4170: Magazine Writing (in-person and hybrid), COMM 3201: Feature Writing and Reporting (in-person and hybrid), COMM 3105: News Writing and Reporting (hybrid and online-only), COMM 2107: Women in the Media (lecture), COMM 3110: Multimedia Design and Production (in-person, hybrid and online-only), COMM 4810: Introduction to Communications Research (in-person and online-only), Special Topics: Multimedia Business Reporting (hybrid), COMM 2101: Writing for Multimedia (in-person, hybrid and online-only),

Study Abroad: Taught advanced writing courses focused on foreign correspondence in Panama in 2018 and 2019

Other Key Responsibilities: Tiger's Roar student media adviser, Society for Collegiate Journalists honors society adviser, academic adviser, journalism track coordinator, assessment committee member at the departmental level, curriculum committee chair at the departmental level, ethics committee member at the departmental level, departmental honors coordinator, director of 69th annual Southern Regional Press Institute

Ball State University | Muncie, Ind.

Instructor of Journalism

August 2010 – May 2011

Classes Taught: Newsgathering Techniques, Foundations of Journalism, New Writing for Broadcast, Web Writing

STUDENT MEDIA ADVISING

Tiger's Roar news outlet | Savannah State University

Faculty adviser

January 2014 – July 2020

Highlights: Joined Georgia Collegiate Press Association in August 2014, which facilitated \$9,000 in scholarships and one paid internship for students; Helped arrange for student journalists to interview distinguished speakers at the university; Guided coverage of breaking news on campus including three fatal shootings and a fire; Facilitated contest entries for the Georgia Collegiate Press Association, Southern Regional Press Institute, Society for Collegiate Journalists, and Hearst Journalism Awards.

SERVICE TO COMMUNITY

70th Annual Southern Regional Press Institute | Savannah, Ga.

Discussion Moderator and Technical Director, “Print and the Pandemic: The Role of Print in the Increasing Virtual Age”, February 2021

69th Annual Southern Regional Press Institute | Savannah, Ga.

Conference Director: led committee to select theme of conference, managed all conference details, panels, and presentations, contacted speakers and arranged for compensation as necessary, served as main contact for entire conference and media contest, introduced mobile application for conference, August 2019- July 2020

Online News Association Annual Conference | Washington, D.C.

Conference Volunteer, October 2017

Friends of Bluffton Dog Parks | Bluffton, S.C.

Media Consultant: Created full campaign containing logo creation, information sessions with community, and social media content including original video vignettes, May 2017 – August 2017

Geekend Savannah | Savannah, Ga.

Conference Volunteer, November 2014

Y-Press | Indianapolis, Ind.

Volunteer coordinator: Worked with middle school and high school students interested in producing news for the Indianapolis Star; Helped coordinate training session for new members; Mentored youth in research methods, interviewing techniques, and other journalism skills, October 2010 – March 2011

CERTIFICATIONS AND TRAININGS

Passport to Great Teaching: TA Edition

Certificate: February 2021

Online training for best practices in pedagogy for teaching assistants
University of Florida

Passport to Great Teaching: Online Teaching

Certificate: February 2021

Online training for best practices in online pedagogy

University of Florida

Adobe Education Exchange

Certificate: November 2019

Mobile App Design Course Completion

Online training from Adobe on Adobe XD mobile application prototyping tool.

Online Teaching

Certificate: May 2019

Online training based on Quality Matters through Savannah State University

Virtual Teacher Program Specialization

Certificate Received: February 2016

Online courses from University of California, Irvine

Through Coursera

COMMITTEE WORK

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

Law and Policy Division, Social Media, August 2024 - Present

Law and Policy Division, Graduate Student Liaison, August 2022 – July 2024

Graduate Student Commission, Division Liaison, August 2021 – August 2023

College Media Association

CMA Education/Certification Committee, December 2021 – December 2022

CMA Media Law and Ethics Committee, December 2021 – December 2022

Savannah State University

Faculty Senate Committee for Online Teaching and Learning, August 2018 – July 2020

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences Curriculum Committee, Fall 2019 – July 2020

Honors Program Advisory Council, Fall 2019 – March 2020

Southern Regional Press Institute Planning Committee, Fall 2014 – July 2020; Director, Fall 2019 – June 2020

Department of Journalism and Mass Communications Assessment Committee, Fall 2016 – July 2020

Department of Journalism and Mass Communications Curriculum Committee, Fall 2016 – July 2020; Chair, Spring 2019 – July 2020

Department of Journalism and Mass Communications Ethics Committee, Fall 2018 – Spring 2019

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences E-Learning Committee, Fall 2015 – Spring 2016

University Plagiarism Task Force, Fall 2015

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (August 2020 – Present)

International Communication Association (November 2021 – Present)

National Communication Association (September 2023 – September 2024)

Broadcast Education Association (January 2023 – Present, February 2011 – February 2012)

College Media Association (February 2014 – December 2022, February 2024 - Present)

Society of Professional Journalists, professional member (February 2015 – Present)

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM WORK

The Washington Post, Freelance Reporter, April 2017 – June 2020

Assisted with research for national sports story; Covered breaking news from Southeast region

Monthly Media, Freelance Reporter, August 2018 – May 2020

Reported news and features for monthly Bluffton Monthly and Hilton Head Monthly

Wall Street Journal, “Back to the Newsroom” Fellow, New York, June 2015 – August 2015

Program sponsored by the Knight Foundation through the International Center for Journalists; Worked primarily with “Numbers” blog in preparing data-based posts with context and visuals; Studied newsroom needs for use in classroom; Created connections between Savannah State University and Wall Street Journal for student opportunities; Created special topics course in partnership with the Wall Street Journal.

Various Publications, Freelance Reporter, May 2011 – January 2012, September 2012 – June 2015

Reported on variety of subjects for Indianapolis Monthly magazine, The Island Packet/Beaufort Gazette and Hilton Head Monthly magazine.

Bluffton Today, Online Editor, January 2012 – September 2012

Maintained content on blufftontoday.com; Coordinated a corps of citizen journalists who take pictures and write blogs; Projected site growth and generated ideas to promote site; Assisted in production of print publication, as needed; Created email marketing campaigns for advertising clients for the company; Covered breaking news and education beat; Photographed community events for use on website and in print

AnnArbor.com, Graduate Intern/ Consultant, Ann Arbor, Mich., July 2009 – August 2009

Assisted in launch of newly created site after The Ann Arbor News shuttered; Reported and wrote several stories for site launch; Helped record and edit video pieces for stories; Trained reporters on equipment

CNN.com, Intern, Atlanta, November 2008

Assisted with iReport vetting during presidential election; Helped produce livestream broadcast for website

The Herald Bulletin, Politics Reporter, Anderson, Ind., May 2007 – August 2008

Covered city, county, state and national politics, as well as general assignments; Coordinated coverage for two elections; Reported for news, features and monthly magazine

HONORS AND AWARDS

Top Research Presentations, Open 2nd Place Paper, Broadcast Education Association, 2023.

Top Paper, First Place, Newspaper and Online News Division, AEJMC, 2022.

Michael Hoefges Research Fund Award, AEJMC Law & Policy Division, 2022, \$500 research grant
Grinter Fellowship Award, University of Florida, 2020 – 2022, \$2,000 a year
Department Chair's Award, SSU Department of Journalism and Mass Communications, 2019
Gold Circle for news writing, Columbia Scholastic Press Association, 2008
Kappa Tau Alpha inductee, 2007
Gold Award and Lifetime Membership, Girl Scouts of America, 2004

OTHER SKILLS

Languages

- Native English speaker
- Intermediate Spanish
- Beginner French
- Beginner Hebrew

Software and Computer Applications

- Adobe Acrobat, Audition, Illustrator, Photoshop, InDesign, Premiere, and InCopy
- Microsoft SPSS, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Project, Outlook, Teams
- R Studio
- Final Cut Pro
- NewsEdit
- Blackboard, Desire2Learn, Canvas
- LiveText, CampusLabs, Anthology, EAB Navigate
- Qualtrics