

Ethical News

The newsletter of the AEJMC
Media Ethics Division

Summer 2006
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SAN FRANCISCO!
MED program
on Pages 4-5

on head
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'Shift' Happens

Mathew Cabot
PF&R chair

Is it wrong to participate in a chatroom discussion about your product or company and not identify your association? Would you do it, though, if you were sure you wouldn't get caught?

Last spring, I asked these questions and others to 130 public relations students from three California universities. My goal was to test two important components of moral functioning: *moral sensitivity* and *moral character*.

The *moral sensitivity* portion of the questionnaire listed seven public relations industry-specific

behaviors and asked students whether those behaviors were wrong. All seven behaviors were taken directly from PRSA's code of ethics, which uses them as examples of code violations. Respondents were given the option of choosing "Yes," "No," or "It depends."

To measure *moral character*, I listed the same seven behaviors again and this time asked: "Would you do the following if you were sure you would not get caught?" This section was designed to detect a shift in attitudes when presented with the guarantee of anonymity.

Thomas Likona followed a similar methodology in his 1991 study on academic cheating. He found that the percentages between those

What our PR students are willing to do when no one is watching

who thought cheating was wrong and those who would do it anyway shifted – "sometimes dramatically." That led Likona to conclude: "While nearly all students judged the various forms of cheating to be wrong, significantly fewer were sufficiently committed to the value of academic honesty to refrain from cheating when they could get away with it."

In my study, I developed a "shift score" to measure the number of times a respondent changed his or her response in the second section based on the guarantee of anonymity. For example, if respondents agreed that a particular behavior was wrong in the first section but

See 'SHIFT HAPPENS,' Page 2

Some parting thoughts

Erik Ugland
division head

In the fall edition of *Ethical News*, I suggested that we were in the midst of a Renaissance period for media ethics and that public, professional and academic interest in these issues had never been so high. I still believe that, and I suspect most of you do as well.

What is less clear is how we, as both scholars and division members, can best seize the opportunities that this moment presents, both for our own purposes and for the benefit of the field.

Our division members, and many who are not yet members, have certainly done their part to advance the Media Ethics Division over the past year. MED membership has increased, our panel lineup for San Francisco is outstanding and our paper submissions increased by more than 40 percent!

But we should now start looking beyond MED and AEJMC for other ways to capitalize on this surging interest. Here are just a few:

Research

Begin discussions with book publishers about expanding their support for media ethics scholarship. Although there is considerable interest among publishers in media ethics textbooks, there is substantially less support for

See 'PARTING THOUGHTS,' Page 6

First tough call teaches student about teaching

Sean McDonald
journalism major
Univ. of Colorado at Boulder

Three days after 14-year-old Betsy Santon was killed in a tragic car accident in June, I found myself at an unavoidable crossroad most aspiring journalists dread.

As a full-time intern at the *Daily Camera* in Boulder this summer, I'm treated not like a student learning the ropes, but as a reporter relied on to carry equal weight.

And like any reporter working a "night cops" shift after someone dies, it was my job to bring Betsy

Santon to life again in 15 inches or less. It's a story most print writers have done, right?

Except, this being my first reporting job, I had never made those calls, never talked to heart-broken friends and family. I had never been forced to ask the questions that my teachers had spent so many hours trying to explain to frightened students.

But now it was my turn, and the story wasn't going anywhere.

I blankly stared at my office phone just three feet away, head pounding, sweat accumulating, feeling like the walls were falling in on me. So I tried to slowly talk my way through it.

All right, Sean – just dial, push

the buttons, make the calls and ask the questions. We've talked about this in class.

I dial Nikki Lindow, a best friend of Betsy's.

Be calm but sympathetic. Ask questions, but let them talk. Don't be pushy, but don't give up too easily.

Ring, Ring.
Don't panic. Stay focused. Keep things simple.

Ring, Ring.
"Hello, this is Nikki."
Oh no. It's all gone now. I'm done. Finished. I am blank.

"Hi, my name is Sean McDonald; I'm a reporter with the *Daily Camera* in Boulder."

See 'TEACHING,' Page 2

Many PR students' morals 'shift' in anonymous venues

'SHIFT HAPPENS,' from Page 1

indicated in the second section they would perform that behavior, they each received a "point." Likewise, if they marked "It depends" in the first section, but then said they would perform that behavior if they would not get caught, they received a point. The points were then totaled to produce a "shift score." The "shift score" is based on the presumption that the stronger one's moral character the more likely he or she would make the right (i.e., moral) choice regardless of whether someone was watching.

The results of the study were interesting – and disturbing – both in terms of moral sensitivity and moral character.

In the first section, many of the students did not correctly identify certain behaviors as wrong, even though all of them are clear violations of PRSA's code of ethics. While it may be argued that identifying those behaviors as wrong

requires specialized knowledge, at least a few of these behaviors seem to be intuitively wrong.

The opening question is a good example. Nearly 70 percent of the students thought it was OK to participate in a chatroom discussion about your product or company and not identify your association. In fact, in a follow-up interview, one student said she had been instructed during her internship to do just that on behalf of a client.

Is that an example of a lack of sensitivity to industry-specific code violations, or an underdeveloped moral conscience that doesn't recognize the behavior as being wrong?

This assumes, of course, that the student believes deception is inherently wrong.

The response to another behavior listed on the questionnaire may indicate that's not the case.

When asked whether

"spinning a situation to make it look better than it is" is wrong, only a third of the respondents said "yes."

That means the other two-thirds said it was either not wrong or it depended on the situation.

When I shared these results in my media ethics course – with a mix of journalism and PR students – there was general dismay. "Isn't that what PR people do?" asked one student, "to make things appear better than they are?"

As for the moral character portion of the questionnaire, there were about 100 instances in which respondents changed their minds about a particular behavior when they were guaranteed they could do it with impunity. Seventy percent of the students at two universities, and about half at the third, registered at least one shift.

One possible interpretation of these "character shifts" is that the majority of these students are motivated by the external threat of punishment, rather than the internal reward of virtue.

As Likona says, individuals need "to be able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe to be right." What is particularly disturbing about these "shift scores" is that most of the students said they would perform or consider performing a behavior they knew was wrong – simply based on the idea they would not get caught.

If they are not committed to even the idea of doing the right thing and living a virtuous life, how could they possibly be expected to actually do the right thing in the face of real-world temptations and pressures?

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First tough call to a grieving friend teaches student about teaching

'TEACHING,' from Page 1

And then, despite the anxiety, the nerves and a telephone that wouldn't stop vibrating in my chattering hand, it all just ... flowed.

I made many more phone calls to friends, coaches and family and wrote the story a few hours later. My state of mind had completely reversed, and, honestly, I felt like I had done a great job.

So was I prepared as well as I could have been? Were my teachers to thank, or was I just the recipient of divine intervention from the journalism gods?

The answer brought me back to a conversation I had with a classmate last semester.

Walking home after an afternoon reporting class, conversation found its way to the quality of journalism classes at CU. My classmate, who is very intelligent, and at the time was much more experienced than me, immediately offered up a strong stance.

"They aren't telling us how to do anything," she said. "I feel unprepared, like I'm supposed to do things I don't know how to do."

Without too much real-world experience at the time, I very passively bounced some short words back but settled the conversation into the back of my mind.

But after making the hard phone calls, doing the things all young journalist dread to do, and then reading the story in the paper the next morning, I now have input.

My classmate had been hoping to receive an education that is simply impossible.

There is no such thing as a fool-proof, awe-inspiring formula guaranteed to produce great journalism. A teacher can give his or her best effort (and I've seen some try) at standing in front of a class and feeding students some sort of step-by-step method, but more often than not it's just a waste of time.

The stories that make you put the paper down and think, "Wow, that was damn good," are

almost always the ones that are of a style all their own.

Sure, we need to be taught the "lede," the "nut graf" and that thing called the "inverted pyramid." But those are only the tools needed to create a style that makes a story interesting, not the other way around.

The carefully chosen adjectives of a good story, or how to ask the right questions of sobbing friends, can't come from a book or a teacher. Becoming a good journalist is about finding those things out for yourself, and good teaching is all about showing students the ways to find them.

And I think that is what I have been taught in my two years of journalism classes at CU, and why I think I've already had some success.

The point is, when I called Nikki Lindow, I had no idea what to do. But, as strange and as contradictory as it sounds, I knew exactly how to do it.

That's good teaching.

Seminar opens students' eyes to media in France

Lee Anne Peck
research chair

The French media interpret the word “freedom” differently than do U.S. communicators.

“There is a radical difference,” said Waddick Doyle, professor and chairman of the American University of Paris Department of International Communications. “With the French, it is ‘freedom to’ but in the U.S., it’s ‘freedom from.’”

For example, in France, the question is “‘How should we show the dead bodies?’ but in the U.S., the question is ‘What can we show?’”, Doyle told U.S. students and their professors during the International Media Seminar at AUP during the last week of May.

The Center for the Study of International Communications hosts media seminars at AUP in March and May each year. Participants meet with both French and American communicators working in Paris.

Doyle said that although the French media distributes news, they must also distribute culture and educate the citizens of France. “Having education, having culture – when an individual is formed and trained, then he or she is free,” he said.

During their week in Paris, students and professors learned about the many similarities and differences between the U.S. and French media – in advertising, public relations, television and newspapers – and also about freedom of the press.

Americans in Paris

“How people view or read something doesn’t matter anymore,” said Eileen Bastianelli, founding president of Milestone Media, based in Paris. “What will the (advertising) world look like in five years?”

She said she believes more advertisers will place their products in entertainment venues such as TV programming and movies because of technology and upcoming social habits.

The question is, Bastianelli said, “‘What is the best way to present our message?’ It’s something to think about – it’s about any kind of screen. ... Convergence can serve other indus-

tries, not just news.”

Press attaché Lynne Platt of the U.S. Embassy of Paris encouraged students interested in public relations to consider working for the state department and to take the Civil Service exam. “The major characteristics a person needs today are energy and curiosity,” said Platt, who majored in political science as an undergraduate.

Jim Bitterman, a CNN senior correspondent and CNN’s only correspondent in Paris, noted the loss of U.S. reporters overseas. “You don’t know a lot of the (international) news because there are no correspondents; for instance, ABC

World News has five international correspondents and three of them are in London,” Bitterman said, noting that at one time there were nine network correspondents in Paris, but now he is the only one.

A 20-year Paris correspondent for *People* magazine, Cathy Nolan, lamented that “the ordinary human interest story has lost value.” Nolan noted that there is no end in sight for celebrity journalism. “If you

give people crack and they like it, do you give more?” she asked participants. Nolan, who covered Princess Diana’s car-crash death for *People*, said that “celebrities feed this frenzy because they won’t tell the truth.”

Nolan also noted that entertainment was beginning to blur with news in France, too, and asked the difficult question: “As media people, should we encourage such celebrity reporting?” *People*’s content used to be more like *Newsweek*’s, she said, but now it’s been “dumbed down.”

The *International Herald Tribune*, based in Paris and the first global newspaper that is now owned exclusively by The New York Times Co., is going multi-platform because young people don’t read newspapers anymore, said Katherine Knorr, *IHT* assistant managing editor. The newspaper, however, refuses to dumb down, she said. The newspaper’s stories remain long and informative, she said, both online and in hard copy.

The French

The leading TV broadcaster in France, France

Television, has plans to start an international news channel similar to CNN and the BBC by the end of 2006.

Karina Chabour, formerly with French TV and now with the recently created and yet to be broadcast (or named) international news network, said, “President (Jacques) Chirac wants to present a French view of world events.” Chabour provided an example for the need for such a view: the fall riots outside Paris in Muslim neighborhoods were depicted in other media as racial and linked to radical Islamists when, in fact, the riots were more about what the protesters believe to be social injustices in France.

The new station, which will broadcast in French and English and eventually in Arabic and Spanish, is in the process of hiring 150 young multimedia journalists. Although funded by the government, Chabour stressed “the government will have no influence – if it did, the channel would have no credibility.”

She also said that she and her TV colleagues were that very afternoon discussing “What are our values?” and would begin the process of creating an ethics code for the station.

Finally, some French newspapers are losing money – just like some U.S. papers. *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *Liberation* are all financially troubled. Francois Sergent, a columnist and editor at the French national newspaper *Liberation*, spoke to seminar participants only days before the paper’s recent investor, Edouard de Rothschild, demanded that Serge July, *Liberation*’s longtime chairman and co-founder, step down.

The newspaper was co-founded with Jean-Paul Sartre in 1973. Sergent explained that the paper was “far from the Maoist ideas of it beginning, but still a bit left.” Today, he said, the paper is just trying to survive. Rothschild, he said, is “a symbol of capitalism . . . and I don’t know where (the paper) will be in five years.”

News from France in mid-June, however, reported that morale among the 280-member *Liberation* staff has suffered since the news that July would step down. The front page of the June 14 edition of the paper included a letter of support for July. The message read: “For 33 years Serge July ... has been the guarantor of our editorial independence. Throughout this time he has been a bulwark against every intrusion, every outside influence that endangered our integrity and values.”

So, what will happen to these journalists? Will their freedoms be compromised? Back in the states, students and professors alike will take note of what happens.

For more information about the annual international media seminars, visit www.pariscenter.org.

During their week in Paris, students and professors learned about the many similarities and differences between the U.S. and French media – in advertising, public relations, television and newspapers – and also about freedom of the press.



Media Ethics Division Program

AEJMC, August 2-5, 2006, San Francisco, Calif.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 1

1 to 6 p.m.

Workshop Session:

New Trends in Teaching Media Ethics

Moderating/Presiding: William A. Babcock, California State, Long Beach, and Virginia Whitehouse, Whitworth

Panelists: Clifford Christians, Illinois

Lee Wilkins, Missouri

Renita Coleman, Texas

Mathew Cabot, California State, Long Beach

Peggy Kuhr, Kansas

Louis Hodges, Washington & Lee

Prior registration required.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 2

8:15 to 9:45 a.m.

Media Ethics Division

Refereed Paper Research Session:

Analyzing Advocacy: Issues in Advertising and PR Ethics

Moderating/Presiding: W. Glenn Griffin, Southern Methodist

• *The Virtuous Advocate versus The Pathological Partisan: A Model of Opposing Archetypes of Public Relations and Advertising Practitioners**

Sherry Baker, Brigham Young

• *Propaganda Analysis: A Case Study of the U.S. Department of Education's Minority Outreach Program Promoting the No Child Left Behind Act*

Bonnie Ann Cain, Oklahoma State

• *Political Consulting: The Rise of Professionalism, The Question of Ethics***

Michelle Donald, Oregon

• *Loath to Admit: Pressures on Ethical Disclosure of News Release Sources****

Peter Simmons, Charles Sturt-Bathurst

* *Second Place, Faculty Paper*

** *Runner-up, Carol Burnett/University of Hawaii/AEJMC Prize*

*** *Third Place, Faculty Paper*

1:30 to 3 p.m.

Media Ethics Division

Refereed Paper Research Session:

Examining the Credibility of News and News Messengers

Moderating/Presiding: Lee Anne Peck, Northern Colorado

• *Anonymous Sources and Readership Credibility: A Qualitative Investigation of the Barriers to Newspaper Believability*

Tom Hrach and Stephen Siff, Ohio

• *Truth and Transparency: Bloggers' Challenge to Professional Autonomy in Defining and Enacting Two Journalistic Norms*†*

Jane B. Singer, Iowa

• *Confidence in the Press, Attitudes About Press Freedom and the Third-Person Effect: A Preliminary Exploration Using Secondary Survey Data*

Derigan Silver, North Carolina at Chapel Hill

• *Stakeholder Theory and Media Management: An Ethical Framework for News Company Executives***

Reuben Stern, Missouri

* Top Faculty Paper

** Winner, Carol Burnett/University of Hawaii/AEJMC Award Prize

† Winner, Professional Relevance Award

5 to 6:30 p.m.

Radio-Television Journalism and Media Ethics Divisions

Teaching Panel Session:

Covering Katrina: How to Prepare Student Journalists for the Story of Their Lives

Moderating/Presiding: Mary Blue, Loyola, New Orleans

Panelists: William Davie, Louisiana at Lafayette
Nancy McKenzie, Loyola, New Orleans
Kris Wilson, Emory

Lynda Kraxberger, Missouri

Erin Richards, Missouri

THURSDAY, AUGUST 3

8:15 to 9:45 a.m.

Media Ethics Division and Civic and Citizen Journalism Interest Group

Teaching Panel Session:

Collegiate Collaboration with Community-Based Media Criticism and Citizen Journalism

Moderating/Presiding: Christopher A. Vaughn, Nascent Journalism Project, Santa Clara

Topics and Panelists:

• *Helping Citizens Be Involved: Usability Factors in Teaching Computer-Based Journalism Courses*
Tony DeMars, Sam Houston State

• *New America Media: Bringing Together Community Journalism Resources for National Impact*

Sandy Close, Pacific News Services, New American Media

• *Citizen Journalism in the Bay Area*

Dan Gillmor, California, Berkeley and bayosphere.com

• *Grade the News: Holding Local Journalism Accountable*

John McManus, Grade the News, San José State

• *Project Censored: Student-Based Media Accountability*

Peter Phillips, Project Censored, Sonoma State

11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.

Magazine, Media Ethics and Advertising Divisions

PF&R Panel Session:

Product Placement: Good or Evil?

Moderating/Presiding: Barbara S. Reed, Rutgers

Panelists:

Edward Wasserman, Washington and Lee

Roy Harris, American Society of Business Press

Editors, CFO Magazine

Frank Zazza, ITVX

Patric M. Verrone, Writers Guild of America, West

1:30 to 3 p.m.

Media Ethics Division

Scholar-to-Scholar paper presentations

• *A Theory of Journalism*

Sandra Borden, Western Michigan

• *Walking the Border Line: Press Coverage of Activist Groups on the Arizona/Mexico Border*

Cari Lee Skogberg Eastman, Colorado at Boulder

• *The Green River Confession: News Treatment of Victims and Co-Victims*

Sue Lockett John, Washington

• *To Publish or Not to Publish: The Muhammad Cartoon Dilemma*

Jenn Burleson Mackay, Alabama

• *Dimensions of Journalistic Messenger Transparency*

Chris Roberts, South Carolina

• *The TARES Test as an Ethical Analysis Tool: Assessing the Ethicality of Direct Response Television Programs*

Ken Waters and Jamie Melton, Pepperdine

• *Media Literacy as Trust Builder*

Wendy Wyatt, St. Thomas

Discussants: John Watson, American, and Stephanie Craft, Missouri

FRIDAY, AUGUST 4

8:15 to 9:45 a.m.

Law and Media Ethics Divisions

PF&R Panel Session: The Legal and Ethical Implications of Privacy in the Physical and Virtual Worlds

Moderating/Presiding: Anthony L. Fargo, Indiana

Panelists:

Don R. Pember, Washington

Dale Herbeck, Boston

Steven A. Smith, editor, *The Spokesman-Review*

Patrick Lee Plaisance, Colorado State

Amy Gajda, Illinois

1:30 to 3 p.m.

Media Ethics and Law Divisions

PF&R Panel Session: Secrecy and Truth Telling in Mass Communication

Moderating/Presiding: William A. Babcock, California State, Long Beach

Panelists:

Don R. Pember, Washington

Matthew D. Bunker, Alabama

Louis Hodges, Washington & Lee

Charles N. Davis, National Freedom of Information Coalition, Missouri

Donald M. Gillmor, Minnesota

3:15 to 4:45 p.m.

Media Ethics Division

Refereed Paper Research Session: Secrets and the Media

Moderating/Presiding: Jay Black, South Florida

• *Separating Rumors from News but not Entirely from Journalism*

Karen Boyajy and Lee Wilkins, Missouri

• *Transparency: An Assessment of the Kantian Roots of a Key Element in Media Ethics Practice**

Patrick Plaisance, Colorado State

• *"Secret" Casualties: Images of Injury and Death in the Iraq War Across Media Platforms*

B. William Silcock and Carol Schwalbe, Arizona State, and Susan Keith, Rutgers

• *Construction of the Truth and Destruction of A Million Little Pieces: Framing in the Editorial Response to the James Frey Case*

Nicole Smith, North Carolina at Chapel Hill

* Top Paper, Special Call on "Secrets and the Media"

5 to 6:30 p.m.

Media Ethics and Newspaper Divisions

PF&R Panel Session:

No Laughing Matter: Editorial Cartoons and Disasters

Moderating/Presiding: Bill Reader, Ohio

Panelists:

Steve Kelley, *New Orleans Times-Picayune*

Rex Babin, *Sacramento Bee*

Don Asmussen, *San Francisco Chronicle*

6:45 to 8:15 p.m.

Media Ethics Division

Business Session: Members' Meeting

Moderating/Presiding: Erik Ugland, Marquette

SATURDAY, AUGUST 5

10 to 11:30 a.m.

Media Ethics and Radio-Television Journalism Divisions

PF&R Panel Session: Al-Jazeera and Truth

Moderating/Presiding: Stephanie Craft, Missouri

Topic and Panelists:

• *Al-Jazeera: The Story of the Network That is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism*

Mohammed El-Nawawy, Georgia State, and Adel Iskandar, Kentucky

Respondents: Clifford Christians, Illinois, and Ed Freedman, Zayed

11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.

Media Ethics Division

Research Panel Session: Whither Global Journalism Ethics? Issues and Opportunities

Moderating/Presiding: Stephen J. A. Ward, British Columbia

Panelists:

Kaarle Nordenstreng, Tampere, Finland

Clifford Christians, Illinois

Shakuntala Rao, SUNY, Plattsburgh

The Media Ethics Division needs YOU!

If you want to get more involved in the Media Ethics Division, please plan to attend the division's business meeting at AEJMC, 6:45 p.m. Friday, Aug. 4. Check the AEJMC program for location.

Time for MED members to look beyond AEJMC for opportunities

PARTING THOUGHTS, from Page 1

book-length scholarly works in our field. We ought to work with publishers to take advantage of the burgeoning interest in these areas, and perhaps try to persuade one of them to launch a book series on ethics in the mass media, or, more broadly, ethics in communication.

Curricula

Work with deans and directors of communications programs to ensure that ethics is part of all communications curricula — ideally as a free-standing course (or two) and not merely as a component of other courses or as part of a law/ethics hybrid.

For those programs that already have a free-standing course, we should urge them to make it required, at least for students in the mass communication areas.

MED might be able to help by writing a letter of support for faculty seeking to persuade their colleagues. We might also consider drafting a short document, made available on our Web site,

spelling out the best arguments. This is could be presented to administrators, or could simply be used a reference by faculty who are trying to build a case for change.

Teaching

Help your colleagues recognize that every course is an ethics course and give them some specific ideas about how they can incorporate ethics issues, discussions and exercises into their non-ethics courses.

Again, MED can help. We might start by establishing a space on our Web site to archive people's best teaching ideas.

Perhaps we could even get the ball rolling by sponsoring a "best practices" competition next year in Washington, D.C.

Outreach

Continue to make our presence known in our communities and around the country by writing Op/Ed pieces, serving as sources for news sto-

ries, writing articles and commentaries for trade publications and making presentations to community groups. We can use our expertise to help check media excesses, to help educate the public about media practices and ethical norms, and to help legitimize our field.

Organizational Leadership

Encourage other professional associations — BEA, ICA, etc. — to establish their own ethics divisions or interest groups.

This is a hard one. By supporting this we run the risk of too badly diffusing our work, leaving us without the critical mass of participants at any one conference to sustain robust paper competitions and programs.

But I think in the end an ethics division in ICA, for example, would serve less as competition for MED than as a home for many of the ethics-related papers already being presented in ICA's other divisions. It would also help establish a more international counterpart to MED.

These are just a few things that occur to me as my time as division head expires. I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to the work of the division this year. Your efforts have left no room for anyone to challenge the importance of this division in AEJMC or the centrality of ethics in mass communication research and education.

Work with deans and directors
of communications programs
to ensure that ethics
is part of all
communications curricula

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