



Rice Visual Communication Symposium 2019

March 1-2, 2019 | Moody Center for the Arts



The Big Picture

By every metric, the inaugural Rice Visual Communication Symposium (VCS) was a tremendous success. We hoped for an audience of 50—over 120 academics and professionals attended. We hoped to appeal to an interdisciplinary crowd—our registrants hailed from 48 different disciplines (including everything from electrical engineering to art history). We hoped that our audience would leave VCS inspired—we heard from speakers, attendees, and administrators alike that VCS was a truly engaging experience.

2.4x

More attendees than our target audience size

48

Different areas of study represented

97%

Agreed that VCS 2019 was worth attending

90%

Opted to join the VCS mailing list



“ VCS was honestly so magical! the booklet was stunning and very fun and helpful, food was great, the space was perfect. ”





As the Program in Writing & Communication's first Instructor of Visual Communication & Design, I crafted the VCS 2019 program to attract a broad audience with the hope of starting a visualization-focused community at Rice, and I can confidently say that it delivered. In addition to extremely positive feedback overall, many attendees left eager to be involved in future iterations of VCS and 90% of survey respondents opted into the VCS mailing list.

The next sections of this summary will discuss what attendees felt they gained from VCS, which aspects they considered most favorably, recommendations for future events, and a detailed overview of our audience and costs. Regardless of the details, however, the excitement surrounding VCS 2019 has confirmed that our community is eager to learn about visualization, especially as it applies to their own work.



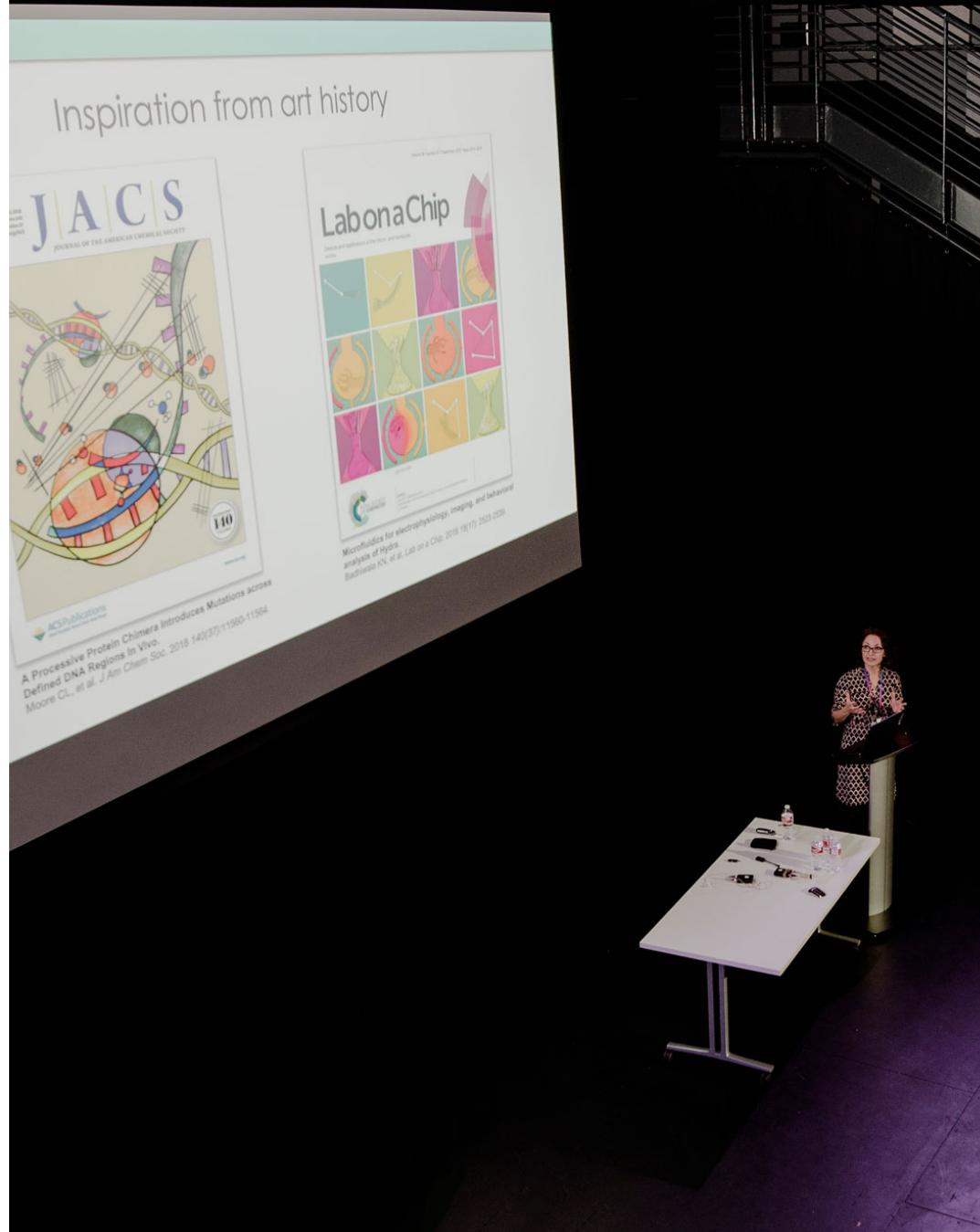
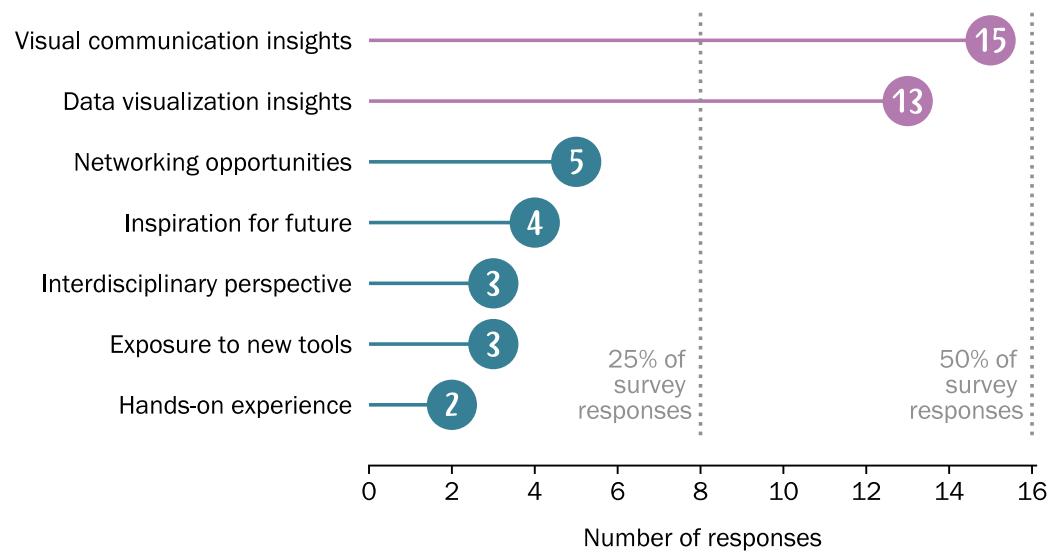
“ [VCS] was the **best-run,
most interesting, conference
I've been to in a long while. ”**

Alyssa Goodman
VCS 2019 keynote

Impact of VCS 2019

We were delighted to find that attendees valued VCS because they learned something. When asked about what they gained from attending the symposium, almost 50% of survey respondents said they left with insight about visual communication and/or data visualization. Lisa Spiro, Executive Director of Digital Scholarship Services at Rice University, shared, “I learned so much [at VCS] – not only about visual communication, but also about astronomy, R, and how designers think.”

What do you think you gained by attending VCS 2019?





“ [VCS] provided me with quite a bit of welcome networking, as well as creative solutions.. **”**

Attendees also experienced a sense of community at VCS. In the post-event survey, 5 responses expressed that VCS provided an outstanding environment to meet new people. One attendee called VCS 2019 a “PHENOMENAL networking opportunity, cutting across many departments.” Another attendee added, “It was great to have a chance to interact with the speakers. Such opportunities are lacking in the typical conferences that I attend.”

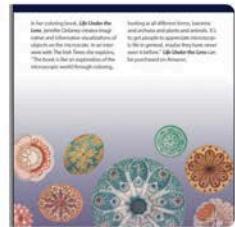
In addition to networking opportunities, attendees enjoyed the “lobby with food and trinkets that stimulated connections and conversations.” Overall, they seemed to respond positively to the coloring pages in the VCS program booklet—all 120 boxes of branded colored pencils, an optional giveaway displayed on the expo table, were picked up by attendees.



Rice VCS
@VCSRice

Follow

We are just so excited to feature the work of @jvcodelaney in our program. If you colored your daphnia pulex, share it with #VCS2019 to show it off!



9:16 AM - 1 Mar 2019



Jennifer Delaney 🎨🚀
@jvcodelaney

Follow

Enjoy #VCS2019 and thanks for including my colouring page in your program. #sciart #scicomm @IAmSciArt @iamscicomm



10:46 AM - 1 Mar 2019

6 Retweets 9 Likes

Follow 6 9



Pamela Luna, PhD
@p_luna

Follow

I'm loving the program for @VCSRice! Having fun coloring with @kshoemaker_stat 😊



9:05 AM - 1 Mar 2019

2 Retweets 6 Likes

Follow 2 6



Alexandra
@ManiacalStar

Follow

ugh this is so cool! sad to be missing it



11:13 AM - 1 Mar 2019

1 Retweet 2 Likes

Follow 1 2



Alyssa A. Goodman @AlyssaAGoodman Follow

At @VCSRice, @KarenKcheng is illuminating options for visual abstracts (and she just called herself a “@felicefrankel fan girl”. Me too—check out Felice’s fantastic new book “Picturing Science and Engineering” (from @mitpress) amazon.com/dp/0262038552 / ...

9:16 AM - 1 Mar 2019 from Houston, TX

1 Retweet 3 Likes

felice frankel @felicefrankel - Mar 2 Replying to @AlyssaAGoodman @VCSRice and 2 others wow – this is wonderful to hear. Thank you!

Alyssa A. Goodman @AlyssaAGoodman Follow

Such AMAZING social justice via #visualization from @laurakurgan, as shown @VCSRice Conflict Urbanism: Aleppo. More people need to work this way—showing truth so plainly. @EdwardTufte — seen this? c4sr.columbia.edu/conflict-urban ...

10:43 AM - 2 Mar 2019

1 Retweet 5 Likes

Alyssa A. Goodman @AlyssaAGoodman - Mar 2 Wish you could be @VCSRice to see this!



C. Fred Higgs III @higgsf Follow

The @RiceUniversity Visual Communications Symposium 2019 (@VCSRice) is going on now & tomorrow. My @thePFTL students are there calling it the 'Data Viz conf.' so go @RiceEngineering and @RiceScience folks, if you want to unlock more brain dimensions and better view your data.

10:34 AM - 1 Mar 2019

2 Retweets 4 Likes

C. Fred Higgs III @higgsf Follow

Great talks at the @RiceUniversity @VCSRice Saturday. @RiceScience Professor @KirstenSiebach made me wish my daughters were there to see a geologist's passion about #Mars , extreme geology, and seeing the same #Rover on #Earth traveling to then become the same one on Mars.



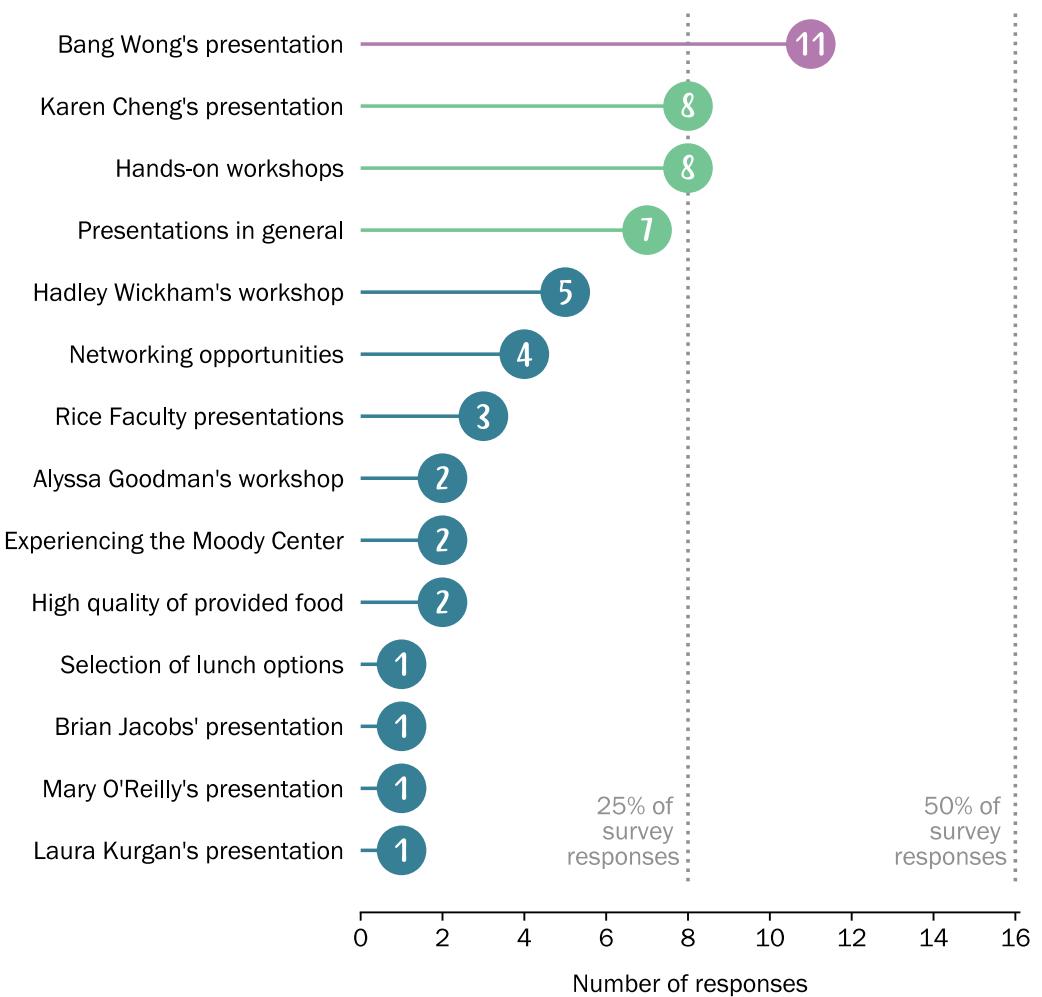
We were particularly enthused to see that several attendees took what they learned at VCS and applied it to their own projects. One attendee shared, “I really enjoyed the lecture with Bang Wong and the workshop with Hadley Wickham. I've already used ggplot2 with my own data to generate histograms and a bar chart with standard error intervals plotted over it!” VCS also inspired an attendee to arrange a data visualization workshop for their own community—We know because she reached out to the VCS 2019 chair for speaker recommendations.

Additionally, because the program was multidisciplinary, even our expert speakers were introduced to new ideas. Our keynote speaker, Alyssa Goodman, was especially enthusiastic. Excitingly, the VCS program also impressed C. Fred Higgs III, The Rice University Vice Provost of Academic Affairs, who introduced speakers in our Saturday afternoon session.

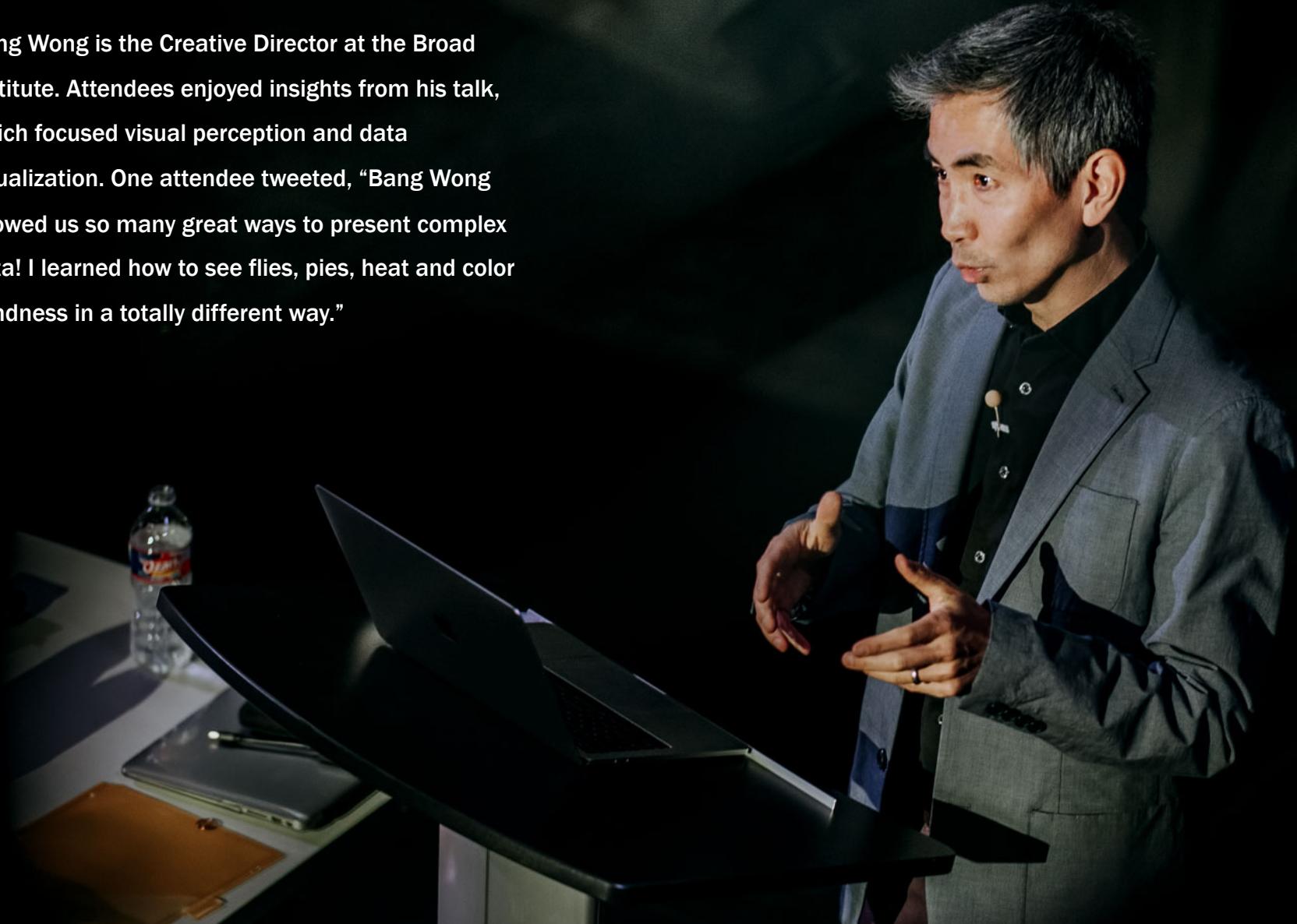
Celebrated Moments

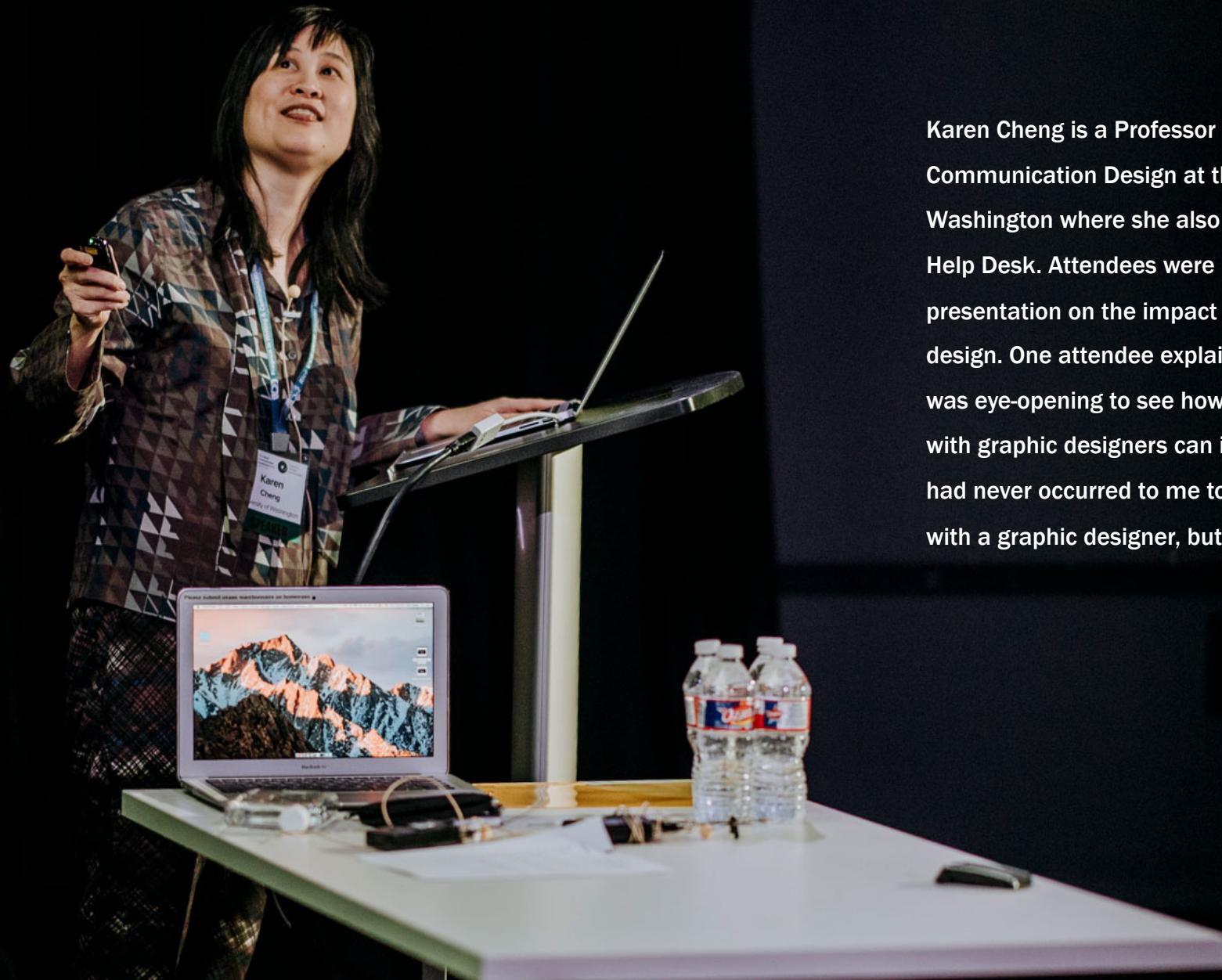
To examine why attendees responded so positively to VCS, we inquired about the aspects that they found most useful. Though every speaker was referenced at least once, Bang Wong and Karen Cheng's presentations appeared most frequently in survey answers.

What aspects or sessions of VCS 2019 did you find most useful?



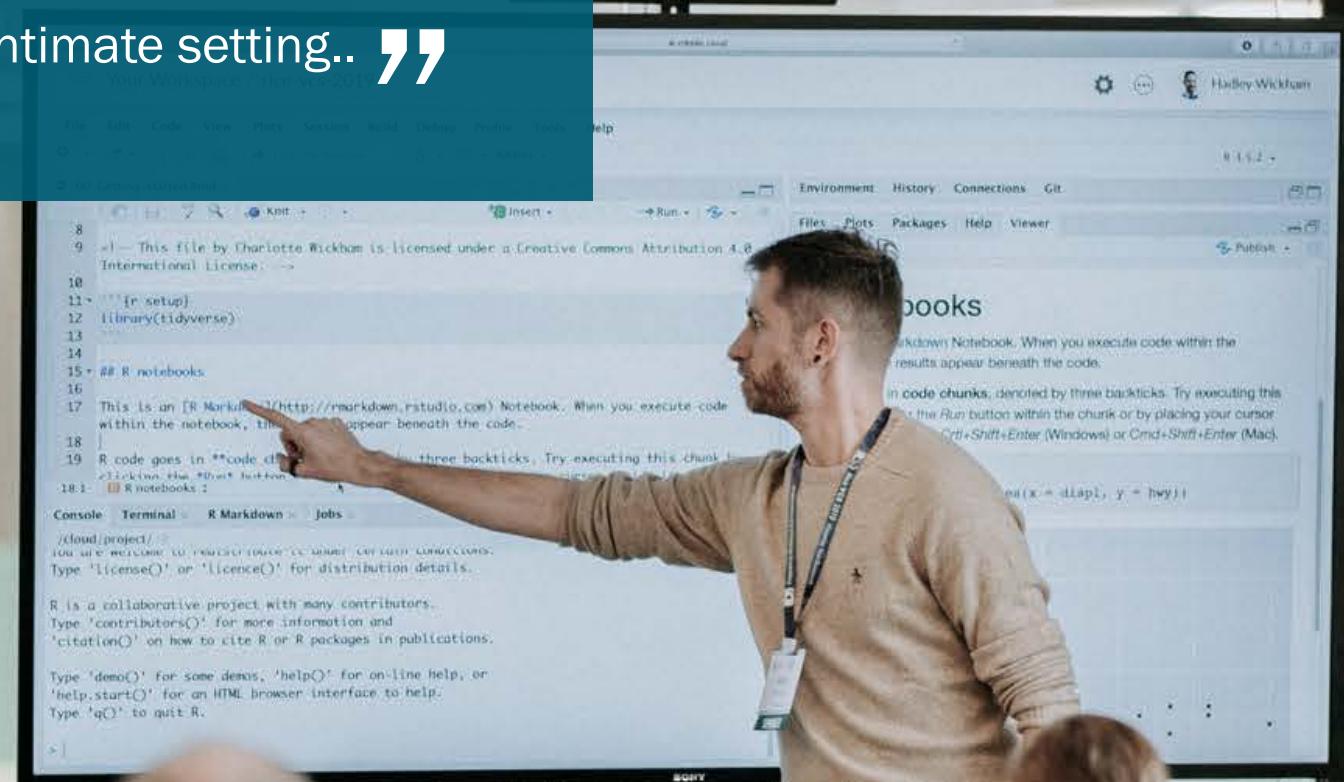
Bang Wong is the Creative Director at the Broad Institute. Attendees enjoyed insights from his talk, which focused visual perception and data visualization. One attendee tweeted, "Bang Wong showed us so many great ways to present complex data! I learned how to see flies, pies, heat and color blindness in a totally different way."





Karen Cheng is a Professor of Visual Communication Design at the University of Washington where she also directs the Design Help Desk. Attendees were intrigued by her presentation on the impact of graphical abstract design. One attendee explained, “As a scientist, it was eye-opening to see how much collaborating with graphic designers can improve our work! It had never occurred to me to workshop my figures with a graphic designer, but now I certainly will.”

“ Hadley Wickham is my **personal hero**
so it was **indescribable** to learn from
him in such an intimate setting.. ”





The post-event survey also confirmed that Hadley Wickham's workshop attracted a large audience to VCS. Over 60 people registered for his workshop, Visualization using `ggplot2`, which was deemed the most useful aspect of VCS in 5 survey responses. Amusingly, some attendees were quite ardent in their fandom. One attendee exclaimed, “Hadley Wickham is my personal hero so it was indescribable to learn from him in such an intimate setting. He's the reason I registered for the symposium, and I'm so glad I did because I learned so much!”



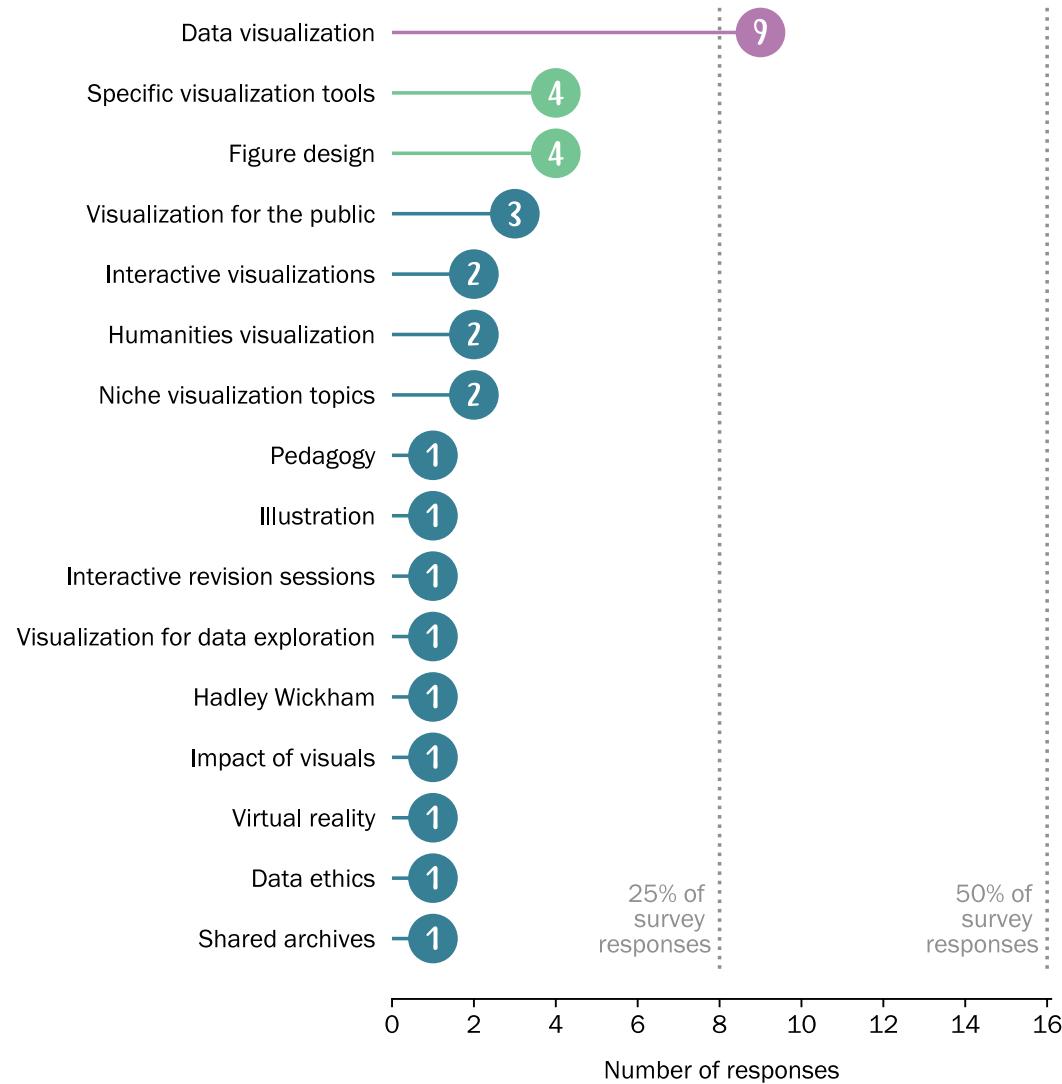
Beyond these specific aspects, attendees were impressed with the hands-on workshops in general and the quality and diversity of the presentations. One attendee commented, “I thought that the workshops were the most helpful, as they gave me an opportunity to experiment with visualization in a supportive context.” Another stated that, “The sessions were most useful to me collectively – just seeing the range of possibilities was the best part.”

Future themes

Overall, VCS 2019 attendees were very enthusiastic about the prospect of VCS 2021. One attendee, Camden Kirkland, Lead Instructor at Trilogy Education Services, shared, “I look forward to future events in the PWC program, and I hope that you all will host VCS as a regular event. I currently teach data analytics in continuing studies and I'd love to encourage more students to come next time in order for them to see better ways to communicate the results of their data explorations.”

Data visualization insight was the second most popular takeaway from VCS 2019 and, perhaps unsurprisingly, data visualization was also the most frequently suggested future theme. These results make a compelling argument that VCS 2021 should focus specifically on data visualization. The program could feature experts from a range of backgrounds such as data journalism, visualization research, data art and activism, and presentation design.

What topic would you suggest for VCS 2021?

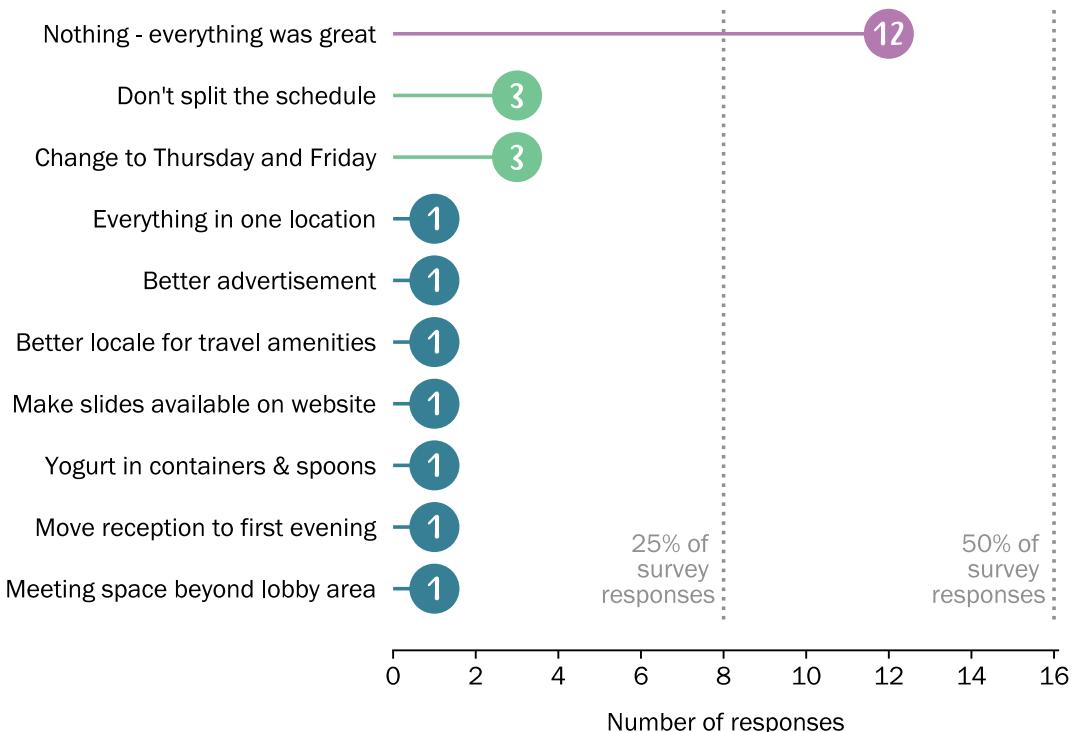


Potential Improvements

Our audience was as impressed by the organizational side of VCS as they were with the program. In fact, when attendees were surveyed about logistical improvements for future events, 37% of responses explicitly stated that no aspects came up short.

The most frequently suggested changes focused on the schedule. Attendees and speakers both recommended changing the days of the week from Friday and Saturday to Thursday and Friday. Other survey responses suggested changing the format of the symposium on Friday afternoon—Multiple attendees were disappointed that they had to pick 1 of 3 simultaneous sessions and would have preferred to attend the whole program.

Are there logistical details we can improve for future events?



Our audience

Not including speakers or members of the organizing committee, 109 attendees were recorded in the VCS on-site registration system. 75% of our attendees belong to the Rice community and 10% of our attendees were Baylor College of Medicine affiliates. Excitingly, VCS also attracted attendees from 11 other institutions and 6 attendees from outside of Houston. To increase the size of the VCS network in the future, we should prioritize advertising VCS earlier to an even wider audience.

Though our reach was limited in some ways, we were pleased to find that VCS attracted a truly interdisciplinary audience. Participants from 48 different areas of study registered for VCS and no single discipline accounted for more than 10% of registrations (detailed table included on the next page). The fields of Applied, Engineering, and Natural Sciences encompassed the largest number of participants with the most popular disciplines being Medicine, Chemistry, and Communication.

81

Attendees from
Rice University

28

Attendees from
other institutions

103

Attendees from the
Houston area

6

Attendees from
outside of Houston

Number of attendees from each institution at VCS 2019

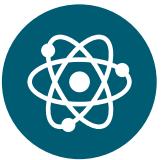
Rice University	81	S&P Global Platts	1
Baylor College of Medicine	11	Texas Christian University	1
University of Houston	3	Trilogy Education Services	1
UT Austin	3	University of Houston-Clear Lake	1
UT Health Science Center	2	Prairie View A&M	1
Texas Community	2	UT MD Anderson Cancer Center	1
Watershed Partners		Lamar University	1

Disciplines of VCS 2019 registrants



Applied Sciences

Medicine	8
Communication	8
Data science	6
Administration	4
Journalism	3
Library science	3
Geographic information science	3
Neuroscience	2
Public relations	2
Education	2
Public policy	2
Business	2
Political science	1
International affairs	1
Accounting	1
Nutrition	1
Total	49



Natural Sciences

Chemistry	8
Biophysics	7
Biochemistry	7
Biology	6
Synthetic biology	4
Space science	3
Earth science	3
Ecology	3
Physics	2
Cell biology	2
Applied physics	1
Total	42



Engineering Sciences

Chemical engineering	7
Electrical engineering	4
Bioengineering	4
Materials engineering	4
Engineering (general)	3
Petroleum engineering	2
Mechanical engineering	2
Total	26



Humanities

Visual arts	4
Architecture	4
History	3
Linguistics	3
Literature	2
Art history	2
Anthropology	2
Total	20



Social Sciences

Economics	8
Psychology	7
Sociology	7
Total	14



Formal Sciences

Statistics	7
Computer science	3
Mathematics	2
Information technology	1
Total	13

Cost of Hosting VCS

77% of the VCS 2019 budget was provided by the Program in Writing & Communication; The remainder was obtained from the Office of Research (16%), the GradStarter program (5%), and registration fees (2%).

Speaker honoraria and the venue rental fee were the largest contributions to the total cost of VCS. Though we feel that speaker honoraria contributed to the high level of speaker engagement at VCS 2019, we may need to consider reducing the amount for future events. Other cost cutting options include changing venues, shortening the program (reduced honoraria and travel cost), and reimagining the reception.

Largest costs for VCS included: speaker honoraria and the venue rental fee

