

CURRICULUM VITAE

JUSTIN F. WILLETT, PH.D., M.H.A.

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SUMMARY

Justin F. Willett, Ph.D., M.H.A., is Research Director for the Novak Leadership Institute. His research examines how leadership communication shapes workplace culture and enhances employee engagement and well-being. He also investigates narrative persuasion mechanisms in health communication, exploring how storytelling influences health attitudes and behaviors. Willett teaches at the undergraduate and graduate levels, while mentoring students in their academic and professional development.

RESEARCH

Expertise

Leadership Communication

- Workplace culture and respectful work environments
- Employee engagement and well-being
- Communicative support for flexible work arrangements

Health Communication

- Narrative persuasion and healthcare storytelling
- Media coverage of public health issues
- Strategic health messaging

[Google Scholar](#)

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

Willett, J. F., LaGree, D., Warner, B. R., Houston, J. B., & Duffy, M. (2024). Flourishing with flexibility: Leader communicative support of flexible work arrangements (FWA) enhances employee engagement and well-being. *International Journal of Business Communication*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23294884241291531>

Willett, J. F., Rodgers S., Stemmle, J. (2024). Seeking the public health angle in Missouri newspaper coverage of the opioid crisis. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 45(3), 311-331. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07395329241255158>

Zhang, W., Tsou, T. H., Rodgers, S., & **Willett, J. F.** (2024). Comparing Personalization Strategies in Social Network Advertising: The Role of Impression Motivation in Persuasion Outcomes. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 24(3), 247–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2024.2337057>

Willett, J. F., LaGree, D., Shin, H., Houston, J. B., & Duffy, M. (2023). The role of leader communication in fostering respectful workplace culture and increasing employee engagement and well-being. *International Journal of Business Communication*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23294884231195614>

Refereed Conference Papers

Willett, J. F. (2024, August 8-11). *The role of patient stories in health care brand storytelling* [Poster session]. Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication 2024 Conference, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States.

Willett, J. F., LaGree, D., Warner B. R., Houston, J. B., & Duffy, M. (2024, June 20-25). *Flourishing with flexibility: Leader communicative support of flexible work arrangements (FWA) enhances employee engagement and well-being* [High-density session]. International Communication Association 2024 Conference, Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia.

Willett, J. F., Rodgers S., Stemmle, J. (2023, August 7-10). *Seeking the public health angle in Missouri newspaper coverage of the opioid crisis* [Poster session]. Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication 2023 Conference, Washington, D.C., United States.

Willett, J. F., LaGree, D., Houston, J. B., Shin, H., & Duffy, M. (2023, May 25-29). *The role of leader communication in fostering respectful workplace culture and increasing employee engagement and well-being* [Paper presentation]. International Communication Association 2023 Conference, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

In The Media

Knight, R. (2025, August 18). Building Employee Buy-In for Strategic Change. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2025/08/building-employee-buy-in-for-strategic-change>

TEACHING

Courses Taught as Instructor of Record

HLTH_ADM 8470: Strategic Planning and Marketing for Health Care Organizations (Fall 2024-present)

College of Health Sciences, University of Missouri

- Required graduate course for Master of Health Administration program
- Develops students' strategic planning and healthcare marketing competencies

JOURN 4242W/7242W: Strategic Communication Leadership (Spring 2023-present)

School of Journalism, University of Missouri

- Elective writing-intensive course for upper-level undergraduate students
- Focuses on leadership communication principles and applications

JOURN 2100W: News Writing (Spring 2017)

School of Journalism, University of Missouri

- Required writing-intensive course for journalism students
- Taught foundational journalistic writing skills and storytelling principles

Teaching Assistantships

JOURN 7242W: Strategic Communication Leadership (Summer 2025)

School of Journalism, University of Missouri

- Required 8-week online course for students in the Mizzou Crosby MBA Program
- Supported synchronous online instruction and Canvas course management

JOURN 4242W/7242W: Strategic Communication Leadership (Fall 2022)

School of Journalism, University of Missouri

- Elective writing-intensive course for upper-level undergraduate students
- Assisted with course delivery, student mentoring, and assignment evaluation
- Developed lecture materials on leadership communication theory and practice

Teaching Certifications

Online Teaching Certification (2023)

Missouri Online, University of Missouri

- This certification involves training in online teaching strategies, including Canvas design, teaching presence, and motivating online learning communities.

Certificate in Inclusive Teaching (2023)

Teaching for Learning Center, University of Missouri

- This certificate involves training on equity-focused teaching strategies and the planning and implementation of a strategy in the classroom.

Faculty Writing Intensive Certification (2022)

Campus Writing Program, University of Missouri

- This certification involves training on designing writing assignments, providing feedback on writing, assessing writing assignments, and the use of revision and peer review in the writing process.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Research Administration

Novak Leadership Institute, University of Missouri, 2022-present

Research Director, 2025-present

- Lead the institute's leadership research agenda, focusing on how leadership communication shapes workplace culture and enhances employee engagement and well-being
- Teach Strategic Communication Leadership (JOUR 4242/7242) at undergraduate and graduate levels while mentoring students in academic and professional development

Program Director, 2022-2025

- Directed leadership development programming while contributing to institute's research initiatives
- Led strategic communication efforts, including website strategy, content development, and digital operations that supported research dissemination

Strategic Communication

University of Missouri Health Care and School of Medicine, 2015-22

Communication Manager, 2018-22

- Led 6-person team managing strategic communications; oversaw \$900,000 annual budget
- Served as public information section leader for COVID-19 Incident Command, developing evidence-based health communication that increased content engagement by 1200%

- Developed patient story campaigns that provided practical applications for narrative persuasion research

Communication Strategist, 2015-18

- Created strategic health narratives through website content, patient stories, and multimedia platforms
- Led the redesign of major healthcare websites (muhealth.org and medicine.missouri.edu), applying research-based principles of information architecture and user experience

Influence & Co., Columbia, Missouri, 2014-15

Editor

- Developed content marketing strategies using storytelling principles for clients across diverse industries
- Applied narrative frameworks to create persuasive content that enhanced brand positioning

Journalism

Multiple reporting and editing positions, 2001-14

- Held progressive editorial and reporting roles at family-owned newspapers in Missouri (Columbia Daily Tribune) and North Carolina (Fayetteville Observer)
- Developed expertise in storytelling and audience engagement that now inform my research on narrative persuasion
- Applied evidence-based approaches to craft compelling stories on complex topics including business, healthcare, and military affairs

SERVICE

Service to the Discipline

Reviewer

- **Student & Junior Faculty Reviewer Training (SRT) Program**, *Journal of Advertising*, 2023-24. Review scholarship submitted to the journal under the supervision of Dr. Shelly Rodgers, former Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of Advertising*.
- **Conference paper reviewer**, American Academy of Advertising Conference, 2023
- **Conference paper reviewer**, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Conference (Advertising Division and ComSHER Division), 2023, 2025

Association Service

- Member, Communication Committee, American Academy of Advertising, 2023-25
- Presenter, Graduate Student Symposium, American Academy of Advertising, 2024

Association Memberships

- American Academy of Advertising (AAA)
- International Communication Association (ICA)
- Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC)
- Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA)

Service to the University

Research Fellow

- Served as Research Fellow for the Gregory Scholars Program from 2022-25 under the direction of Dr. Shelly Rodgers, Maxine Wilson Gregory Chair in Journalism Research.
- Assisted with program administration and mentored undergraduate and master's students in strategic communication research for positive social change.

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Journalism (2025)

Area of study: Strategic Communication

School of Journalism, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri

- Dissertation: Content-Conditional Effects In Patient Story Advertising: A Dual-Mechanism Approach To Healthcare Narrative Persuasion

Master of Health Administration (M.H.A.) (2021)

School of Medicine, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri

- Awarded **2021 Bonnie and Douglas Wakefield Award** for achievements outside the classroom: leading COVID-19 communication for University of Missouri Health Care

Bachelor of Journalism (B.J.) (2001)

School of Journalism, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri