

# The Alabama Communicator

Newsletter of The Alabama Communication Association

Summer 2024

## Walker To Receive 2024 Saunders Service Award

By **George L. Daniels**  
ACA Immediate Past President

When the 2024 ACA Top Graduate paper award is presented, Jefferson Walker will be able to take part of the credit. While he didn't work with the doctoral student from University of Southern Mississippi who is this year's winner, Walker as a former faculty member at the school in Hattiesburg started encouraging USM students to submit their work to the ACA Convention.

Now his promotion of and personal commitment to growing the Alabama Communication Association for so many years is paying off as more than 20 presenters at this year's convention are from out-of-state.

Walker's hard work and dedication are two of the reasons he's the 2024 recipient of the John H. Saunders Service Award, which will be presented during the Presidential Luncheon at this year's convention at the University of North Alabama.

"It's nice to get an award for something I would do regardless," said Walker, upon learning that he is this year's recipient. "To receive this award is a big deal for me."

An assistant professor at University of Montevallo, Dr. Walker is beginning his final year as executive director of the association, an organization in which he's now held every elected position.

Walker was elected first as secretary while he was a Ph.D. student at The Univer-

sity of Alabama. Then, he continued up the ACA leadership ladder serving while teaching out of state on the faculty not only at Southern Miss, where he taught for one year, but also at Louisiana Tech.

He vividly recalls attending his first ACA Convention at the University of South Alabama in 2011. He's been a part of every ACA convention since then. Whether it's serving as a respondent during a research session or helping set up the chairs for the luncheon, pitching in where needed is just second nature for Walker.

"I love the ACA and I don't even think about it," he said.

In recommending him for the award, one of his colleagues cited his stellar service record during his five years at University of Montevallo where, among other roles, he's served as an undergraduate student advisor since 2022.

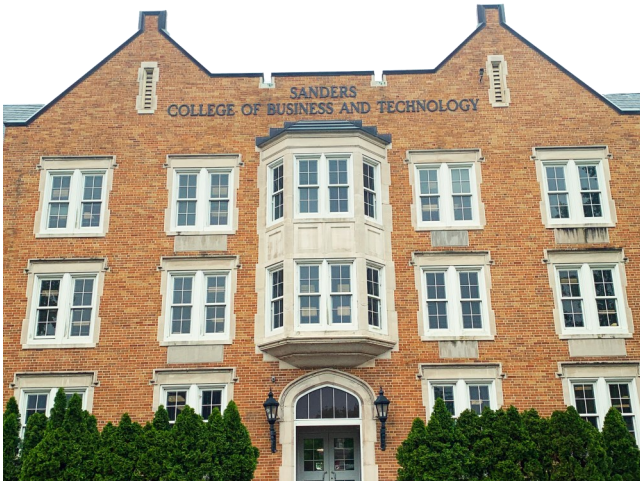
"He creates a supportive environment where his students, advisees, and mentees can learn the essential professional skills they need to function on their own after they graduate," the University of Montevallo faculty member said.

Walker's commitment to his students is certainly one of the reasons he was named director of the Honors Program at University of Montevallo. In the upcoming year, he will train his successor, the ACA Executive Director-Elect who will be chosen at the convention in Florence.



In addition to serving as ACA Executive Director, Jefferson Walker in 2023 became director of the Honors Program at The University of Montevallo where he's an assistant professor in the Department of Communication.

## UNA Ready To Host Its First ACA Convention



Keller Hall at The University of North Alabama is home to the Sanders College of Business and Technology.

For the time in its 14-year history, the Alabama Communication Association will be meeting in Florence, Alabama on the campus of the University of North Alabama. The student-centered regional institution has more than 12,000 students enrolled.

Faculty and students from both UNA's Department of Communication and Sanders College of Business and Technology participate in ACA.

"We are extremely excited to host this year's Alabama Communication Association Convention and its members," said Dr. Pat Sanders, chair of the Department of Communication.

ACA Vice President-Elect Dr. Lindsey Sherrill, who is a faculty member in the Sanders College of Business and Technology, will be part of the team welcoming ACA to campus.

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# THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear ACA Colleagues,

Welcome to the **Convention Edition** of *The Alabama Communicator*!

We're thrilled to bring you a comprehensive outline of the activities for this year's highly anticipated conference. You'll also find the official announcement of our prestigious award winners, celebrating exceptional achievements in teaching with the Outstanding Teaching Award and honoring exemplary service with the John H. Saunders Service Award.

We eagerly look forward to a day packed with engaging discussions, thought-provoking scholarship, and valuable networking opportunities. It's a wonderful chance to reconnect with

colleagues from across the state, share insights, and foster professional growth. Make sure to finalize your plans to join us at the University of North Alabama for what promises to be an enriching experience.

As my presidential term ends with this year's convention, I am confident the association will continue flourishing, welcoming fresh ideas and new faces to keep ACA vibrant and forward-thinking. To the membership, carry on the excellent work and ensure that the Alabama Communication Association continues to shine brightly.



**Dr. Niya Pickett Miller**

Looking ahead, ACA is excited about the Southern States Communication Association's upcoming convention in Birmingham in 2026. Now and then, ACA is poised to shine bright as a state association. Cheers to making the next couple of years the best yet!

## SAVE THE DATE

Mark your calendars for **July 26, 2025** for the 15th Annual ACA Convention to be hosted by The University of Alabama in Huntsville.



## CONVENTION SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

7:30– 11 a.m.	Registration
8:00– 8:40 a.m.	ACA Business Meeting* and Continental Breakfast *Elections for ACA Vice President-Elect and ACA Executive Director-Elect
8:50-10:00 a.m.	Block Three– (including Great Ideas for Teaching session)
10:10-11:20 a.m.	Block Four
11:30-1:00 p.m.	Conference Keynote Address <b>Amy Alridge Sanford, Middle Tennessee State University</b>
	Luncheon and Award Presentations (ACA Teaching Award and John H. Saunders Service Award)
1:10-2:20 p.m.	Block Six
2:20-2:30 p.m.	Mid-afternoon Cookie Break
2:30-3:40 p.m.	Block Eight
3:50–5:00 p.m.	Alabama Communication Association Top Papers Session



**Sanford**



### *Alabama Communication Association 2023-2024 Executive Board*

- President - Niya Pickett Miller, Samford University
- Vice President- Tiffany R. Wang, University of Montevallo
- Vice President-Elect- Lindsey Sherrill, University of North Alabama
- Secretary - Joseph Honeycutt, University of Alabama
- Immediate Past President– George L. Daniels, University of Alabama
- Executive Director- Jeff Walker, University of Montevallo

## 2024 ACA TOP PAPER WINNERS

# UAH, Southern Miss students, 4-Person Faculty Team Take Top Honors For Research Papers

A four-person research team from four institutions will be recognized with the Top Faculty Paper award at the 14th Annual Alabama Communication Association Convention.

Leading the team is J. Patrick McGrail from Jacksonville State University, who collaborated with Ewa McGrail from Georgia State, Daniel Rieger from Broward College and Alicja Rieger from Valdosta State University.

The winning paper is entitled "AI-Generated Omniprise: An Ethical Framework for Educational Contexts"

"AI is a double-edged sword, said Ewa McGrail. "We need to figure out meaningful and learner-enhancing, rather than learner-replacing ways to use it."

While McGrail is a professor of Language and Literacy Education at Georgia State, Daniel Rieger is professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Broward College in Southeast Florida.

"I am grateful to have the opportunity to contribute to an interdisciplinary discussion concerning the ethics of artificial intelligence usage, especially in higher education, said Daniel Rieger.

Two students from the University of Alabama in Huntsville will receive the Bradley-Bryant Top Undergraduate Student Paper Award.

Alison Gongre wrote a paper entitled "The Mythical Power of Popular Culture on Protest Visuals."

Halle Huber wrote a rhetorical critique on a topic with special meaning to her.



J. Patrick McGrail



Ewa McGrail



Daniel Rieger



Alicja Rieger

"The topic of mental health, found within my paper *"Crazy Ex-Girlfriend and Antidepressants Rhetorical Critique"* is a topic dear to my heart, said Huber, who is a senior communication arts major at UAH. "As someone who has struggled with mental health, I am honored that I have the opportunity to use this platform to promote mental health advocacy for all."

The Bradley-Bryant Award is named for two longtime communication scholars in our state, Dr. Bert Bradley, who served as head of the Department of Speech Communication at Auburn University and Dr. Jennings Bryant, Ronald Reagan Chair of



Huber



Gongre

## ON THIS YEAR'S PROGRAM

- 30 # Papers to be presented
- 17 # Sessions on the program
- 3 # Experiential Projects and Short Films to be shared
- 12 # Great Ideas for Teaching to be shared
- 12 # Alabama colleges, universities participating
- 21 # Out-of-State Presenters

Broadcasting and founder of the Institute for Communication Research at The University of Alabama.

The 2024 Top Graduate Student Paper Award goes to Richard Cobb, a first-year Ph.D. student in the School of Media and Communication at the University of Southern Mississippi.

The ACA Convention will be a trip back to his old stomping ground. After receiving his undergraduate degree from UNA and his master's degree from Mississippi State University, Cobb spent 30 years working in broadcast radio.

He continues to host the "B-95 Breakfast Club" on WBBN in Laurel, Miss. His most recent research is on generative AI's current and potential effects on radio communication.

The winner of the Top Graduate Student Paper Award receives complimentary registration for the ACA Convention and 2025 Southern States Communication Association that will be held in Norfolk, Virginia.



Cobb

## Aswad Chosen As ACA's Outstanding Teacher



Noor Ghazal Aswad teaches at University of Alabama.

By **George L. Daniels**  
ACA Immediate Past President

Noor Ghazal Aswad, an assistant professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Alabama, is the 2024 winner of the Alabama Communication Association's Award for Outstanding Teaching. The award recognizes those who demonstrate excellence in teaching communication in the state.

Her nominator noted "Dr. Aswad has made significant contributions to our department and college through her expertise in rhetoric and political communication. Her ability to teach this foundational course effectively is evident in her success stories, such as the undergraduate student who received a Top Student Paper Award at the 93rd Annual Convention for Southern States Communication Association based on a paper from her COM 310 seminar."

In supporting her nomination for the award, one of her former students wrote "Dr. Aswad is an amazing professor that I have thoroughly enjoyed learning from. The way she sets up her classes not only is a fun environment of learning, but a comfortable one."

Aswad will receive the ACA Award for Outstanding Teaching during the Presidential Luncheon at this year's ACA Convention at The University of North Alabama.

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Alabama Communication Association



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