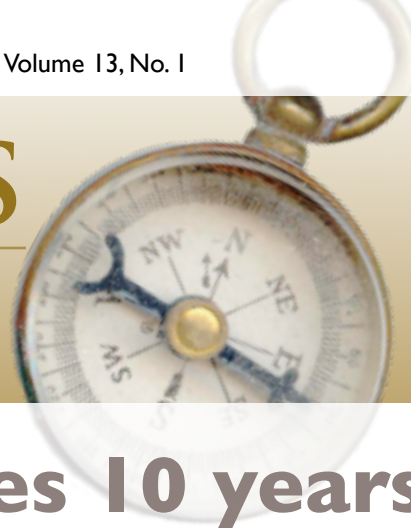


ETHICAL NEWS

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- Visit the MED website at http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/aejmc_ethics/index.html
- Have an announcement or an article to share with MED members? Email the newsletter editor at bvanacker@luc.edu

MED celebrates 10 years

Jack Breslin
 Division Chair

Ten years ago last August, at AEJMC's 82nd Annual Convention in New Orleans, a determined coalition of media ethics scholars, led by Bill Babcock and Michelle Johnson, rallied enough membership votes to raise their Media Ethics Interest Group to full division status.

The overwhelming approving vote demonstrated the association's recognition of the value and relevance of media ethics scholarship and teaching. Over the past decade, our continuing valued status among AEJMC's divisions, interest groups and commissions has been demonstrated by growth in membership, panel co-sponsorship requests and research papers.

During my anecdotal research of MED's history at the Boston convention, the pioneers weren't too sure about the exact dates of the approval process, but still appreciate the wide support from other disciplines.

"We weren't an interest group that long," Bill Babcock recalled. "But once we looked for support from the general membership and various groups, it was obvious that the time had come for a separate media ethics division."

As a doctoral student involved with the Silha Center for the Study of Media Ethics and Law at the University of Minnesota in 1998, I helped Bill mail out the first editions of Ethical News, along with then Silha fel-



lows Genelle Belmas and Jenny Lambe. Among the more memorable articles in those early issues was a thoughtful reflection "Ethics Trumps Law or Why Have Laws Anyway" by Louis Hodges, another of the division pioneers, which he originally presented at a law and ethics conference honoring Don Gillmor.

How fitting that on the MED's tenth anniversary in Boston we honored one of the great media ethics scholars, Cliff Christians, after toasting another legend, Jay Black, last year in Chicago. At the annual member's meeting, we also honored Michael Kittross for his eightieth birthday and countless contributions to our field.

In addition to Bill and Michelle who served as the interest

group chairs, the MED owes a great debt to the ten members who have served as division chairs: (in chronological order) Maggie Patterson, Elizabeth Blanks Hindman, Ginny Whitehouse, David Allen, Sandy Borden, Kris Bunton, Erik Ugland, Stephanie Craft, Liz Skewes and Patrick Plaisance.

Without their leadership and dedication, our division would never have grown and flourished the way it has in the past decade. Having committed to the "three-year ladder" of leadership, most of them also served as division programming and research chairs before assuming the chair role.

We should also recognize several members who have served as chairs to promote teaching and professional freedom and responsibility, along

with those who volunteered as MED's liaisons with other academic and professional organizations, like Wendy Wyatt's work with APPE.

Like most of us, when I attended my first AEJMC convention in Baltimore in '97 wearing a yellow "graduate student" ribbon below my name tag, I didn't know much about AEJMC except that its law division had

rejected my first research paper. Watching the MED pioneers huddle around a table to discuss their strategy for gaining division status, I never dreamed that today I would have the honor to serve as MED's eleventh division chair.

With support from the membership and our leadership team, I hope to continue MED's growing legacy of excellence in research, teaching and service

into our next decade. My thanks in advance to a dedicated team selected by our membership. Shannon Bowen (Syracuse) moves up to vice chair and programming chair, after assembling a fine group of scholars for Boston's research panels. Katie Tusinski (Marquette) steps onto the leadership ladder as research chair. Jenn Burleson Mackay (Virginia Tech) will serve as

teaching chair and Chris Roberts (Alabama) continues as PF&R chair for his third term. Bastiaan Vanacker (Loyola Chicago) will continue for another year as editor of *Ethical News*.

Congratulations and thanks to all MED members on ten excellent years.



Media Ethics Division Chairs

CHAIR	SCHOOL	YEAR	CONVENTION SITE
William Babcock	Minnesota	1997-1998	Baltimore
Michelle Johnson	Westfield State	1998-1999	New Orleans
Maggie Patterson	Duquesne	1999-2000	Phoenix
Elizabeth Blanks Hindman	North Dakota State	2000-2001	Washington, DC
Virginia Whitehouse	Whitworth	2001-2002	Miami Beach
David Allen	Wisconsin-Milwaukee	2002-2003	Kansas City
Sandra Borden	Western Michigan	2003-2004	Toronto
Kris Bunton	St. Thomas	2004-2005	San Antonio
Erik Ugland	Marquette	2005-20056	San Francisco
Stephanie Craft	Missouri	2006-2007	Washington, DC
Elizabeth Skewes	Colorado at Boulder	2007-2008	Chicago
Patrick Lee Plaisance	Colorado State	2008-2009	Boston
Jack Breslin	Iona	2009-2010	Denver

Football writers tackle ethics

Chris Roberts
Professional Freedom and Responsibility Chair-
man

Anyone who has ever sat in the press box at a college football game has heard the pre-kickoff pronouncement: “This is a working press box. In accordance with the Football Writers Association of America, no cheering will be tolerated. . . .”

Oddly enough, the Football Writers Association of America’s just-released code of ethics makes no mention of cheering. The former president of the association explains that there are bigger problems – and he blames the Internet for much of it.

The Memphis Commercial Appeal’s Ron Higgins, 53, says his job has evolved since his first sports byline for a Louisiana newspaper when he was 8 years old. The task of writing for the print edition has been eclipsed by demands to write and produce video for the Web – and post early and often.

“The only way to earn trust is to be professional and fair,” said Higgins, who was the 1,100-member group’s president in 2008. “That’s harder to do because of the pressure from editors and others to get things up quickly, and to compete with bloggers who don’t have the professional training. . . . There’s such a rush to get things online that it’s easy to compromise.”

The association’s code, after several years of development, was published in its “Fifth Down” newsletter in July. It is based on the Society of Professional Journalists’ code of ethics. Its four categories – seek truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently, and be accountable – come straight from the SPJ code.

The difference in those codes may come in enforcement. The SPJ in the 1980s removed a clause that called for the organization to “actively censure” its members who break the rules. But Higgins said it’s possible that the Football Writers may call attention to offenders: “We may write a letter or call the writer or maybe call them

out in the newsletter.” As of this writing, no one has filed an allegation with the association.

The Football Writers Association of America was founded in 1941, when it wasn’t unusual for sportswriters to go out drinking with coaches (and sometimes, perhaps, even players) and do what the late, great sportswriter Red Smith called “god up” the players. Today, football is big business for teams, universities, and journalists. Higgins said the code is meant as a way for older sportswriters to remind younger ones of the importance of accuracy and thinking about the “post-first-and-fix-it-later” approach to journalism.

The eagerness of some sportswriters to “stick something up on the Web so quickly is compromising accuracy,” Higgins said. “Some of the young guys aren’t thinking things through. They don’t see the repercus-

down with an injury – before the coach had a chance to comment, before the extent of the injury was known, and before the player’s parents knew. “I told him: ‘Can’t you wait an hour?’”

The result, Higgins said, is that coaches and sports-information directors do not always differentiate bona fide journalists from others, and they limit access to coaches and players and practices. The association’s newsletter is filled with concerns about how teams and conferences are cutting access and trying to control the journalists’ work. The code could help sports organizations differentiate between real journalists and people who simply use the tools of journalism, he said.

The association “has been around a long time, and we have members who coaches respect,” Higgins said. “We understand their (coaches’ and sports-information directors’) jobs, and they kind of understand our job and respect us. But they tend to lump everybody together. Fan sites are given the same access as folks who have gone to journalism school and work for real news organizations. “We’re trying to hammer it home with this code, to remind people that this is how you do it right.”

Chris Roberts, an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Alabama, covered his first football game as a teenage sportswriter 30 years ago this fall. He still has trouble cheering when he takes his son to games.



sions of throwing things out there that are not verified or are conjecture. They figure if it’s wrong, it’ll be forgotten in an hour.”

Many newer writers were raised in the age of sports talk radio and try to create the journalistic equivalent, he said. “Lots of these young writers think they’re bullet-proof. They’ll rip somebody and then revel in the celebrity of it when they’re talked about it on the radio or online, even when they’re wrong.”

At least as big a problem, Higgins said, are bloggers who have little understanding of journalism ethics. Last year, he said, he confronted a blogger who, during a football practice, posted an item about a player going

ONLINE: Sports Codes of Ethics

The Football Writers of America: Its code is adopted from the Society of Professional Journalists and at www.sportswriters.net/fwaa/about/ethics.html

The College Sports Information Directors Association: Its code of ethics focuses on dealing with bad behavior. It’s at www.cosida.com/About/codeofethics.aspx

A plea for PR ethics research

Kati Tusinski,
Research Chair

As people who have attended Bill Babcock's workshop can attest, some of the best events at AEJMC take place before the conference even officially begins. This year I attended a two-part workshop hosted by the Public Relations Division and sponsored by The Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication at Pennsylvania State University and Business Wire.

In the first session, Restoring Public Trust in Business: A Pre-Convention Dialogue, Roger Bolton presented the results of a major new study entitled "The Dynamics of Public Trust in Business: Emerging Opportunities for Leaders," which was released by the Business Roundtable Institute for Corporate Ethics and The Arthur Page Society. The report identifies new approaches that will better enable leaders to proactively build trust. Specifically, it recommends concrete actions that business leaders can take with respect to building mutuality, balancing power, and creating trust safeguards. Bolton provided a brief overview of the study and presented attendees with ideas about integrating the study into the classroom.

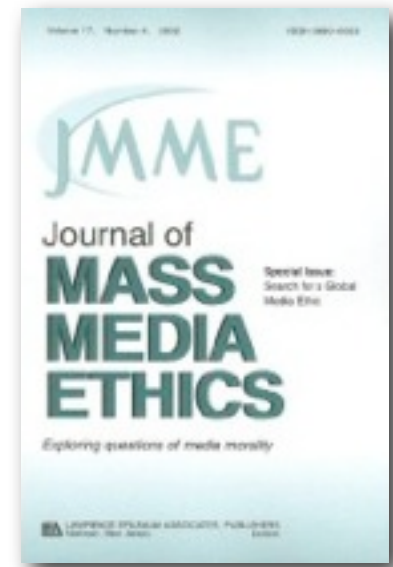
The second part of the workshop, Lessons in Corporate Social Responsibility from Practitioners and Educators stood out to me because it was the first (and only time

thus far in my academic career) that I had heard the terms corporate communication and social justice mentioned in the same sentence. At Marquette University (a Jesuit institution), social justice is at the heart of the university's mission, so when Steve Young, senior vice president at Wainwright Bank, spoke about the company's commitment to issues of social justice I was ecstatic. Wainwright's commitment to a progressive agenda demonstrates that corporations can engage in ethical business practices while still making profits. In my opinion, Wainwright is an exemplar of corporate social responsibility.

But how is this all related to research, what this column is supposed to be about? A deeper examination of issues, such as the ethics of stakeholder engagement, the connections between trust, corporate social responsibility and reputation, and the ethical implications of social media, are fertile areas of research for media ethics scholars interested in public relations. In the past 10 years, only 15 articles, seven of which were published in 2005 as part of a special topics issue on exploring ethics in public relations, have been published in the Journal of Mass Media Ethics.

At this year's convention, there were a number of papers presented in the Public Relations Division that meet the content requirements of JMME. Even though public

relations scholars have other outlets (e.g. Journal of Public Relations Research and Public Relations Review) for their research, I encourage my peers who examine issues related to public relations ethics, corporate social responsibility, trust and communication to consider submitting their work to JMME. Furthermore, I hope this piece might have sparked an idea for a future research study or a special call for next year's convention. I welcome any and all suggestions of how we can encourage and promote research that focuses on the intersection of ethics, trust, and corporate behavior.



The ontological status of the "unethical analysis"

Shannon A. Bowen, Syracuse
Programming Chair

A renowned media ethicist recently criticized an article¹ that I published, because I employed the term "ethical analysis." He argued that this erroneously implied that there is also an "unethical analysis." This comment begs the question: Is there such thing as an "unethical analysis"?

I would argue that unethical analyses are conducted more commonly than are ethical analyses. Everyone is familiar with the Enron collapse, so that case makes a useful example. Executives in Enron such as Andrew Fastow, Jeff Skilling, and arguably Ken Lay, engaged in explicitly unethical analyses. Their decision making was not done in familiar ethical terms, such as promoting the public good, creating virtue, upholding duty or moral principle, or creat-

ing a just or caring outcome. Their decision making factors were based on what might be called an "unethical" analysis. Researchers^{2,3} who closely studied the case determined that Enron's principles used factors such as, "Innovate at all costs" and, "How can I maximize my own gain at the cost of others?" or, "How can I deceive stockholders about the amount of debt the company has?" or even, "How can I charge a higher price for this electricity; potentially by routing it out of state before sending it back in-state with a tariff?"

Such questions demonstrate many of the components of analysis we recognize in moral philosophy; they set a clear priority in the objective, a consistent means of analysis, offer a yardstick for determining what is "good" (financial gain, in this case), and show a quality of rigor in the analysis, as opposed to apathy. These men were engaging in a self-serving and biased form of

moral analysis that we can call an "unethical analysis."

As ethicists, we spend so much time pondering the good and determining what is right, true, and so on, that we often forget the other side of the equation. We don't focus on how people arrive at decisions that are unethical. Perhaps we should spend more time exploring those concepts? Enron gives us a clear case of avarice, uncontrolled ambition, and deception for personal gain, decision making factors Kant labeled "prudent self-interest."

What about the cases that are less obvious, in which there are gray areas and compelling arguments on each side? Might some of these situations be complicated by unethical analyses? In Newton's law of mechanics, every action has an equal and opposite reaction. If ethical behavior is one side of that equation, should we focus time and attention on also studying the unethical

side of the equation? Knowing the considerations that lead to employing an unethical analysis might offer a glimpse into the other side of ethics, allowing us to reach new understanding in normative and applied ethics.

The problem of evil seems to be discussed infrequently in modern media ethics literature, much less the means and causes of unethical analyses. Should our research

revisit the discussion? I would love to hear your thoughts on this perplexing problem.

¹ Bowen, S. A. (2009). "What communication professionals tell us regarding dominant coalition access and gaining membership." *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 37(4), 427-452.

² Bowen, S. A., & Heath, R. L. (2005). "Issues management, systems, and rhetoric: Exploring the distinction between ethical and legal guidelines at Enron." *Journal of Public Affairs*, 5, 84-98.

³ Sims, R. R., & Brinkman, J. (2003). "Enron ethics (or, culture matters more than codes)." *Journal of Business Ethics*, 45(3), 243-256.

When ethics get lost in translation

Jenn Burleson Mackay
Teaching Chair

Ah, the joys of study abroad - funky foods, fumbling linguistic skills, homesick students, and cultural chaos.

Studying abroad allows students to test their independence while they immerse themselves in new cultures. It also allows students to stumble into unfamiliar ethical territory as they get lost in cities and struggle to communicate. They long for the comforts of home while they are surrounded by unfamiliar foods and traditions. This environment creates a plethora of unique ethical challenges for instructors.

I helped leading a study abroad program to Riva San Vitale, Switzerland this summer. We offered three classes: International Public Relations, Photojournalism, and Magazine Writing. The students put their coursework to the test as they explored Europe, often without the constant supervision of instructors.

One of our biggest ethical challenges was guiding the students to be respectful to everyone, despite cultural differences. Before we left, we spent one semester meeting with our students for one hour a week. We spent that time planning the trip and talking about cultural issues. One of the topics we covered was the fashion trend abroad. The students listened, discussed and seemingly understood that sleeveless shirts and short

skirts were not always appropriate in the places we were traveling to. However, this information clearly did not seem to affect what they wore abroad. Later, some students complained about the direct comments that men made about their physical appearance.

Our coursework presented its own ethical challenges. The students in our photojournalism class were instructed about asking permission before taking photographs of strangers - even if they couldn't speak the language. I had the impression that our students avoided taking photographs of strangers whenever they could get away with it. Nonetheless, they understood

what they were expected to do and I believe they understood why it was important.

Studying abroad provides students and faculty with fantastic opportunities to learn in creative new ways. Yet, it is easy to get so caught up with budgets, transportation, and course syllabi that one doesn't spend enough time considering ethical obligations. I think we did many things right on our trip, but there are things that we could have done to have made this a better and more ethical experience for everyone. Of course, we sometimes learn the most in life when we make mistakes. I hope we all learned from our experiences in Riva San Vitale.

