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## Ideas R Us

Do you have a teaching idea or question you'd like to see in the Newsletter or on the website? We'd like to "poll" MED members on some aspect of teaching? Send your ideas to our Teaching Chair and she'll try to pursue them in future issues. Examples might include: teaching ethics to large classes, using the Socratic method in teaching ethics, tips for grading and assessment in ethics education and more. What's "trending" in your brain? Contact Jan Leach at [jleach1@kent.edu](mailto:jleach1@kent.edu) (<mailto:jleach1@kent.edu>) or phone 330-672-4289.

## MASTHEAD

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## Ethical News: Spring 2014 • Volume 17, No. 3

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## What to do about "clickbait"

 by **Ryan J. Thomas**

Newsletter Editor

Last August, *The Onion* satirized CNN's spotlighting of Miley Cyrus' performance at the MTV Video Music Awards. The [article \(http://www.theonion.com/articles/let-me-explain-why-miley-cyrus-vma-performance-was,33632/\)](http://www.theonion.com/articles/let-me-explain-why-miley-cyrus-vma-performance-was,33632/), under the byline of CNN.com managing editor Meredith Artley, provided a biting commentary not just of CNN, but also of the state of contemporary journalism and its tendency toward the lowest common denominator. The article contained such gems as these:



Ryan J. Thomas

*[This] was an attempt to get you to click on CNN.com so that we could drive up our web traffic, but in turn would allow us to increase our advertising revenue.*

*There was nothing, and I mean nothing, about that story that related to the important news of the day, the chronicling of significant human events, or the idea that journalism itself can be a force for positive change in the world... [P]utting that story front and center was actually doing, if anything, a disservice to the public... But boy oh boy did it get us some web traffic. Which is why I, Meredith Artley, managing editor of CNN.com, put the story in our top spot. Those of us watching on Google Analytics saw the number of homepage visits skyrocket the second we put up that salacious image of Miley Cyrus dancing half nude on the VMA stage.*

*I want our readers to know this: All you are to us, and all you will ever be to us, are eyeballs. The more eyeballs on our content, the more cash we can ask for. Period.*

This is the phenomenon of "clickbait," a method of using eye-catching headlines and visuals to prompt readers to "click." It is chiefly associated with sites like [BuzzFeed \(http://www.buzzfeed.com\)](http://www.buzzfeed.com) and [Upworthy \(http://www.upworthy.com\)](http://www.upworthy.com). The article is, first and foremost, hilarious. Yet, like any good satire, it also gives us food for thought.

Ethics research, of course, is not satire. However, it is nonetheless a form of critique, if we concur that the aim of media ethics scholarship is to understand, develop, and argue for ways in which the "media can contribute to high quality social dialogue."<sup>[i]</sup> Where media fail to live up to their role-related responsibilities, ethicists should be sounding the alarm.



Which brings me back to the concerns outlined in *The Onion's* spoof. In a journalistic environment where the technological capacity to tailor to transient audience preferences and whims has conditioned yet greater fealty to the bottom line, ethicists should be addressing the ethical issues involved with news production, content, and consumption in a constantly changing journalistic environment. Much of the scholarship on web analytics, citizen journalism, customization, and so on is techno-centric and somewhat deterministic. There is ample scope for us ethicists to park our tanks on this turf and refocus the debate around the use of these technologies and whether they align with what we expect of journalists in a democracy.

A student of mine recently bemoaned the fact that he could no longer go to the *Time* magazine website for his news because it had fallen victim to "Buzzfeedification." Check out Time's website (<http://time.com>) and see for yourself. There's a place for BuzzFeed in the media ecosystem, for sure – I was thrilled to discover what X-Man I should be – but the bleed of its conventions into journalism are worrying. In much the same way that British journalism scholars once warned of "tabloidization" – the bleed of the format, style, and values of the tabloid newspapers into those of the quality press and broadcasting – perhaps we are now in the midst of a new "bleed" centered around web analytics which portends ill for journalistic ethics and standards.

I will close with another effort by *The Onion*, which [recently announced](http://www.bizjournals.com/newyork/news/2014/04/29/the-onion-sets-its-sites-on-buzzfeed-upworthy.html?page=all) (<http://www.bizjournals.com/newyork/news/2014/04/29/the-onion-sets-its-sites-on-buzzfeed-upworthy.html?page=all>) it was launching a new sister site. Its name: [ClickHole](http://clickhole.com) (<http://clickhole.com>). Hilarious and thought-provoking. Check it out.

[i] Clifford G. Christians, "Social Dialogue and Media Ethics," *Ethical Perspectives* 7 (September 2000): 182.

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## Update that passport and review your papers... We're heading to Montreal!

by **Jenn Burleson Mackay**  
Vice-had and Programming Chair



(/uploads/6/4/2/2/6422481/\_sky\_news\_hd\_onscreen.jpg)

You've made those last minute research updates, and uploaded your papers to AEJMC just in the nick of time to make the submission deadline. Now it's time to peruse the conference programming and make a quick check of your passport.

Non-Canadians will need a passport to cross the border and it's certainly easy to forget that passports must be renewed. U.S. passports must be renewed every 10 years. The U.S. Department of State website says that a routine passport application takes 4 to 6 weeks. For more information, visit the passport's website [here](http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports/renew.html) (<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports/renew.html>).

We've been working on a strong program for this year's conference. As a result, we will have sessions on each day of the conference, including a preconference on writing research papers. Although it is regrettable that we will not have our traditional teaching workshop this year, we're looking forward to a new adventure in Montreal. Please encourage your graduate students and new scholars to learn more about the pre-conference. It could be a great way for them to learn about navigating the scholarship waters.

We will have research paper sessions on both the first and last day of the conference. Please keep that in mind as you are making travel plans.

We had a solid turnout for this year's paper competition. Initially, there were a few hiccups with

the All-Academic website, but the papers have been assigned to reviewers. Please take care that you review your papers by the May 8 deadline and accept our apologies for the quick turn around.

See you in Montreal!

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## Publishing in academic journals

by **Tom Cooper**  
Emerson College

Have you ever wondered how our editors and reviewers make choices about which articles to include in our refereed journals? Patrick Plaisance, editor of the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* (JMME), and former JMME editor Lee Wilkins will join forces with editors from “next of kin” journals to provide tips and insights about the reviewing, selection, and editing

process and about how to improve your writing for submission for publication. Patrick will also present a sense of the direction and uniqueness of our flagship publication.



Other MED colleagues involved include Cliff Christians, who advised and co-created the panel, Jenn Burleson McKay, who as program chair teamed with leaders from the Media Management and Economics Division and the Religion and Media Interest Group to co-sponsor the workshop, and Tom Cooper, co-publisher of *Media Ethics Magazine*, who co-created and will chair the panel.

Although the panel/presentation is part of a full day workshop about improving research writing, individuals may attend this afternoon (1-4 p.m.) session with editors as an independent, free-standing session at no cost on Tuesday, August 5. Please let Tom Cooper ([twcooper@comcast.net](mailto:twcooper@comcast.net) (<mailto:twcooper@comcast.net>)) know if you will be attending. Below please find the complete program description and panelists. The panel lasts from 1-3 p.m. followed by an opportunity from 3-4 p.m. to meet one-on-one with the panelists, discussant, and moderator.

### **“LEARNING FROM EDITORS” WORKSHOP** **Tuesday, August 5, panel 1-3 p.m., coaching 3-4 p.m.**

Editors of refereed academic publications in media economics, media and religion, and media ethics who work within AEJMC will present an afternoon panel explaining:

1. How best to submit articles, reviews, and especially research for possible publication.

2. The uniqueness, scope, and vision of each featured publication.
3. A behind-the-scenes view of editing, reviewing, and article selection to help answer the question, “What are editors and reviewers for refereed journals looking for from contributors?”
4. How editors and contributors working together may improve scholarship, research, and cooperation within our fields.

**PANELISTS:**

- Judith Buddenbaum (Colorado State University), co-editor, *Journal of Media and Religion*
- Hugh J. Martin (Ohio University), co-editor, *Journal of Media Economics*
- Patrick Plaisance (Colorado State University), editor, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*
- Daniel Stout (Brigham Young University-Hawaii), co-editor, *Journal of Media and Religion*

**DISCUSSANT:**

Lee Wilkins (Wayne State University), past editor, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*

**MODERATOR:**

Tom Cooper (Emerson College), founding editor and co-publisher, *Media Ethics Magazine*

**ADVISOR:**

Clifford Christians, executive publisher, *Media Ethics Magazine*

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## Connecting scholars and professionals

by **Chad Painter**  
PF&R Chair

I recently had the privilege of attending the Digital Media Ethics Symposium at the University of Colorado. At the March 14-15 symposium, media scholars and journalism professionals gathered to discuss new and changing ethical issues regarding the ever-increasing role of digital technology in the journalism field.

Panelists discussed a wide range of topics including disaster coverage and drones, content marketing and other marketing influences, global standards for media ethics, the need for speed, ethics codes for the new breed, and digital media, and the exclusion of underrepresented groups. In addition, keynote speakers Jay Rosen (New York University) and Steve Buttry (Digital First Media) spoke on the ethics of point-of view journalism, and upholding and updating journalism values, respectively (you can read University of Colorado-Boulder graduate student April Nowicki's reports on each panel and keynote [here](http://testkitchen.colorado.edu/ethics-symposium/) (<http://testkitchen.colorado.edu/ethics-symposium/>)).

Many attendees of the symposium discussed ways to continue the dialog between media scholars and working journalists. The field is strongest when academics and professionals communicate to address our shared issues, concerns, and possible solutions. We are at our best when we have more voices discussing the myriad issues concerning journalism ethics today.

As the Media Ethics Division PF&R chair, I'm calling on you to help continue the discussion. Please send me your ideas on forums where professionals and academics can discuss ethical issues surrounding journalism. My email is [Chad.Painter@enmu.edu](mailto:Chad.Painter@enmu.edu). I will compile the ideas, add a few of my own, and present them during our division meeting at AEJMC.

The scholars at the Digital Media Ethics Symposium were Stephen Barnard (University of Denver), Mary Bowannie (University of New Mexico), Imani Cheers (George Washington University), Beth Concepcion (Savannah College of Art and Design), Katy Culver (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Dave Gordon (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire), Peggy Kreshel (University of Georgia), Joe Mathewson (Northwestern University), Joy McDonald (Hampton University), Meg Moritz (University of Colorado-Boulder), Chad Painter (Eastern New Mexico University), Lee Anne Peck (University of Northern Colorado), Derigan Silver (University of Denver), Rick Stevens (University of Colorado-Boulder), Stephen Ward (University of Oregon), and Wendy Wyatt (University of St. Thomas).

The media professionals were Gil Asakawa (manager of student media at the University of Colorado-Boulder), Fred Brown (*The Denver Post*), Aimee Heckel (Digital First Media, *Boulder Daily Camera*), Tom Kent (Associated Press), Kim Nguyen (7NEWS), Steve Outing (media futurist), Jessica Plautz (Mashable), Daniel Schneider (*The Denver Post*), Samaruddin Stewart (visual journalist and media technologist), Christine Taylor (CT1 Media), Phil Tenser (7NEWS), and Dalton Walker (Gazette.com).

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## Moral dilemmas and ultimate objectives

 by **Angela M. Lee**

Co-Graduate Student Representative

I'm fond of normative ethics theories because I believe they provide an insightful philosophical basis for behavioral studies. I am especially interested in understanding how people make decisions in the face of moral dilemmas – situations that are not strictly black and white but a mix of different shades of gray – but sometimes I wonder if there are limitations on prescriptive ethics in those situations?

Depending on the nature of a moral dilemma, most of us are likely to experience shifts in our ethical value prioritization, which may in turn influence our ethical decision-making. To me, this variability is one of the most exciting yet challenging things about doing research on ethical decision-making, and it often reminds me of this quote by Spencer W. Kimball that I chanced upon a while ago:

*A dozen times a day we come to a fork in the road and must decide which way we will go... It is important to get our ultimate objectives clearly in mind so that we do not become distracted at each fork in the road by the irrelevant questions: Which is the easier or more pleasant way? Or, which way are others going?*

What should our "ultimate objectives" be as ethicists? Are there, or should there be, systematic ways in which we educate our students on *how* to make ethical decisions in the face of moral dilemmas?

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