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our MED pros!  
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# Ethical News

The newsletter of the AEJMC  
Media Ethics Division

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## Submitting a paper? It's all online

**Wendy Wyatt**  
Research chair

As you likely know, all AEJMC divisions are moving to electronic submissions this year, and the research chairs are looking forward to it. Keep in mind that papers not submitted through the submission Web site will not be reviewed.

Shortly after Feb.1, you'll be able to visit the AEJMC homepage (aejmc.org) and link to the submission site. From there, you can create a user account, view the call for papers for all divisions and preview the submission pages. When creating an account, make sure you indicate whether you're a faculty member or student because we'll use this information to determine top faculty and student papers. Once you've created an account, you'll receive an e-mail verification that reminds you of submission deadlines and gives a link to the site.

After you log in, access the main page to submit or edit a proposal, edit your personal

information or check messages from the research chair. Follow the on-screen instructions to enter the paper title and abstract and request A/V equipment.

.....Make sure your paper does not include the title/author page or any identifying information on the text pages. The system will recognize whose paper is being submitted by the login, and the title is entered manually. If a paper is received with a title/author page, it will need to be resubmitted by the author. Additionally, stay away from using your browser's "back" button; the system gives you links to navigate within the submission pages. If you run into problems, contact the division research chair.

Once you've submitted your paper, you can use the "Message Center" (accessed via the main page) to check the status of your submission.

Remember that the deadline for submissions is Sunday, April 1, at 11:59 p.m. (CST). You'll be notified of the status of your paper no later than May 20. As with all first efforts, we'll surely encounter minor bugs. So thanks in advance for your patience!

## Call for papers!

The Division is making a special call this year for papers that advance the development of ethical theory across the journalism and mass communication field (in research or teaching). The Division welcomes submissions that 1) incorporate ethical theory in media effects, media economics, strategic communication, critical/cultural studies or other areas in the field, 2) explore commonly used ethical theories in new ways, and/or 3)

See SPECIAL TOPIC, page 3

## Call for reviewers!

As submissions for our division continue to increase, our need for paper reviewers also grows. If you are not submitting a paper to the division this year, please consider serving as a reviewer. The electronic submission process should make reviewing easier than ever. If you're willing to serve, please contact Wendy Wyatt, MED research chair, at wnywatt@stthomas.edu.

# A culture of honor in J-schools?

## Reports of cheating in Columbia ethics course invite weighing of student codes

**Stephanie Craft**  
Division head

RadarOnline.com had the story first: The Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University was investigating allegations of cheating in its Critical Issues course. It had to be the delicious irony - the course deals largely with ethical issues - that propelled this otherwise rather insignificant story onto the pages of the New York Times and Washington Post. Certainly the irony wasn't lost on those who posted comments on

RadarOnline and other blogs repeating the old saw that "journalism ethics" is an oxymoron or joking that whoever had cheated ought to graduate with honors.

I hear those kinds of jokes all the time, especially when I tell someone outside the worlds of journalism and academe that I teach journalism ethics. But that's not really the point. Journalism is hardly alone among occupations that are the butt of jokes calling integrity into question - just ask a politician or a lawyer. The point also isn't to argue that the Columbia case suggests what we teach in our ethics courses, or how we teach it, is somehow faulty. Even if

that were true, the Columbia case is hardly proof. I cannot guarantee that my students will act on all the wisdom I try to impart in the classroom, only that I will make that wisdom as available and accessible to them as I can. The point, rather, is to consider what journalism educators can and should do to promote ethical behavior inside or outside the classroom.

Perhaps you and your colleagues have engaged in the discussion that comes up now and again among my colleagues at Missouri. What we need, we say, is an honor code. A code would communicate to students how important we consider academic integri-

ty to be. A code would indicate that we believe being dishonest in one's school work suggests one will be dishonest in journalistic work too - and that we feel a responsibility to the profession to avoid sending the ethically suspect into its midst. That's what we say. But how to act on it? No one thinks that writing an honor code and presenting it to students will magically create an ethically robust educational environment, just as no one thinks journalism ethics codes automatically beget saintly journalists. What we want is to create a culture of honor. But doesn't the creation of such a culture ultimately depend

See HONOR CODES, page 4

# Your research got you a teaching job. Now what?

## Pedagogy experts say culture change needed to reward good teachers

**Jack Breslin**  
Iona College

**J**ust because one has a doctoral degree in a subject doesn't mean that a newly minted assistant professor will be a success in the classroom.

Obviously a correct assumption, right? The "expert" professor also has to know how to teach the material.

Then why is there this acknowledged gap between research expertise and practical pedagogy in preparing future professors for the classroom? And how can working professors improve their teaching skills?

I interviewed two college teaching experts, Richard Felder, the Hoechst Celanese Professor Emeritus of Chemical Engineering at North Carolina State University, and Todd Zakrajsek, director of the Faculty Center for Innovative Teaching at Central Michigan University. Both conduct teaching effectiveness workshops for college faculty across the spectrum of academic disciplines.

Felder has conducted close to 300 teaching effectiveness workshops to faculty in the engineering and sciences. Since 1991, he and his wife, Roberta Brent, co-direct the National Effective Teaching Institute.

According to Felder, professors come to their workshops with similar concerns:

How can I be becoming a better lecturer (e.g. use of PowerPoints or not)?

\* How can I engage students in their own learning?

\* How can I get students to read the textbook before class?

\* What level should I be teaching at?

\* What's wrong with my exams?

\* Why are my evaluations so low?

\* How should I deal with cheating?

\* How can I improve by focusing on active, cooperative and problem-based learning, yet cover my syllabus?

While professors know their subject, they struggle with the delivery, Felder said.

"The strength of most professors is their expertise on course content," he said. "Their weakness is their lack of expertise on pedagogy, which they have never been trained in.

Felder said a change in the academic culture was needed. At research institutions, teaching should count more in the faculty reward system,

he said.

"It's not that administrators don't want their faculty to be good teachers-many just don't want them to spend a lot of time on their teaching or on instructional development that they could be spending generating proposals and writing papers," Felder said.

"Many a new faculty member has been warned that a teaching award is the 'kiss of death' insofar as tenure and promotion are concerned, and the warnings are not entirely unjustified. Professors who are excellent researchers and not completely disastrous teachers are routinely promoted (and often the disastrous ones are promoted as well), while professors who are

**Many a new faculty member has been warned that a teaching award is the 'kiss of death,' [but] more campuses are starting to make good teaching a necessary condition for tenure and promotion.'**

excellent teachers and merely adequate researchers often don't make it to the associate professor level and almost never make it to full professor."

Learning about teaching should be incorporated into the faculty culture, Felder said. Schools should develop enrichment workshops, improve methods for teaching evaluation, reward good teaching and provide incentives to attend national conferences with teaching elements. And the tide is slowly shifting.

"The good news is that these things are starting to happen," Felder said. "More and more campuses are starting to make good teaching a necessary condition for tenure and promotion, including for research superstars."

My interview with Todd Zakrajsek took place here at Iona College prior to his faculty workshop, "Teaching Well with Technology: A Focus on Learning."

While he agreed that most faculty come to the classroom unprepared, he said they can improve by focusing on some foundational areas of teaching, such as interacting with students in and out of the classroom. Some professors fail to recognize their basic responsibil-

ities, such as returning student telephone calls or e-mail messages.

"By and large, we have disciplinary knowledge down pretty well," Zakrajsek said. "That's what graduate school is all about - becoming very proficient in your area.

"Some of the areas we're not taught about are interaction with students. Dealing with students is one of those things that we all do basically the way we interact with individuals."

Improving one's interaction with students takes some extra effort, such as arriving early for class and chatting with students.

"Creating a good climate, a good atmosphere where it's just human beings interacting with one another, that's an important thing," said Zakrajsek, who is a cognitive behavioral psychologist. "By and large, faculty don't have a lot of training in that, but most faculty are pretty good at that."

Another foundational aspect he stressed is day-to-day course management, such as setting objectives, improving grading rubrics or posting grades on time.

"Some faculty struggle with that because the other thing that we're not taught is how to organize our lives," he explained. In addition to those two foundational areas, Zakrajsek emphasized instructional or course design.

"How do you design your course so that you're presenting it in such a way that the students really are going to learn what you want you hope they learn?" he said. "We key off from some of the basic problems faculty members tend to have."

For example, in his workshops professors often complain that students do not read assigned materials before class or even attend class. So Zakrajsek asks them how they can facilitate better study habits, such as daily quizzes or discussion groups.

The actual class experience must offer more than a lecture on class notes posted on Blackboard. Is there a collaborative learning environment?

"If students aren't coming to class, there's probably no value or very little value to coming to class," Zakrajsek said. "So what do you do?"

"That's all course design - how do you design a course to get what you want? And that's something that very, very few faculty understand or get any training whatsoever." Yet despite those weaknesses, Zakrajsek said most faculty "really, really want to teach well," but are afraid of their shortcomings or "letting students down."

# Aloha!

## 2007 colloquium in Hawaii to explore diversity

As part of a decade-long series aimed at enhancing scholarship in applied media ethics, the University of Hawai'i at Manoa will host the 2007 colloquium October 14-18 in Honolulu. The colloquium - eighth in the Colloquia 2000 series - will feature 10 fellows working in teams to explore the moral dimensions of negotiating intercultural issues in media.

Two of the fellows will be invited to represent differing cultural perspectives. The remaining eight fellows will be chosen through a competitive proposal process.

Selected fellows will receive travel expenses to cover airfare, accommodations and some meals. Fellows will stay on the University of Hawai'i at Manoa campus and have the opportunity to conduct their work in a culturally diverse setting and participate in programs and activities that will enrich, enlighten and enliven.

During the colloquium fellows will present their work to, and solicit feedback from, each other and the senior scholars who form the colloquium steering committee. An honorarium will be

awarded to subsequently completed papers, which will be given priority consideration for publication in the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*.

Proposals should focus on media and media practitioner roles, practices and responsibilities in the interface and interaction of dominant and indigenous value systems (i.e. host and occupying cultures); empowerment; authentic voices; and representations. The colloquium is less interested in studies of a descriptive nature of comparative media structures or case studies that lack an element of intercultural interaction. All proposals should feature a solid foundation in ethical theory or the application of normative ethics.

Colloquium hosts are eager to explore how our traditional Western-based media ethics can be informed by other cultural systems and extend our scholarship beyond the traditional lines of journalism, public relations and advertising into other forms of popular culture such as cinema, digital platforms and distribution, video games, television and music.

Applicants may apply as indi-

viduals, in which case colloquium organizers will pair them with another applicant. Or they may apply as part of already formed teams. In the selection process, preference will be given to creating teams that are able to combine disciplines, that include a junior scholar working with a senior scholar, or that bring cultural perspectives to the table that are fresh to the discourse, or have been in the past minimized or marginalized.

Once selected, teams will begin to exchange ideas and develop a single first draft to be presented at the colloquium.

Applications for fellowships should include the following:

- \* A brief (500 words) abstract of a proposal for an original paper to be written exclusively for this colloquium and subsequent publication
- \* A CV
- \* Notation, if any, of a desired team membership
- \* Notation of whether you have previously applied for, or participated in, the colloquium series. (This is for data purposes only. It will neither privilege nor prejudice an application.)

The deadline for proposals to

## Paper Call!

SPECIAL TOPIC, from page 1

examine ethical perspectives that seldom appear in media ethics scholarship or teaching. Top papers will be scheduled for a special panel session at the AEJMC convention in Washington D.C. and will be considered for publication in the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*. Special call papers must be marked "Developing Ethical Theory Across the Field" on the title page.

be received is March 7, 2007.

Email or send submissions to:

Tom Brislin

Academy for Creative Media

University of Hawai'i

2550 Campus Road

Honolulu, HI 96822

Phone inquiries: 808-956-3788

Email: tbrislin@hawaii.edu

The colloquium, one of the Colloquia 2000 series in Applied Media Ethics, is sponsored by the University of Hawai'i at Manoa Academy for Creative Media and School of Communications through the Carol Burnett Fund for Responsible Journalism; Brigham Young University, the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., the Media Ethics Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, and others.

## Media ethics offerings at APPE's 07 convention in Cincinnati

Ethics scholars from a variety of disciplines and universities will meet in Cincinnati in February for the annual meeting of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics. And MED will be there too, holding its mid-year meeting in conjunction with the APPE conference, which runs February 22-25. To register or for more information, go to <http://www.indiana.edu/~appe/>.

Here's a closer look at these offerings as well as other programming of interest to media ethics folks:

\* The "Who is a Journalist?" panel, featuring participants in last fall's colloquium, is scheduled for Friday afternoon. Panelists include Wendy Wyatt of St. Thomas, Jennifer Jacobs

Henderson of Trinity University, Sandra Borden of Western Michigan University, and Arthur S. Hayes of Fordham University.

\* On Friday morning, Deni Elliott of the University of South Florida will present a paper titled "Getting Mill Right."

\* A panel titled "The Diogenes Dilemma: Finding Moral Exemplars in Public Relations" is scheduled for Saturday morning. Panelists are Sherry L. Baker of Brigham Young University, Deborah Copeland-Bloom of APR Public Relations, Pamela Gilchrist Corson of the University of Cincinnati, Helio Fred Garcia of New York University, Barbara Greene of Logos Consulting Group and Susan Walton of Brigham Young.

\* The Saturday program also features two

linked sessions on privacy and the public sphere, the first focusing on theoretical considerations, the second on practical concerns. In the second session, David Boeyink of Indiana University will present on the topic, "What Journalists Do When Private Moments Invade Public Spaces."

\* Also on Saturday, David Craig of the University of Oklahoma will participate in an "Author Meets the Critics" session. Edward Wasserman of Washington & Lee University and Jon Dilts of Indiana University will comment on Craig's new book, "The Ethics of the Story: Using Narrative Techniques Responsibly in Journalism." Craig also will be participating in the "Lunch with an Author" session that day.

# Might student codes foster a culture of honor?

HONOR CODES, *from page 1*

on the students themselves? Certainly a top-down approach feels just a little sketchy.

The incentive to figure all this out goes beyond just making ourselves feel better about upholding high standards. Honor codes, research suggests, may actually be associated with lower levels of cheating. (See McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield, 2001, for an overview.) Among the possible explanations for this finding: Codes eliminate grey areas, thereby limiting the rationalizing students can do about cheating behavior. And codes, to the extent that they place responsibility on students for detection and enforcement, are constant reminders of the importance of integrity. The type of institution (large or small, private or public), as well as how an honor code is implemented and other contextual factors can affect the results. Even so, it's worth considering that, given these general findings, perhaps there is no downside to pushing for an honor code.

Honor codes are not uncommon in the Ivy League and at other elite institutions. Stanford, Princeton, Dartmouth, and the University of Virginia each has an honor system featuring some combination of signed pledges on exams and other coursework and a student-run honor court. Some discourage or even prohibit faculty proctoring of exams on the premise that students taking the exam are on their honor. But these honor systems also are part of the lengthy history and tradition of the schools - Princeton's

honor system was instituted in 1893 - which no doubt has an impact on how the code is perceived by students. What would it mean to start from scratch?

My own institution, the University of Missouri, created an honor pledge a few years ago that reads: "I strive to uphold the University values of respect, responsibility, discovery, and excellence. On my honor, I pledge that I have

neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on this work." This is great as far as it goes. However, it is unclear to me how widely known this pledge is, even among faculty. There is no requirement for the pledge to appear on exam bluebooks or even in course syllabi. And, as a journalism educator, I find myself wanting something that is specific to journalism students.

New York University's journalism department might be on to something. The department requires its students to sign an "ethics pledge" to receive a grade in a journalism course. The pledge reads, in part, "A scholar's mission is to push forward the boundaries of knowledge; a journalist's mission is to serve the public by seeking out and reporting the facts as accurately as possible. Good journalists and scholars share a commitment to the same principle: integrity in their work."

I would welcome hearing from you, Media Ethics Division members, about honor codes or pledges at your schools and what you think about the promise of such codes more generally. Maybe it's just the optimism of the New Year talking, but I'm inclined to think that creating an honor code specifically for journalism students could be a seed from which a culture of honor might grow.

McCabe, D.L., Trevino, L.K., & Butterfield, K.D. (2001). Cheating in academic institutions: A decade of research. *Ethics & Behavior* 11 (3), 219-232.

## Where to find honor codes

### New York University Dept. of Journalism

<http://www.journalism.nyu.edu/ethics/>

### Stanford University

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/guiding/honorcode.htm>

### University of Virginia

<http://www.virginia.edu/honor/intro.html>

### Dartmouth University

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~deancoll/documents/handbook/conduct/standards/honor.html>

### Princeton University

<http://www.princeton.edu/~honor/introduction.htm>

### University of Missouri

<http://academicintegrity.missouri.edu/honor-pledge/>

# MED firms up range of panels for D.C.

**Elizabeth A. Skewes**  
Vice head/program chair

The August convention in Washington already is shaping up to be an interesting and inviting one for the Media Ethics Division. At December's midwinter meeting in New Orleans, the division used its chips to find slots for four research paper sessions, one scholar-to-scholar paper session and 10 panels - plus, the division will be taking part in a mini-plenary session with members from the Federal Communications Commission.

The FCC session, which is scheduled for Thursday, Aug. 9, at 3:15 p.m., currently is planning to feature FCC Chairman Kevin Martin and Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein. Media Management and Economics is leading the session, with help from MED, Law and Policy, Entertainment Studies, and Communication Technology.

MED also is working with the Small Programs Interest Group on a "hot topics" panel, being held on Friday, Aug. 10, at 3:15 p.m. So what's it about? Well, that's what makes it so exciting. We don't know yet. The idea is to hold off until April or May and see what unanticipated

events have occurred that raise ethical questions about media practice. Stay tuned for more information on the topic and the panelists.

We'll be involved in a couple of sessions that focus on academic scholarship. One, being held on Thursday, Aug. 9, at 10 a.m., will feature editors from some of our discipline's leading journals talking about their view of ethics scholarship, which often is not data driven, and how they see it fitting with their journals. The other, being held on Saturday, Aug. 11, at 8:15 a.m., will look at the best and worst practices in academic scholarship. The co-sponsor for both of these panels is the Communication Theory and Methodology Division.

Working with the Entertainment Studies Interest Group, we'll have two panels that look at the intersection of popular culture and media ethics. The first, "Journalism Ethics Goes to the Movies," is a panel that's being coordinated by Joe Saltzman, director of the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture at USC. It will examine how journalistic ethics are portrayed in several well-known films. The second, scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 11, at 3:30 p.m., is a teaching panel that will focus on how journalism educators can use movies, television and music to reach students with important lessons about media ethics.

A second teaching panel is slated for Sunday, Aug. 12, at 11:45 a.m. This one, co-sponsored by Interna- See DC SESSIONS, page 7

# Ethical journalism of the future: A manifesto

Report on the industry offers valuable teaching ideas for our students

Lee Wilkins

University of Missouri

To paraphrase the President, journalism has taken "a thumpin'" lately. That means media ethics instructors, one of the places where "good" and "hope" emerge in the curriculum, are facing tough classroom questions.

How to provide a vision for the future—one of the most common goals of ethics instruction—is becoming increasingly urgent. It is tempting for students and faculty to see technology—such as convergence—as the answer to some far more systemic questions. But, as teachers, it's difficult to find a toe-hold into a conversation that must, by necessity, include more than technique and individual-level decision making.

Geneva Overholser, former newspaper editor and now the Curtis B. Hurley Chair in public affairs reporting at the University of Missouri, is attempting to provide such an intellectual entre. What's better is that Overholser's "On behalf of journalism: A manifesto for change" provides a wonderful teaching opportunity precisely because there's a set of voices it omits: our students.

Disclosure: I, too, teach at the University of Missouri. However, I was not among the nationally known panelists Overholser and the Annenberg Public Policy Center summoned to discuss the profession's future. Overholser and I have discussed the project, however. And, yes, my most recent research is mentioned—as is the research of several of our media ethics division colleagues. And, no, the University of Missouri didn't pay for the work—Annenberg did. The 20-page document must be accessed through the Annenberg Public Policy Center Web site.

So, here's what you will find, as well as some teaching opportunities.

The opening five pages discuss corporate realities—from a largely management and stockholder point of view. Everybody knows that circulation and viewership is down, that web hits are up but that the business model that captures these facts has yet to take hold. What's missing—a discussion of starting salaries and benefits, of the amount of money organizations are willing to invest in continuing education, any discussion of work hours and assignments that classroom instructors know is the core of soon-to-be professionals' concerns. Stakeholders, in addition to stockholders, are mentioned, but it is unclear how one might integrate them

into the financial and accounting structure.

The teachable assignment: What would it take—from the worms' eye view—to make journalism as financially rewarding to those entering the profession as it does to current stockholders? What would that mean for the bottom line? Asking students to respond to those questions, and to link them with concept of distributive justice, would be a great start. They could interview local journalists, do some qualitative work about newsroom reward systems—in short, report and analyze the work life of their contemporaries and then suggest changes.

But while the manifesto begins from a largely establishment stance, it does not remain there. Overholser and her colleagues suggest that Americans invent and invest their time in

Geneva Overholser gathers some provocative ideas about where journalists should go from here. For media ethics students, her manifesto offers a way to ground theory in practical approaches to some critical questions:

*How can journalism be attractive to both stockholders and stakeholders? How might media ownership structures be changed to promote responsible content?*

demonstration projects—everything from non-profit media outlets to a more open role for government.

The teachable assignment: What would such projects look like, and how would they work? Students could begin by analyzing their campus media outlets (most of which look a lot like non-profits to university administrators), by examining the business models that might be implemented in various social network systems, by trying to determine whether technology could make some difference. Students who can't quite break free of the First Amendment could see how government support works in other countries, from the venerable BBC to the more problematic government-owned and

licensed broadcast outlets in sub-Saharan Africa. What are the virtues and vices of such systems? Could legislation for a diversity of ownership work in the United States as it has in some European countries? What duties do employers and employees owe one another?

Having taken on structure, the manifesto turns to content. Here students will recognize some of the standard debates about the role for objectivity. Asking them to graft an epistemological understanding of the nature of truth to these debates is an obvious but maybe worthwhile exercise. Perhaps more subtle is using a discussion of objectivity to tease out what journalists' relationship with their audience is, could and should be. The manifesto has some provocative ideas here—including the notion that journalists should speak out for themselves and a discussion of professionalism focusing on whether journalists should be credentialed. The manifesto considers "who is a journalist"—a question that allows students with their energetic participation in social networks to take on from a participant/observer point of view. Ethical constructs of reciprocity, benevolence and duty certainly would enter any such discussion.

There are two additional teachable sections: Propositions and Next Steps. Considering the scholars who helped produce the document, it would be naïve to suggest that it is uninformed by ethical theory. But, asking students to delineate the link between ethical theory to propositions such as, "A greater role for nonprofits...could help lift all media" could make theory come alive in the newsroom as well as the classroom. Under next steps—for this generation of students who have been so thoroughly and frequently tested—what would "emulate national board for teacher certification to provide credential" actually accomplish? Who would be allowed to walk through that door? Who might just as likely be left out? Ask students to develop such a test—and then see if they (or we) can pass it.

Overholser wrote the manifesto as a spark for out-of-the-ordinary ideas that just might work. As your students respond to the document, they are asked to post their responses to a website. Overholser welcomes the comments—and difficult questions.

If ethics is about action, then the manifesto might be a good place to start. For those instructors who find it provocative, it provides a great tool to allow students to integrate their knowledge from many classes with their ethically informed hopes—and expectations—for the future.

# Values in the media ethics class

Strategies to use challenges in the field as opportunities to apply ethics

**Seow Ting Lee**  
Teaching standards chair

Media ethics instruction is not an easy assignment, despite having established an "essential place" in major programs of journalism and mass communication as noted by Lambeth and his associates in their 2002 survey of media ethics teachers and program administrators. The results of the survey, published in the Autumn 2004 issue of *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, found a significant improvement in the breadth and quality of instruction compared to earlier surveys conducted in 1977, 1984 and 1993. Unlike other journalism and mass communication courses such as media theory, newswriting, research methods, principles of advertising or public relations campaigns, media ethics is often confusing for students, especially undergraduates who become disconcerted when confronted with the realization that there may not be a single right answer to the many questions raised in class. It also does not help that media ethics courses are sometimes taught by professors who are not fully prepared for media ethics instruction—as it appears that the qualification need only be an ability to criticize the media and harp on their ethical lapses. Anyone can be a media critic, but few can teach media ethics effectively.

Students troop into the media ethics classroom believing that they will be preached at, and instructed on what is right, what is wrong, and what to do—a situation resembling a parent-child relationship, complete with the threat of punishment (a C?). The words "ethics" and "law"—second and third only perhaps to "math"—simultaneously terrify and bore the American liberal arts undergraduate. When told that there may be no single right answer, students perk up initially but become increasingly resentful as they struggle to cope with a Socratic learning environment typically not promoted within other courses in their program of study. Eventually, they slide into an abyss of relativism believing that there is no right answer to anything at all.

A 2006 Josephson Institute's Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth found deeply entrenched habits of dishonesty among high school students, including lying to parents and teachers, cheating in exams, plagiarizing from

the Internet and stealing from family, friends and stores. More disturbing is the revelation that despite admissions of high rates of lying, cheating and theft, the youths expressed little contrition and maintained a high self-image of their character and ethics both in relative and absolute terms:

\* 92% said they are "satisfied with my own ethics and character."

\* 84% expected that half or more of all the people who knew them would list them as one of the most ethical people they know

\* 74% said, "When it comes to doing what is right, I am better than most people I know."

According to the survey report, released as part of a National Character Counts! Week, October 15-21, young Americans are "almost unanimous in saying that ethics and character are important on both a personal level and in business but they express very cynical attitudes about whether a person can be ethical and succeed." The report further concluded that "the same youngsters that speak of the importance of ethics, character and trust, frequently lie, cheat and even steal without much guilt or hesitation."

Given such a dismal picture, is it any wonder that media ethics instruction can be such a challenge for both instructor and student? When confronted with cases of media professionals behaving badly, it is easy to place the blame on external pressures—competition, deadlines, organizational culture—pushing a journalist into fabricating his work or the PR practitioner into deceiving her clients, but can basic norms such as truth-telling be separated from professional ethics? A journalist who cheats on his income tax or falsifies his travel receipts is more likely to deceive his editors and readers. From a pedagogical perspective, more attention needs to be paid on understanding the relationship between personal ethics and professional ethics. Many instructors steer away from discussing personal/religious values in class, out of fear of offending students and alarming university administrators. Media ethics instructors walk a fine balance between guiding students to find a set of professional ethical standards and imposing values on them; the difference, to paraphrase Jay Black, is that between moral philosophy and moralizing. At the same time, media ethics instruction must engage students, and allow them to apply theoretical concepts in ways that appeal to their sense of pragmatism and create connections with the community and the real world.

A useful teaching tool that helps accomplish these goals is the code of ethics assignment for public relations that I have adopted for my media ethics classes. The assignment, which can easily be adapted for advertising or journalism, set students up as consultants to draft a code of ethics for public relations practitioners. Working in groups of five or six, students approach a public relations department, organization or company with a proposal to write a code of ethics for their day-to-day operations. They conduct extensive face-to-face interviews with at least two of the company's public relations practitioners to gain an understanding of their work and to obtain material for the code. Upon completion of the assignment, students submit a code of ethics and a report explaining and defending the code, and do an oral presentation to share their work and experience with their classmates. In the process, students are encouraged to interact closely with the public relations practitioners, including shadowing them for a full day of work, obtaining feedback on a number of drafts and presenting the final product to the executives in a formal setting. Over six semesters, student feedback has been extremely positive. More than the Potter Box, case studies, role-playing, guest speakers and movies, this assignment allows students to directly apply concepts from class, serve their communities, interact with media professionals, and carve out a sense of ownership on the ethics work they do for class. It is also a tangible piece of work students can include in their resume. At least three former students have credited the code of ethics assignment for getting them jobs.

Most students dislike working in groups, but teamwork is an essential concept in ethical decision-making. The ability to talk through issues, find solutions, publicly articulate and defend a point of view, and respect differences in opinion can only lead to better decisions in the workplace. For the code of ethics assignment, working in groups compels students to construct authentic workplace issues such as work distribution, equity and motivation as well as learn about cooperation, negotiation, tolerance, public speaking and leadership-skills that may seem generic but are vital to effective ethical decision-making in the newsroom, advertising firm or PR agency. That the code of ethics assignment captures many teachable moments is clear from students' comments in the peer reviews.

# Who controls TV news?

Dictates of affiliate consultants may pose major ethical questions about content

**Kate West**  
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**D**o you ever have a day you just dread? For many reporters and anchors in the television news business, it's the day the media consultant makes a visit to the station. It's not because the consultant isn't a friendly person or you don't enjoy talking with him or her; it's the fact that they've come with a new, brilliant idea to change the newscast and capture thousands of additional viewers. Typically, they will advocate some sensational piece of journalism that worked great in New York or Los Angeles and will draw in viewers in your market. Never mind that your market is half the size of L.A., has a completely different demographic, and your viewers have never responded to that type of journalism before. However, for some reason, the news director finds it his or her job to assign that story to someone. As a television reporter in a medium-size market in Texas, I've found the role of media consultants in the newsroom disturbing. Here's an example of what happened just this past year.

My station paid thousands of dollars for the consulting firm to conduct research on what viewers in our market wanted to see on our newscasts. One of the survey questions asked respondents to list in order from most to least important what they wanted to watch on the news. Topics such as the weather, what's happening in my neighborhood and crime were on top. But coming in at No. 10 were feature stories. As someone who enjoys feature stories, I found it troubling that there was never a fol-

low-up question asking whether feature stories were still important to have in a newscast. One of the biggest complaints TV stations hear from viewers is we never report any good news, which feature stories usually are. As a result of that research, our news director decided to eliminate feature stories from our newscast; he even reassigned our feature reporter to another beat. In addition, the focus of our newscast changed from stories reporters felt were important, such as issues at city hall, technology, and education, to crime, crime and crime. Sex offenders, arrests, and drug deals gone wrong became the lead night after night.

**Are consultants setting the agenda for newscasts? Is market-driven research driving out enterprise work and possibly wasting viewers' time? Often, the answers seem to be 'yes.'**

Since that research six months ago, we've seen our numbers at 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. fall from 2nd to 3rd place.

For academics, that raises the question of whether consultants are setting the agenda for newscasts. Are reporters unable to enterprise stories they feel are important for viewers? That's the focus of research I am currently conducting at the University of Texas and will be submitting for the AEJMC 2007 conference. I realize not all news directors implement consultant research the way my boss did; some use it as a guide instead of a hard-and-

fast rule. But I wonder whether reporters are putting their journalistic ethics aside to do stories they feel are a disservice to viewers just because of consultants. We like to say in the business that we mustn't waste our viewers' time, but market research-driven news maybe doing that. Has this form of agenda-setting led to fewer enterprise stories, or are reporters' enterprise stories being turned down because they don't fit into the dictates of market research?

So, you may ask, if a conscientious journalist has a problem with what a consultant is suggesting they cover, wouldn't he or she just speak out against it? Sure, if you don't care about not looking like a team player. Since news directors are typically behind the consultants being hired and are allotting money in their budgets to have the consultant, most take their advice seriously. And news directors expect their reporters to do so as well. Remember, the ultimate goal is to increase ratings. If that happens, it's a win-win situation for everyone. If not, the consultant could be fired, or reporters and anchors who don't fit into the market research could be canned.

While many of us write this off as just the way the business is, does it really have to be that way? I wonder if new media and the effort to put more of the newscast on the Internet will change that. Online seems to have endless possibilities. Maybe the stories that don't fit into market research during the news hour could find a place on the station's Web site. I guess we'll only find that out as time goes on, or as we say on the news, stay tuned - we'll tell you coming up.

*West is a graduate student at the University of Texas.*

## MED firms up range of panels for D.C.

DC SESSIONS, *from page 4*

tional Communication, will look at ethics analysis from a cross-cultural framework. In a world where media is global, for instance, should notions of community also be global? Can there be a universal moral template?

International Communication also is the co-sponsor on a panel being held on Thursday, Aug. 9, at 1:30 p.m. on cultural boundaries in public relations ethics. As the practice of public relations has

spread throughout the world, have the ethics that guide public relations considered cultural norms?

We'll have two panels co-sponsored by Law and Policy. The first, on Saturday, Aug. 11, at 1:45 p.m., will examine the role of religious institutions in shaping FCC policies and the ethical implications of those policies. The second, on Sunday, Aug. 12, at 10 a.m., will examine how U.S. courts are using ethics standards in their decisions on news cover-

age and newsworthiness.

Finally, working with the Newspaper Division, MED will have a panel on Friday, Aug. 10, at 8:15 a.m., that features academics and news editors talking about how the two groups can work together better to connect with readers and to promote journalistic credibility.

MED will have its scholar-to-scholar paper session on Saturday, Aug. 11, at 12:15 p.m.; research paper sessions are slotted for

Thursday, Aug. 9, at 11:45 a.m., Saturday, Aug. 11, at 5:15 p.m., and Sunday, Aug. 12, at 1:30 and 3 p.m. And the division's business meeting (mark your calendars now!) will be on Saturday, Aug. 11, at 7 p.m.

The panels will be firmed up - panelists named and sessions sharpened - over the next couple of months. In the meantime, many thanks to those who submitted panel ideas to the division. You all made my job a lot easier.