

Ethical News

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Media Ethics Division

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Media ethics, now more than ever Intense scholarly interest gives MED many ways to grow

Erik Ugland
division head

As much as we all cringe at the endless reports of declining media credibility, we should be encouraged by what appears to be a concomitant resurgence of academic interest in media ethics.

In fact, I don't know if there has ever been a time when mass communication educators have been so focused on ethics issues and so interested in scholarly work in this area.

Some powerful evidence of this came this summer at the AEJMC convention in San Antonio, where ethics issues pervaded the conference program – in panel sessions, in research presentations, and, at least in my experience, in less formal interactions as well. Ethics seemed to be on everyone's mind.

The Media Ethics Division, I suppose, can take some of the credit. We contributed 17 research papers, eight panel sessions and the media ethics teaching workshop.

But the emphasis on ethics went well beyond the MED lineup. Several other divisions sponsored ethics-related sessions, and a number of papers in the Advertising, Public Relations and Newspaper divisions, among others, addressed ethics issues.

The concern for ethics was exhibited at the institutional level as well. Faculty from both Penn State and Southern Illinois universities announced that their schools have established faculty chairs in media ethics and soon will be seeking candidates.

All of this is excellent news for

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media ethics education and scholarship.

And it can only mean good things for MED as well – more potential members, more opportunities for collaboration, more research submissions, more competitive paper competitions, more convention partnerships and more interest in the scholarly work of the division's core constituents.

I believe that this is a Renaissance period in our field, and it can be a special time for MED as well if we can sustain this momentum and take advantage of the opportunities it presents.

Fortunately, we need not start from scratch. MED has had extraordinary leaders over the past several years (David Allen, Sandy Borden, Kris Bunton, among others) who have developed an outstanding organizational framework.

With the media ethics workshop, our Web site and newsletter, the special paper calls, the faculty and graduate student research awards, and the partnerships with APPE,

JMME and the media ethics colloquium, MED has established itself as an active and vital division in AEJMC.

We don't need to do anything differently. We just need to continue to build – in terms of both quality and quantity – on what we already do. And we need to start now!

Panel proposals are due in early October for the summer 2006 convention in San Francisco. That will no doubt be one of AEJMC's most widely attended conventions (finally, a world-class city without the grievous weather). And with the growing interest in ethics, there will be a lot of attention directed at our sessions. So, we need your ideas to help us put together a great program.

The April 1, 2006, deadline for research paper submissions also will be here all too soon, so keep that date in mind as you plot out your research agenda for the coming year. If you already have a project finished, there is still time to submit it for presentation at the February APPE conference in Jacksonville. That deadline is Oct. 14.

For those of you who work with graduate students, please remind them about the April AEJMC deadline, encourage them to submit their work and let them know that they are eligible for the Carol Burnett/University of Hawaii/AEJMC Prize.

Finally, to all of the stalwart MED members out there, let's see if we can't each find a colleague or two to join us this year – ideally by collaborating with us on a panel or research project.

With people's interest piqued, there has never been a better time to broaden our reach and to welcome others into the MED family.

Turn that good idea
into a panel proposal
while it's still fresh

Stephanie Craft
vice head/program chair

I leave most AEJMC conferences with a small notepad filled with research ideas, articles to track down, names of students to watch, and events to put in my calendar that come to me while I'm sitting in on research session and panel discussions. Do you also have some interesting tidbits jotted down in your San Antonio program or on the back of a business card? Now, while those are fresh in your mind and still somewhere near the top of the pile on your desk, is the time to turn those gems into panel proposals for next year's conference in San Francisco. And now is when we need them. To meet AEJMC deadlines, all proposals are due by Oct. 14, 2005.

Everyone, from MED veterans to new members, is welcome to submit a panel proposal. The only requirement is that the panel relate in some way to media ethics. Panels can address ethics across the media or in specific media industries or professions. Also, panels can focus on research, teaching or practice. Consider the range of successful panels we offered in San Antonio, from one that considered the role of academics as public scholars to another that addressed the ethical implications of requiring students to participate in research.

I encourage you to be creative, think broadly, and keep the following "secrets of suc-

See **GOOD IDEAS**, page 4

Reflections of a sixth-year rookie of teaching ethics

One teacher of media ethics vows not to become another reader of yellowed index-card lectures

Jack Breslin
teaching chair

In accepting the MED teaching chair, I hope to continue the remarkable tradition of thoughtful and useful columns written by my talented predecessors on the art and practice of effectively teaching our chosen discipline. Yet as a sixth-year rookie in teaching media ethics, I wonder what possible wisdom I can pass along to my gifted colleagues, many of whom have decades more experience than me.

And after six years of teaching media ethics as a graduate student and full-time assistant professor, I still wonder whether I am doing it the right way. How can I improve and mature as a teacher? How can I challenge my students to be skilled, ethical decision makers? How can I avoid the sloppy mistakes that sometimes slip unnoticed into one's semester routine? How can I better listen to and learn from my students and peers? Here at Iona College we combine media law and ethics into the same course. That presents the added challenge of giving both areas equal consideration, if such a balance is possible in 15 weeks.

As I prepared for the fall semester, I updated my syllabus, written assignments and PowerPoint slides. There is always plenty of new material with the latest media ethics scandal hitting the headlines. After networking with the media ethics folks at both the Colloquium in Applied Ethics in Oregon and AEJMC in San Antonio, I will incorporate a few new teaching tricks – excuse me, teaching methods – to try out.

Yet as I become more familiar with the material and confident in my presentation, I wonder whether familiarity and confidence could fester into mediocrity. The temptation looms to rely on the same PowerPoints for lectures, drag out same case studies for discussions, and reuse old exams in a multi-year cycle.

Pretty soon I might become like those boring professors I mocked as an undergraduate. They hid behind a towering desk as they recited the same lectures year after year from their outdated, yellowed index cards. Since we were only a few years from high school adolescence, these jaded professors concluded we had few of our own ideas to offer. We were like baby chicks in a nest straining our necks for their worms of philosophical wisdom.

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Yet what about those professors who inspired us? Went beyond the traditional lecture? Challenged us to develop our own ideas? Or, in this discipline, to develop our own ethical identity and become skilled ethical decision makers.

To avoid the sixth-year slip into mediocrity (especially as tenure and promotion looms), I have embarked on an ambitious six-point strategy. As with most sports game plans, I might not accomplish all these goals and will adopt new ones.

◆ **Listen and learn from students.** In one of my first classes, I was shocked to hear a student rationalize that since the consumer public knows that all advertising is deceptive by nature, it's OK to mislead and deceive them. No one disagreed with him but me. Will this be the ethical advertising code of the future? What inspires such a conclusion? Have consumers really become that savvy?

◆ **Don't force my own values down their throats.** How does one fairly assess a student's ethical opinion? If students back up their decisions with ethical theories, principles or examples that have been discussed in class, don't they deserve an A? But are they really expressing their own ideas or giving back what they think I will like. Do I so strongly argue my own ethical values that I discourage true dialogue? Is my class truly an open forum when the professor usually wins the argument? Ask challenging questions to draw out their ideas.

◆ **Experiment with your approach to reach your objectives.** What approach works best – emphasis on philosophy and theory, lots of

case studies – or both? Eventually one finds an approach that works best for the course objectives, but not without trial and error. While I use a case study textbook that covers all the mass communication majors, I introduce material from other sources, such as readings in various philosophies, a variety of decision-making tools and media ethics in news headlines.

◆ **Try new ideas.** The students and you might learn something. Last year Wendy Wyatt shared an excellent teaching method for exploring the ethics of photojournalism which she and Kris Bunton developed at the University of St. Thomas (see Fall 2004 "Ethical News"). While I don't have a worthy gem for this column, I have successfully experimented with role plays, five-minute position papers, media ethics examples dramatized in feature films and television shows – and even puppet shows by yours truly.

◆ **Evaluate early even if it hurts.** My students are confused when I attach an evaluation form to their midterm examination. They will evaluate me at the end of the course, they explain, wondering about my memory lapse. What good would that do me six weeks after the course has ended, I respond. In developing my own assessment tools I focus on both student comprehension and my own effectiveness at the halfway point – capitalize on what I'm doing right, fix what I'm doing wrong.

◆ **Tell stories with a purpose.** As I detailed in a previous MED newsletter column (see Winter 2003), I often share my professional experiences with my students. While I may not be proud of some of my ethical failings, these "war stories" seem to be appreciated and effective. At a recent social gathering, a former student told me and other students how much he enjoyed them, especially "the one about the phony photo." That was an incident where, as the Fox publicist for "COPS," I staged a publicity still by lying handcuffed on the hood of a Las Vegas police cruiser. But what did he remember – the humorous irony of the photo or my ethical caveat against such conduct?

While I might not achieve all these goals, I hope they will prevent that slow slide into mediocrity. But I will have some help. The goal of my course is similar to one of the five qualities of our graduates listed on the Iona College Mission Statement. The first one states that our graduates will be "ethical and skilled decision makers motivated to leadership and service."

Why you should help form a news council

John Hamer
Washington News Council

Want to help the news media in your state be more ethical and professional?

Want to open up more dialogue among journalists, academics and citizens?

Want to make your news media more open, transparent and accountable?

Want to help maintain public trust and confidence in your state's news media?

Want to give your students some unforgettable case studies in media ethics?

If so, you should help start a news council in your state. Here's how:

◆ Apply for one of the two \$75,000 start-up grants that will be awarded in a national contest funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation in Miami.

◆ The application deadline is Feb. 15, 2006. Winners will be chosen by May 2006.

◆ The Washington News Council (www.wanewscouncil.org) in Seattle and the Minnesota News Council (www.news-council.org) in Minneapolis are overseeing the competition and will select the winners. (See their Web sites for guidelines and application forms.)

◆ Grant applicants may be coalitions of journalism schools, citizen groups, media outlets and/or business associations. They should be nonpartisan, diverse and representative of their states and communities. They must have or be seeking 501(c)(3) nonprofit status from the federal Internal Revenue Service.

Minnesota and Washington will award the start-up grants to groups that submit the most detailed, viable proposals. Proposals that include print, broadcast and online media outlets are especially encouraged. Applicants must be able to raise additional funds, including a significant portion from media organizations, to support operations for at least three years.

News councils are independent, nonprofit organizations that investigate complaints against news organizations and issue evidence-based rulings about their accuracy and fairness. They provide public forums where citizens and journalists can discuss media performance and ethics. They have been called "outside ombudsmen" for the media.

The mission of the Minnesota and Washington News Councils is to promote fair, accurate, vigorous and trusted journalism. They do this by offering the media and citizens an alternative to litigation regarding complaints. They also sponsor panels and discussions on media-related issues. And they conduct student mock news

Good reporters and editors have nothing to fear from news councils, which strongly support vigorous, accurate reporting.

Greater willingness by journalists to be more open to public scrutiny will actually increase public trust.

council hearings and other educational activities. The idea for the competition originated with Eric Newton, director of journalism initiatives at the Knight Foundation.

"News councils that actually take the time to investigate a complaint before reaching a conclusion are a welcome relief from today's horde of self-appointed media critics offering froth without fact," Newton said.

"News councils are needed today more than ever before," said Cyrus Krohn of Yahoo, who is past president of the Washington News Council and former publisher of Slate.com. "Every state should have a news council."

"If the news media want to restore their eroding credibility with the public, they should embrace the news council concept," said John Finnegan Sr., chairman of the Minnesota News Council board and retired executive editor of the *St. Paul Dispatch* and *Pioneer Press*.

Worldwide, dozens of countries have press councils, including England, Australia, New Zealand, Israel and Canada. And new ones are springing up in many other countries, including Burundi, Estonia and Peru. (For a complete list, see www.press-councils.org).

The Minnesota and Washington News Council members each include a dozen journalists and a dozen laypersons, each representing only themselves. The councils invite news organizations to address complaints against them in open hearings. This helps journalists explain how they act in the public interest and helps them learn how to improve their service to readers, viewers or listeners. Participation by news outlets is entirely voluntary.

Of the 1,650 grievances filed with the Minnesota News Council since its creation in 1970, 136 have been discussed at hearings. About half of the time, the Minnesota council has agreed with the journalists, half the time with the public. Of 21 complaints filed with the Washington News Council since it was formed in 1998, only three have led to hearings. Two complaints were upheld; one was not. Others were dismissed as

unwarranted or were resolved with the council's help as an informal mediator.

A National News Council, based in New York, operated from 1973-1984. Media critics of the council said they resented a group that included non-journalist outsiders scrutinizing journalists' performance. Proponents said the news media would benefit by embracing any form of transparency, including a news council.

Some journalists remain skeptical of news councils, contending that they will have a "chilling effect" on vigorous reporting and further diminish public trust in the media. Others call news councils a first step toward government regulation or control of the news media.

The opposite is true. Good reporters and editors have nothing to fear from news councils, which strongly support vigorous, accurate reporting. Greater willingness by journalists to be more open to public scrutiny will actually increase public trust. And news councils are a defense against government interference, performing a kind of "peer review" function. They accept no public funding or taxpayers' dollars to avoid any hint of government control of the media.

Stephen Silha, current president of the Washington News Council, wrote in *The Christian Science Monitor* (Aug. 29, 2005): "As someone familiar with two news councils in Minnesota and Washington State, I can offer firsthand testimony that news councils are great places for journalists and citizens to talk about news coverage, learn from each other and strengthen the relationships between news organizations and their communities."

Silha's late father, Otto, was publisher of the *Minneapolis Star & Tribune* when the Minnesota News Council was formed in 1970 by that state's newspaper association, and helped found the Silha Center for Media Ethics at the University of Minnesota Journalism School.

News councils are an idea whose time has come – again. These days, the news media need all the help they can get. As the saying goes, journalism is no longer a lecture, but a conversation. News councils can help invigorate and deepen that conversation.

Every state deserves a news council. If more are formed, citizens and journalists will all be better off.

John Hamer is Executive Director of the Washington News Council, which he helped found in 1998. He is former associate editorial-page editor of The Seattle Times, and a former staff writer for Congressional Quarterly in Washington, D.C. He is a graduate of Dartmouth College with a master's degree in journalism from Stanford University.

Needed NOW: ideas for 2006 MED special paper call

Lee Anne Peck, MED research chair, is seeking ideas or topics from MED members for the 2006 special paper call. Peck needs to make a decision on the topic as soon as possible, and any topic ideas should be sent via e-mail to Leeanne.peck@unco.edu.

Two years ago, MED did a special paper call on media literacy; this past year, the topic was political messages and political coverage.

MED head Erik Ugland says that he would like the division to do a special call again this year.

"It brings more attention to the division, attracts contributors from

outside the division, boosts our submission numbers and gives more people to present research," Ugland says.

During the past two years, mini-plenary sessions were scheduled back-to-back with the special-call paper sessions.

Peck also hopes to hear from MED members who would be willing to review papers for the 2006 convention in San Francisco. If members do not plan to submit papers to the MED division, they should consider helping review papers.

Send paper-call ideas to Leeanne.peck@unco.edu.

Turn that good idea into a panel proposal while it's still fresh

GOOD IDEAS, from page 1

successful proposals" – adapted from Erik's very useful article from last year's newsletter – in mind.

◆ **Co-sponsorship:** AEJMC has more divisions than time during the convention day, so the law of supply and demand kicks in. Each division has a limited number of slots it can use for its convention programs. But when one division

Panels that address issues of particular salience to San Francisco or the state of California might have added appeal.

partners with another division, each is only charged for half of a slot. Co-sponsorship, then, stretches MED's programming capacity. Any panel that can be jointly sponsored will be given special consideration. Please note in your proposal which division or divisions might be suitable co-sponsors. If you think there might be three or more divisions interested in your topic, you might want to suggest your panel as a mini-plenary session. In San Antonio, for example, MED co-sponsored a mini-plenary called "At the Intersection of Ethics and Politics" with the PR, Advertising and Radio-Television Journalism divisions.

◆ **Location:** Panels that address issues of particular salience to the city of San Francisco or the state of California might have added appeal. San Francisco is a multicultural city, so panels addressing, diversity, culture or media representations of minorities could be promising.

◆ **Participants:** Consider whether there are people in the Bay Area or other California cities (journalists, PR professionals, entertainers, aca-

demics, politicians, etc.) who could make unique contributions to your panel.

◆ **Feasibility and Cost:** Sure, getting Gov. Schwarzenegger on a panel would be a real coup.

And it's probably impossible. But if you think you can convince a high-profile figure to join your panel, great. Just be realistic. MED can request money from AEJMC to cover travel expenses for panelists who are not members of the association, but these funds are neither guaranteed nor limitless, so keep that in mind.

◆ **Timing and Current Events:** It is hard to predict now what issues will be grabbing headlines next summer, but panel proposals that address timely and controversial issues are certainly encouraged. For example, Hurricane Katrina may have struck the Gulf Coast, but news coverage of natural disasters, emergency management and so on are certainly of interest to folks who live on the fault line that produced the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake and will likely occupy the national news agenda into next year.

◆ **Originality:** Before working on your proposal, you might want to look at some of the panel titles and themes from the most recent AEJMC conferences to avoid any significant overlap.

Keep in mind, though, that if you submitted a proposal last year (or earlier) that was not selected, you may resubmit it.

◆ **Themes:** As of this writing, AEJMC has not

adopted a theme for the San Francisco convention, but that could change before the panel proposal deadline. Proposals that tie in to that theme would be especially attractive, so keep an eye on the AEJMC website for any announcements about a convention theme.

Before you submit your proposal, please review the guidelines outlined in the AEJMC call. If you have any questions or would like to see a sample proposal, let me know and I will gladly send one to you.

All proposals must be delivered to me as Word e-mail attachments. Please send them to CraftS@missouri.edu by the end of the day

Panel proposals include:

◆ **Title**

◆ **Moderator** (feel free to name yourself)

◆ **Panelists:** Provide the names of possible panelists, but please make sure your volunteers understand you're submitting a proposal that is tentative and not guaranteed.

◆ **Topic:** A one-paragraph description of the topic/issue to be addressed in the panel.

◆ **Possible co-sponsors:** A list of other AEJMC divisions that might be interested in co-sponsoring the panel (preference for inclusion on the program will be given to topics that appeal to both MED members and members of other divisions).

◆ **Estimated costs, if any:** Remember that funds for speakers and audio/visual equipment are quite limited; also, please note that if your panel proposal is accepted and you need funding to convince a non-AEJMC member to be on it, you'll need to file a later request seeking funds for travel and lodging.

◆ **Your contact information.**

◆ Send proposal by Oct. 15 as an e-mail attachment to: CraftS@missouri.edu.

on Friday, Oct. 14. I will send an e-mail reply when I receive your submission.

Now, before all those good ideas from San Antonio slip away, open up a new document, name it something like "San Francisco panel proposal" and start typing. I look forward to hearing from you.

MINUTES OF THE 2005 MEDIA ETHICS DIVISION MEMBERS' MEETING

The annual members' meeting of the AEJMC Media Ethics Division was called to order by outgoing MED chair Kris Bunton (University of St. Thomas) at 6:46 p.m. Friday, Aug. 12, 2005, at the Marriott Riverwalk, San Antonio, Texas. About 25 members were present.

I. Announcements

Bunton introduced Lee Wilkins (University of Missouri) and Cliff Christians (University of Illinois) to present the 2005 Clifford G. Christians Ethics Research Award, sponsored by the Carl Couch Center for Social and Internet Research, to Michael Bugeia (Iowa State University) for "Interpersonal Divide: The Search for Community in a Technological Age." This was the second year the award was given. The 2004 recipient was Patrick Plaisance (Colorado State University).

Bunton informed members of the sites under consideration for future AEJMC conferences. AEJMC is seeking division input; each division gets one vote. Bunton asked members to offer their opinions about preferred sites, including Montreal, New York, Boston on a sheet she distributed at the meeting.

She also thanked outgoing officers and others who assisted with various aspects of MED during the year.

II. Reports

Outgoing teaching chair Wendy Wyatt (University of St. Thomas) reported that she had focused on teaching tips and practical items in the teaching column in the newsletter and hoped that that effort to serve as forum for trading teaching ideas would continue. Wyatt also informed members that she is taking over the book reviews for the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* for Deni Elliot and asked those members interested in writing reviews to contact her.

Patrick Plaisance (Colorado State University), outgoing research chair, reported that MED had received roughly the same number of submissions – 35 – for its research paper competition this year as last, with roughly half the papers coming from faculty and half from students. MED had a 45 percent acceptance rate. Plaisance noted that the group of papers was very strong and featured a lot of variety and a number of submissions on topics related to new technology. Also, the conference research panels were very well attended.

Outgoing PF&R chair David Craig (University of Oklahoma) reported that he had attempted to solicit items from practicing journalists for the newsletter. While that attempt wasn't successful

this year, Craig said he would like to see that effort continue.

MED officers and members made putting out the four newsletters very easy, with great ideas submitted on time, reported outgoing secretary and newsletter editor Stephanie Craft (University of Missouri). She thanked Bill Reader (Ohio University) for his great work designing the newsletter and Tom Bivins (University of Oregon) for putting newsletters up on the web and maintaining an archive of newsletters.

Outgoing vice head/program chair Erik Uglund (Marquette University) noted that MED sessions at the San Antonio conference had been very popular; in some cases, MED sessions were standing room only. MED had co-sponsored lots of sessions with other divisions and interest groups, which contributed to the success. Uglund thanked all participants, especially Lee Anne Peck, Kathy Fitzpatrick and Karla Gower for their assistance. Uglund also credited Patrick Plaisance with coming up with the idea for the mini-plenary on ethics and politics, which was highly successful. Ideas for next year's conference in San Francisco need to be submitted in October, Uglund said.

Bunton, outgoing division head, gave an overview of MED's midwinter meeting with the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, which also took place in San Antonio. MED programmed seven sessions at the APPE conference. Jacksonville, Florida, is the site of next year's APPE meeting, at which MED already has been asked to do programming again. Bunton said the partnership is very cheap – we need only provide APPE with MED membership labels for mailing conference information – so unless any member had an objection, Bunton recommended continuing the relationship. No objections were voiced, so MED will proceed with the midwinter meeting.

Bunton reported that MED membership is stable at 300-320 paid members. The addition of the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* subscription price into MED dues has not had an impact on membership numbers. MED is financially solvent, Bunton reported, and has enough money to contribute to the 2006 colloquium. The division is ending the year basically as it started. The 2006 colloquium will be at the University of Hawaii, organized by Tom Breslin; the topic will be Intercultural Communication. In the past, MED has contributed \$500 toward colloquium expenses. Members agreed, by acclamation, to again contribute \$500.

Bunton noted that MED membership dues are \$10 for graduate students and \$26 for faculty. A motion to keep the dues at current levels was made and sec-

onded. The motion passed by unanimous acclamation.

III. Other business

At the request of the Council of Divisions, Bunton solicited feedback regarding the *AEJMC Reporter* newspaper, staffed by students, which debuted at this year's conference. Members offered the following suggestions: the selection process for student reporters ought to be competitive; distribution of the paper needs improvement, as some members reported seeing stacks of newspapers left behind; the paper needs to contain more information about upcoming events, not just what has already happened; and an online version of the paper and/or a system in which AEJMC members could receive e-mail highlights would be especially useful.

Bunton then initiated discussion on the paper review process for AEJMC. Two divisions (Communication Theory & Methodology and Communication Technology and Policy) switched to online submission this year. Those divisions purchased software for roughly \$400 to implement online submission. (This is different software, a member noted, than what the International Communication Association is using.) Bunton reported that papers submitted by April 1 were in reviewers' hands by April 4, and reviewers were able to submit scores online. Entertainment Studies tried an alternative method this year – hard copies of papers were submitted, and the research chair scanned the papers into pdfs for distribution to reviewers. A number of issues were raised in the discussion. A member asked how much money is spent on the paper submission and review process. Bunton responded that roughly \$150 is spent on postage in the current system. Members pointed out some difficulties with relying on the mail system; when Romayne Smith Fullerton (University of Western Ontario) was research chair, for example, papers were taking a very long time to get through customs. Other members raised the issue of how research chairs would handle any problems that arose with the new software. If everything worked well, that was fine. Otherwise, an online system could be very difficult and time-consuming for research chairs to handle. Members at smaller schools may be at a disadvantage in terms of having on-site technical support. A member suggested experimenting with a parallel process, in which both paper and online submission were offered. Bunton noted that CT&M had helped the Newspaper Division make the transition. Craft asked whether online submission would be something

that could be done through the AEJMC website. Right now, members said, the divisions are doing in on their own. Uglund asked whether there has been discussion in the Council of Divisions about buying the software for individual divisions. Bunton said no, the discussion in the Council now is simply whether to encourage a move toward an online submission process.

Next came a discussion about the MED newsletter. Craft asked for member input on the postcard notification system for announcing when new editions of the newsletter are available as well as the format of the newsletter, which is currently PDF. Reader said the advantages of PDF are that it is easy to print out the newsletter, it can include color, and it doesn't matter whether there is an odd or even number of pages (as it would matter with a printed edition). Advantages of having a Web-based newsletter, in contrast, would be the freedom from temporal limitations. It would be possible to streamline the announcement function the newsletter serves – announcements could go directly to Tom Bivins for immediate posting to the Web site rather than waiting for the next edition of the newsletter to be published. A member said that a Web newsletter sounds good in theory, but that people are more likely to read something printed out. One member asked whether the newsletter could be made available in both formats; another member voiced the concern that that might create more work for the secretary.

On the subject of the postcard notification process, Craft noted that it is time-consuming and expensive. She experimented with notifying international members of MED via e-mail, culling e-mail addresses out of the AEJMC directory. She received no complaints from those members. Members pointed out that AEJMC does not have a system for collecting and maintaining a database of e-mail addresses. Another member suggested waiting to change the system until it becomes clearer what AEJMC might do on the technology front more generally.

Bill Babcock (California State University-Long Beach) reported on this year's teaching workshop, scheduled on the last day of the conference. The theme was "Visual Truth in the Marketplace of Ideas." It is the second year the workshop has had a theme. As of the business meeting, 27 participants had signed up and 3 slots were still open. The theme for next year's workshop will be "Secrets."

Bunton noted that the latest MED annual report is now up on the Web site,

Journalism and PR pros should work together on ethics concerns

Lee Anne Peck
research chair

The Society of Professional Journalists will meet from Oct. 16-18 in Las Vegas for its annual convention. The SPJ ethics committee will meet as it always does, but this year a touchy subject is on the committee's agenda. Should SPJ join together with the Public Relations Society of America to discuss the topics of ethics at workshops, meetings or conferences?

The reasoning is that both professions – journalism and public relations – have lost credibility with the public, a public that might not even know the difference between the two professions any more.

However, there is that old-fashioned notion – a notion that continues to exist – that the two professions only put up with each other. Neither profession respects the other, so why waste the time?

When I taught the stand-alone, required media ethics course at Ohio University while a graduate student, I had between 80 and 90 students in the class each quarter. The course was taught in a

small auditorium. The advertising students sat in the top rows on the left-hand side with the public relations students in front of them. On the other side of the auditorium the news-editorial students sat in the top rows and the broadcast students sat in front of them. A handful of graduate students with no specific calling sat in the very front row.

What I saw so clearly then – and hope to stop now in my courses at the University of Northern Colorado – is that there was already a division between the news media and the persuasion media. Which concentration area in the journalism school was better? Who were the better students? Who had the better job aspirations for after college graduation? Who were hacks and who were flacks?

This kind of competitiveness, or conceitedness, may not happen in all journalism schools or departments, but at this large Midwestern university, it was obvious.

Today I teach why the news media and the persuasion media need each other, and I make it perfectly clear why: Those in the news media need information that the public relations practitioner can give them, and the PR person needs the exposure that the news media can give his or

her client or organization. Simple. Both sides have a job to do. The arrogance must stop.

Of course, there are bad eggs in every basket, so to speak. And a few bad eggs can ruin the reputation of each profession. But respect, truthfulness and independence are three values that each profession should embrace. I take issue with those journalists who generalize that PR practitioners lie and use deception; that is not how my PR students are taught.

One topic the SPJ ethics committee members believe can be discussed safely with PRSA, however, is the use of video news releases (VNRs). The PR people make them, and the TV stations broadcast them – oftentimes as if the VNR was original reporting, not giving the proper credit for the footage. Now, who is more to blame here?

Both professions need to be concerned with their actions, and the one principle they share is social responsibility. The two professions both inform the public. Any opportunity for a discussion about ethics with others in the media business should be a worthwhile endeavor.

For more information on the SPJ convention in Las Vegas, see www.spj.org.

MINUTES OF THE 2005 MEDIA ETHICS DIVISION MEMBERS' MEETING

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bringing the total number of reports available on the site to five. These reports form the basis of the new evaluation process for divisions AEJMC will employ.

IV. Election of Officers

Bunton conducted elections for MED's 2005-2006 officers. She noted that under the division's structure, Uglund would automatically succeed from vice head/program chair to division head, and Craft would move up from secretary/newsletter editor to vice head/program chair. Members approved those moves by acclamation.

Bunton noted that Reader will be stepping down from the associate

newsletter editor role in a year. She encouraged members who are interesting in assuming that job to keep that opportunity in mind.

Bunton then presented a slate of nominees Uglund had prepared after soliciting interest from members. Nominations from the floor were also welcomed. By acclamation, members elected the following officers: secretary/newsletter editor Elizabeth Skewes (University of Colorado at Boulder); teaching chair Jack Breslin (Iona College); research chair Lee Anne Peck (University of Northern Colorado); professional freedom and responsibility chair Matt Cabot (California State University-Long Beach).

Uglund asked members who are interested in serving as liaisons between MED and organizations such as the

Commission on the Status of Women, the Graduate Education, APPE, SPJ and so on to just let him know.

V. Closing comments

Babcock thanked Bunton for her service as head of the division. Bunton received a round of applause.

The director at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale announced that the school had received money to hire a full professor in media ethics. The position will be advertised soon. The director added that the school has a new dean and has hired eight people for SIU's global media research center.

Patrick Parsons (Pennsylvania State University) announced that the College

of Communication at Penn State had been given a seven-figure gift to endow a chair in ethics, which Parsons holds.

John Hamer of the Washington News Council announced that, with the Minnesota News Council, they had received money from Knight Foundation to start new news councils. They are looking for collaborations among academics, media and nonprofits. The application form is on the group's Web site; the deadline is February 2006, and the grant winners will be chosen by May 2006.

Sandy Borden (Western Michigan University) gave an update on the AEJMC ethics code task force. Currently the task force is seeking feedback on a draft code throughout AEJMC, which we will be hearing more about soon.

The meeting adjourned about 7:40 p.m.