

# ETHICAL NEWS



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- Have an announcement or an article to share with MED members? Email the newsletter editor at [philtodd@earthlink.net](mailto:philtodd@earthlink.net)

## Next Ethics? examines digital community

Jan Leach  
 Teaching Standards Chair

**N**ews now is about community -- especially news that is delivered online.

“Digital do-ers” from legacy media, new media and newsgathering organizations in between emphasized community issues throughout the Poynter Institute’s “Next Ethics?” Media Ethics Workshop at Kent State University in September.

The ever-widening community of news consumers and “Fifth Estate” news creators is reshaping media ethics. Community values and attitudes about objectivity, transparency and the role of the press are forcing traditional media professionals to rethink long-held beliefs and practices.

Speakers including Paul Steiger, editor of ProPublica, the non-profit investigative reporting team, and Adrian Holovaty, founder of EveryBlock, the hyper-local online news feed, joined ethics faculty from the Poynter Institute and guests from the Online News Association and the Public Relations Society of America to discuss and debate media ethics and innovation.

Steiger, who delivered the keynote, said the journalism community needs to define values for survival that include accuracy, innovation and transparency while remaining mindful of business challenges.

Sharp changes in the news business pose urgent questions

for journalists, Steiger said. However, while some of the questions may be new, the values that guide journalists – commitment to fairness, to accuracy, to public service – should be constant.

And while those values endure, he said, journalists must recognize how the inherent ethics issues around technology and innovation affect communities. Those issues include the blurred line between the presentation of fact and opinion, the tension between the quest for audience and the need for journalism of substance and civic importance, the business and economic challenges newsrooms have experienced, and the obligations we have to be transparent about the process of newsgathering and the business of news operations.

Meanwhile, data mining is expanding because of the proliferation of information available online. This includes accessing publicly available information, looking for patterns and analyzing it. It’s a tool traditional journalists have been using for decades, made more powerful because professionals, citizen journalists and others can collect, dissect and present data online.

Holovaty reminded journalists that presenting data requires editorial judgment and that presenting public data, such as crime statistics, can be unnecessarily intrusive.

Sarah Cohen, Knight Professor of Journalism and Public Policy at Duke University, said that when journalists present data they must let users see what they see. Transparency is critical



Duke University’s Sarah Cohen, left, listens as Adrian Holovaty of EveryBlock.com makes a point during the panel discussion “Data Mining: You Can’t Always Get What You Want” at the Poynter ethics workshop at Kent State University. (photo by Susan Kirkman Zake)

to the community, she said, and such transparency includes disclosing the origin and quality of data used in reporting. (continued next page)

Holovaty said that instead of providing the traditional reporter function of analyzing data, he sees EveryBlock as a community project to include involvement like lists and forum-like comments.

Other highlights included new information from Poynter's ground-breaking "Sense-Making Project" that revealed significant patterns in the ways people consume news and share it within the community. Among the findings presented by Kelly McBride, Ethics Group leader, were that consumers are less likely to have a single, trusted source for news and information; almost a third of news consumers are not interested in objective newsgathering, instead looking for news presented from their viewpoints; and online

information can be censored, fabricated, spread and distorted easily, causing problems with context.

An ONA-sponsored panel examined how online comments on news sites can expand, narrow or expose the community. Professional journalists now must engage with their audiences (especially online) instead of just presenting news. Such involvement opens the issue of moderating comments, forcing people to identify themselves, and setting rules about community comments.

Another presentation examined how journalists and public relations professionals interact, especially when they're working online. Speakers including Michael Chersonson, immediate past CEO of PRSA, talked about tension in the professional community and, again, the need for transparency.

The 6th annual Media Ethics Workshop was presented



*The Poynter Institute's Kelly McBride presents the results of the organization's sense-making study at the ethics workshop at Kent State University. (photo by Susan Kirkman Zake)*

by the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Kent State University and The Poynter Institute. More than 300 people attended in person or viewed the conference via livestream.

For more information and session downloads, visit: <http://jmc.kent.edu/ethicsworkshop/2010/index.php> or contact MED Teaching Chair Jan Leach at [jleach1@kent.edu](mailto:jleach1@kent.edu). The next Media Ethics Workshop is scheduled for Sept. 15, 2011.

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## Member engagement and recruitment via high density session

Shannon A. Bowen  
Division Chair

**A**EJMC in Denver saw the Media Ethics Division bring in some new activities. We held our inaugural "high density" paper session in which six papers were presented – concurrently. High density sessions are a rare commodity on the AEJMC planning grid. So, they are extremely competitive to program at the fabled "chip auction" of December's midwinter planning meeting, but MED planners nabbed one early in the scheduling of sessions. Although we cannot promise to do that every year (much of it comes down to the luck of the drawing order), the session was an exciting change of pace for those who attended it in Denver!

The beauty of a high density research session is that it allows a conversation to take place between presenter and listener. In that conversation, ideas can be shaped, questions can be explored, and various aspects of the research can be discussed in depth depending on the interests of the audience. The session is intellectually



*These dancers greeted conference goers to the Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel. (photo by Philip A. S. Todd)*

engaging for both presenters and audience members.

The logistics of our high density session were new to most MED members, except those who had seen the format used before in other divisions. It is also a format used at other conferences, such as the Institute for Public Relations Research Conference that relies exclusively on high density session.

The way that the session works is that the six papers are presented at number of tables (numbered as listed in the order of

the program) and the audience members rotate tables every 10 minutes. Presenters are instructed to provide a brief overview of their research, and then engage in dialogue with listeners. This format is especially useful in gaining feedback on one's research or to help develop the project more fully for publication. Plus, it is fine for audience members to hear a diversity of different topics and offer their own particular insights based on their individual expertise. They can freely choose which tables to visit, tailoring the session to their own interests. During this type of session, a moderator acts as a timekeeper and occasionally as a facilitator of discussion questions.

New members are often attracted to the division through our paper call. The strategy of the MED planners was to use the high-density session to increase our ability to schedule a larger number of competitive papers than usual, thereby raising our acceptance rate to 67%. We hoped that this move will increase the number of competitive papers submissions from both graduate students and faculty to MED. Having a competitive paper presented in

MED links scholars to the division, engaging potential new members, and giving current members a format in which to truly discuss their ideas.

Because ethics spans the entire communication discipline, we hoped that this strategy will help us to remain a growing and vital division, attracting like-minded scholars throughout AEJMC to MED. Continuing to invigorate our

membership with new people, new perspectives, and new challenges for ethics allows us to grow, increase revenue, increase the number and range of activities we can offer as a division, and to remain intellectually vital.

Will you help the division in reaching out to just a few colleagues or graduate students by encouraging them to submit a paper to our competition for St. Louis?

Because our number of papers submitted has been on a slight decline over the past few years, we would certainly appreciate your help in encouraging those with an interest in ethics to submit research and become actively involved in our division.

Thank you!



## The Ethics of Nonprofit Journalism

Jenn Burleson Mackay,  
Professional Freedom and Responsibility chair

**W**hile some journalists lug multimedia equipment to their assignments and send stories to multiple news outlets, and others stand around the water cooler debating whether the public ever will be willing to pay for news, another type of journalism has emerged. It's journalism that's paid for through the kindness of donors or the assistance of public and private grants. This is the world of nonprofit news.

Nonprofit news certainly isn't a new concept in the broadcasting sector, where the Public Broadcasting System and National Public Radio have been established for decades. Print-style nonprofit news organizations have existed for some time as well, such as the *Christian Science Monitor*. What is new is the sudden popularity of the movement. Nonprofit organizations have emerged in numerous cities, from Alabama's *The Anniston Star* and Minneapolis' *Minn Post* to the *New River Voice* in the mountains of southwest Virginia. The movement could prove to be a viable economic solution to the woes of the journalism industry, but it raises a host of ethical questions. Perhaps the broadest and most basic of those questions is this: Does it matter who pays for journalism? We've allowed everyone from department stores to used car salesmen to buy advertising for years. Under the traditional advertising model, we typically would have

multiple advertisers. One would hope that this system would keep any single advertiser from becoming overwhelmingly powerful to the point of manipulating content.

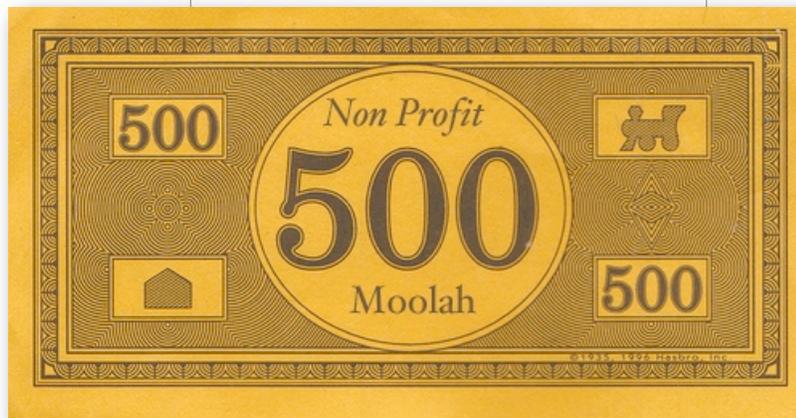
Most realists would likely agree that the advertising system hasn't been perfect. Yet the public always knew whom the advertisers were. All they had to do was to flip through the pages of the paper. They

should open a dialogue with prospective funders to make sure that everyone understands the expectations of the relationship. The journalists need to understand what the donor is expecting of them. Organization leaders also must decide whether they will accept funding from government agencies. The group was concerned that government funds could lead journalists to become "indebted to government." The group also argued that nonprofit organizations should give full disclosure regarding their donors. They suggested that journalists should be very cautious about accepting anonymous donations. It is paramount that nonprofit news centers protect their editorial operations from their funding sources and the group stressed that news organizations must be prepared to write stories about their donors.

It is too early for us to know how successful the nonprofit movement will be as a long-term enterprise, but these ethical issues certainly should be studied by researchers and discussed within our classrooms. While the traditional ethics codes that we've studied for years are still applicable for the nonprofit world, we must be careful that we don't overlook the new issues on the horizon.

### Source:

- Ward, S. (Ed.) (2010). *Ethics for the New Investigative Newsroom: A Roundtable Report on Best Practices for Nonprofit Journalism*. Madison, WI: The Center for Journalism Ethics.



also knew that the news organization was privately funded, and that the government was not directly paying for the news. Nonprofit journalism is different.

Nonprofit publications may have some advertising, but that typically isn't where the bulk of their money is found. They seek grant funding and ask for donations from the public. In the paper "Ethics for the New Investigative Newsroom: A Roundtable Report on Best Practices for Nonprofit Journalism," editor Stephen Ward and his co-writers outlined a series of issues that develop from the concept of nonprofit news. Among these were how to select an appropriate donor, how much does the public need to know about those funders, and how to avoid conflicts of interest. The group suggested that nonprofit journalists

## Paper submission numbers reconsidered

Bastiaan Vanacker  
Research Chair

**T**ucked away between the positive reports about our division's health and steady membership numbers at the annual members' meeting in Denver, one number gave me some pause: 36. That's how many submissions Kati Tusinski Berg, our outgoing research chair, reported to have received, for an acceptance rate of 67%. (Of course, the high acceptance rate was also the result of the eight slots in the high density session we occupied.)

This seemed low to me, so I checked some old issues of Ethical News and combed the annual meeting minutes of the last few years for comparison. What I learned did little to alleviate my concern.

This year's paper total was down slightly from 38 in 2009, which already marked a decline from 2008's total of 44. In 2007, we had 42 submissions and a 50% acceptance rate.

In 2006, then-Chair Erik Ugland reported in Ethical News that "paper submissions to the Media Ethics Division were up by 43 percent." No actual number

of submissions appears recorded that year, but considering 2005's total of 35, the number must have approached 50. In 2004, the 32 papers received marked a steep jump from the 22 submitted in 2003. In 2002, the limit of the Ethical News archives, 30 papers were judged.

In a nutshell, the number of submissions more or less steadily increased from the early days of the division until 2006, and has steadily declined ever since. I am not in possession of AEJMC-wide numbers to put this decline in context.

Fortunately, dwindling quantity has not (yet!) come at the expense of quality. As everyone who attended a session this year can attest, the quality of research presented was outstanding. Kati Tusinski Berg did an outstanding job organizing the sessions.

I emailed non-MED members who presented in Denver about their experiences, and the feedback was unanimously positive.

The only way these declining numbers might be truly troubling is if they reflect a dwindling interest in media ethics, where fewer faculty and graduate students are conducting research in the field. Research is our lifeblood; and as a small division, we need to keep trying to attract interest.

In this context, I would like to stress how important it is to encourage graduate students to submit papers. While a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, I was lucky enough to have people like Bill Babcock and fellow students further along in the program to push me to submit papers and find a home in our division. For those who teach at doctoral-program schools, please encourage your students to submit their research to MED.

Once they do, we need to invite them to become active media ethics scholars. This is a growth area for our membership. We do sponsor the Burnett awards, but too often we hand the winners a plaque, give them a round of applause and send them on their way while we continue our conversation with our colleagues we haven't seen in so long. But that graduate student smiling uncomfortably in the corner holding that award could be the next Cliff Christians. Go and introduce yourself, offer congratulations, have a chat and invite him or her to our social. After all, we don't want to lose a future Christians to the Advertising Division.

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## Business & Announcements

### MED Business Meeting Minutes (Denver 2010)

In brief, here is a summary of the member meeting at the AEJMC conference on Thursday, August 5, 2010.

Thirty-five members attended the business meeting in Denver. Chair Jack Breslin called the meeting to order, and chair reports were offered from Bastiaan Vanacker (newsletter editor), Chris Roberts (Professional Freedom & Responsibility chair), Jenn Mackay (Teaching chair), Kati Berg (Research chair), and Shannon Bowen (Programming chair).

The Chair's report indicated that we are one of the smaller of the 30 divisions and interest groups with roughly 300 members. The coffers show a balance of \$4,353, which helps support the Journal of Mass Media Ethics, division speakers, paper awards and so on.

At the Denver conference, we supported 13 panels, one high density session and 4 research sessions. Thirty-six competitive papers were submitted to the conference and Berg reported a 67% acceptance rate. That acceptance rate was intended to increase acceptance for recruiting new members to our division. Concern was expressed by several division officers about the lack of paper reviewers, and new reviewer volunteers were



*This 1945 mural on the wall of the basement card room in the Denver Press Club depicts an ideal all-star newsroom featuring the best-known journalists of the era. In 2008, SPJ designated the building as one of their recipients as a "significant historical place in journalism." (photo by Philip A. S. Todd)*

encouraged to submit their names to the research chair. A special thanks was issued to Tom Bivins for organizing and hosting our division newsletter, *Ethical News*.

In new business, JMME Editor Lee Wilkins offered a report on JMME and invited submissions from the division. J. Michael Kittross encouraged the submission of unique and interesting pieces to Media Ethics magazine. Wendy Wyatt, the division's Association for Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE) liaison, offered a report calling for participation in APPE by MED members. She proposed that the MED membership offer a \$300 stipend for each current MED chair to attend APPE in order to strengthen ties between the organizations. A motion was made to use \$300 from MED funds to support travel of the current MED Chair to APPE this year until the membership can vote on the initiative becoming a regular part of division activities and funds. 28 voted in favor, 0 against, and there were 5 abstentions. Members should send comments on the APPE attendance initiative for future MED Chairs to any of the current officers for discussion.

Bowen introduced the idea of a MED Service Award. Discussion left the administration of the award in the hands of MED officers, but the membership should nominate candidates by Feb. 15. Members present voted to approve the initiative. (continued next page)

New officers were elected: Jenn Mackay, Virginia Tech, as PF&R Chair; Phil Todd, Oklahoma, as Newsletter Editor; and Bastiaan Vanacker, Loyola, as Research Chair. Officers moving up the chain were Kati Berg, Marquette, who took over the role of Vice-Head for Program Planning, and Shannon Bowen, Syracuse, 2010-2011 chair.

Breslin turned the meeting over to Bowen, who thanked Jack for his service as 2009-2010 chair, and encouraged members to attend the first MED offsite social, co-sponsored by Media Ethics magazine, immediately following at the Denver Press Club. Bowen and Berg will attend the mid-winter planning meeting in Albuquerque to represent MED interests in planning the conference this December. Meeting adjourned until St. Louis.

*Respectfully submitted by Shannon A. Bowen, chair, Syracuse.*



## Donations Welcome For Student Registration Fund

It is not usually easy for students to attend conferences such as AEJMC. Recognizing this difficulty, five Media Ethics Division members — Cliff Christians at the University of Illinois, Ed Wasserman at Washington and Lee, Wendy Wyatt (and her husband Tom) at St. Thomas, Stephen Ward at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Tom Cooper at Emerson College — have collectively pledged to donate \$450 to start a fund to cover the registration fees (and possibly more) of some students attending AEJMC who have an affiliation with or interest in the Media Ethics Division. Dr. Janet Leach at Kent State University, who chairs our Teaching Committee, will administer the funding.

The pledged donors would love to have company. If you wish to make a pledge to help the fund grow, and to help more students attend MED events and AEJMC, please contact Tom

Cooper at [tcooper@emnet.org](mailto:tcooper@emnet.org) or 617-824-8812. No doubt we can all recall what it was like when as students we longed for greater intellectual opportunities we could not always afford. Thanks for your interest and, if you wish to pitch in, your pledge. —Tom Cooper (and for Cliff, Wendy, Stephen, Ed, Jan, and Shannon)



## Hot Off the Press:

### Fast Media Media Fast

Dr. Thomas Cooper (Gaeta Communication, 2011)

This author suggests taking a liberating media fast in an age of increasingly fast media. His book is the first to provide a practical, user-friendly and thought-provoking guide to gaining a newfound control and understanding of readers' relationship with the media.

This researched, seasoned manual provides specific guidelines, important areas for thought, creative options and life-changing opportunities. It seeks to help understand and handle today's immense media overload, speed-up, and addiction through encouragement to discover and realize one's purpose, meaning, dreams, and fulfillment. Its approach liberates readers to think creatively in a world in which "thinking" is becoming the recycled soundbites, opinions, and jingles of others. By thinking about who we are within the wireless, hand-held revolution, it locates the Walden Pond of the 21st century where we may understand our society and ourselves.

For more information: <http://gaetaseminars.com/store/Books/>.

### Excellence in Online Journalism: Exploring Current Practices in an Evolving Environment

David A. Craig (Sage, 2011)

Like the technologies that support it, the craft of online journalism is evolving quickly. This timely book helps students develop standards of excellence, through interviews with more than 30 writers, editors and producers, and dozens of examples of strong work. Author David Craig provides a framework of concepts to show how the field is evolving and challenged by competition, staffing limitations, and other pressures. Discussion is organized around four key elements: speed and accuracy with depth in breaking news; comprehensiveness in multimedia content; open-endedness in story development, including public contributions; and conversation with users. Chapter-length treatments of these topics bring home the realities of online work to students, who also come to appreciate how excellence and ethics online go hand in hand.

For more information: <http://www.sagepub.com/textbooksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book233171>.



## MED Newsletter Winter issue deadlines

Please send articles, notices, photos, illustrations, or anything else of division interest for inclusion in the winter issue of the newsletter to the editor at [philtodd@ou.edu](mailto:philtodd@ou.edu) by Dec. 15. Thank you.



## Call for papers

### AEJMC 2011 Midwinter Conference

The AEJMC Midwinter Conference is an annual forum for the presentation of research and debate in areas relevant to the 13 AEJMC groups (divisions, interest groups and commissions) sponsoring the event. The conference provides a platform for presentations and extended discussions in a relaxed setting. The next conference is scheduled for March 4-5, 2011 at the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication (University of Oklahoma) in Norman, Oklahoma.

Authors are invited to submit research paper abstracts only of between 600 and 800 words, exclusive of author information and references. Abstracts should give a clear sense of relevant literature, research objectives, methodological approach, findings and conclusions.

Submissions should be made by e-mail to the midwinter chair of the appropriate participating group. Authors may submit any given abstract to only one participating group. Do not submit full papers.

Authors of accepted abstracts will be notified by mid-January 2011. Papers presented at the midwinter conference are also eligible for presentation at the AEJMC national convention. Authors are encouraged to use the midwinter conference as an opportunity to get feedback on their research, improve and finalize it for submission to the national conference.

Authors of accepted abstracts must submit complete papers (not exceeding 30 pages) to the discussant of their conference session least two weeks before the conference.

At least one author must register and attend the conference to read the paper.

Panel submissions: In addition, the organizers are also inviting panel proposals. Panel submissions should include the panel title, a description of the session's focus, the issues to be discussed, and a list of panelists (potential and confirmed), including affiliation. Panel proposals should not exceed two double-spaced pages.

Deadline: All submissions should reach the appropriate group's midwinter chair by noon, December 3, 2010.

Authors are invited to submit completed research papers and panel proposals to the paper chairs from the participating interest groups, divisions, and commissions: Civic & Citizen Journalism, Communication Technology, Status of Women, Cultural and Critical Studies, Entertainment Studies, Graduate Education, International Communication, Magazine, Mass

Communication & Society, Media Management and Economics, Minorities and Communication, Religion and Media, and Visual Communication.

The University of Oklahoma is located in Norman, 20 miles south of Oklahoma City, with easy access to the Will Rogers World Airport. Details on submission requirements, participating group chairs, conference registration, hotel accommodation and airport transportation is available at [www.ou.edu/content/gaylord/home/main/outreach/aejmc\\_mid\\_winter.html](http://www.ou.edu/content/gaylord/home/main/outreach/aejmc_mid_winter.html).

For more information, please contact Dr. Elanie Steyn, conference site host, at [elanie@ou.edu](mailto:elanie@ou.edu).

### AEJMC 2011 Southeast Colloquium

The USC School of Journalism and Mass Communications will host the AEJMC 2011 Southeast Colloquium March 17-19 in Columbia, S.C. Authors are invited to submit completed research papers and panel proposals to the paper chairs from the participating divisions: History, Law & Policy, Magazine, Newspaper and Radio-Television Journalism. All papers must be submitted via first class U.S. Mail or overnight delivery by the postmark deadline of December 13, 2010.

For more information: [www.jour.sc.edu/sec2011/](http://www.jour.sc.edu/sec2011/).

### 2011-12 Institute for the Digital Humanities

The University of Denver Digital Media Studies Program is now accepting applications for fellowships in its 2011-2012 Institute for the Digital Humanities, a program funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Proposals are due December 15, 2010 and should be emailed to [adrienne.russell@du.edu](mailto:adrienne.russell@du.edu) and [lynn.clark@du.edu](mailto:lynn.clark@du.edu). More information and workshop description can be found at [http://dms.du.edu/DU\\_IDH.html](http://dms.du.edu/DU_IDH.html).

The University of Denver's Institute for the Digital Humanities will offer scholars the opportunity to explore the benefits of incorporating interactive media into interdisciplinary collaboration and public dissemination of research. Fellows will be given training and mentoring in the use of digital tools for data analysis and presentation, social collaboration and authorship, and/or research production and dissemination in relation to projects of their own choosing. This is a non-residential fellowship program, although participation is required in two on-campus events at the beginning (June 2011) and end (September 2012) of the 18-month fellowship period, as well as in one video teleconference at the fellowship's midpoint (December 2011).

