

# ETHICAL NEWS

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- Visit the MED website at [http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/aejmc\\_ethics/index.html](http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/aejmc_ethics/index.html)
- Have an announcement or an article to share with MED members? Email the newsletter editor at [jemackay@vt.edu](mailto:jmackay@vt.edu)

## Division launching new teaching resource

Jan Leach  
 Teaching Standards Chair

**C**oming soon to a computer near you: The Media Ethics Division's new Teaching Ethics Resources website packed with practical information, teaching tools and tips, case studies, hot topics in ethics, book reviews and much more.

That is... if every member of MED contributes.

The Teaching Ethics Resources website is the brainchild of long-time MED member Ginny Whitehouse.

Whitehouse, associate professor at Whitworth University and co-director of the annual MED Teaching Ethics Workshop, wanted to create a pool of good ideas for faculty teaching ethics.

"Handing out a stack of papers at the annual Teaching Ethics Workshop seemed inefficient," Whitehouse explained. "Creating a website means faculty will have access to a large wealth of material whenever they need it."

The website, currently under construction, will be hosted on WordPress so that editors and contributors will be able to access it easily to add or change content. Though it's being built at Kent State, the server space is not owned or controlled by the university. That means MED will have complete management and oversight of the new site.

As with many online operations, content will be key to the Teaching Ethics Resources website. Ideally, the website will be active with changing topics and frequent contributions from members, including new materials and updated information. The site should be so useful that you'll want to bookmark it and visit often for ideas and topics to share, adapt or incorporate into your classroom or your research.

Here are some planned topics:

- Teaching Tips & Tools -- Will feature syllabi, class activities, discussion questions, ideas for grading and just about

anything that can help faculty facing a new teaching assignment or looking for ways to freshen up a course.

- Teaching Tips should be geared to college undergraduate and graduate courses in all areas of media ethics; i.e. advertising, broadcast, online, photo, print, public relations, etc. Some of the material from the pre-conference Teaching Ethics Workshop will be housed here.
- Case Studies & Activities -- Will contain real or hypothetical case studies and discussion questions. We will pursue linking to other sources of good ethics case studies. Suggestions welcome.

Activities can be assignments, classroom projects, group discussion questions or "instruments" you use to engage students. Think "Best Practices" here.

- Theoretical Perspectives -- Can include anything from short essays to book chapters on the theoretical foundations of media ethics. Do you start with Aristotle? Do you include Locke? Why? What are the advantages of looking at ethics in other cultures or from non-Western religions, for example?
- Hot Topics -- Will highlight current, brewing ethics issues so professors can



find timely cases in journalism, advertising, public relations and more. This can be a sentence or a paragraph with links to specific events, developing questions or immediate problems. MED members will be encouraged to add their opinions about the newest hot topics.

- **Book Shelf** – Think of this as a digital “library” dedicated to media ethics topics. This will list new publications in media ethics, books by MED authors, book reviews and, again, links to articles and journals. If you’ve published something, let us know.
- **Links & Dates** – Links will connect to media ethics resources online such as Poynter, SPJ, RTDNA, NPPA, PRSSA, APPE, ethics centers and institutions. Links to newsletters or communications from ethics centers can also be added.

Dates will list upcoming ethics training programs, workshops and symposia, and online offerings such as webinars and live chats. Of course, the AEJMC annual convention and the Media Ethics Division midwinter meetings will be included and highlighted.

- **Here to Help** – Similar to the ethics experts listed on the MED site, this will list members who volunteer to help

others who have questions or problems. You may just serve as a much-needed sounding board.

Plans for the website are ambitious and we need your help. Here’s how you can contribute:

- Send suggestions, articles, essays, dates, links and especially photos or visuals to Jan Leach, MED Teaching Standards Chair, at [jleach1@kent.edu](mailto:jleach1@kent.edu) or phone 330-672-4289. Certainly there are things we haven’t considered yet and all ideas for the website and for content are welcome.

Think of this website as an inventory of the wisdom of our collective members. We want it to be respected and recommended; you can make that happen.

The site is still under construction (so don’t search for the url yet), but it will be online in June. Then, it will be formally introduced to members during MED’s Teaching Ethics Workshop before the AEJMC convention in August.

That may sound like a lot of time, but content is crucial so start sending files now.

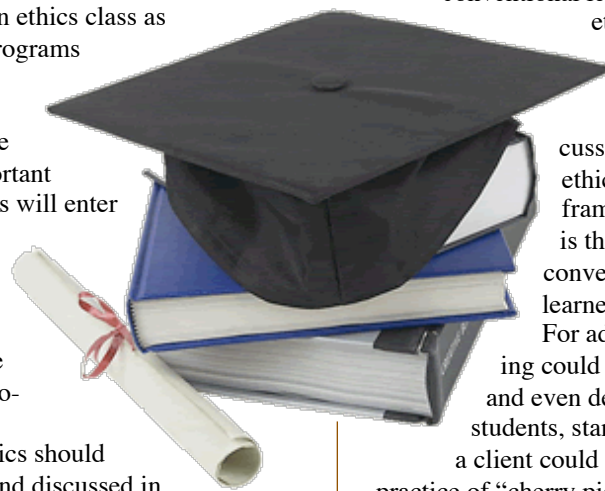
## Serious Questions: What Happens Without Graduate Study of Ethics?

Shannon A. Bowen  
Division Chair

**W**hat would happen eventually if graduate students never study ethics in the communication discipline?

Recent cancellations of graduate-level ethics classes in the public relations program at my university led to this question. Pressures to lessen graduate programs to fewer credit hours and focus on technical-skill classes (such as writing) are pressing ethics courses out of the curriculum. Some graduate programs now require multiple internships or independent study courses rather than offering an ethics class as an elective or requirement. Other programs are eliminating ethics in favor of courses that some argue are more important. However, I must pose the question: What could be more important than ethics? Masters degree students will enter their chosen fields with some immediate level of responsibility, and many will go directly into management where difficult decisions must be made. Many of those decisions will involve ethical components.

Some academics argue that ethics should be included across the curriculum and discussed in each course: this is the “wide” approach. But, others argue that an in-depth course in ethics is more satisfactory for the resolution of moral dilemmas: this is the “deep” approach. The wide approach is definitely better for minimizing credit hours. Is the wide or deep approach better for preparing graduate students to ultimately analyze and resolve moral dilemmas?



Learning to analyze and resolve dilemmas in an ethical manner means that one must study moral philosophy. As Kohlberg’s research on moral development and subsequent studies showed, complex moral reasoning is a learned behavior that takes place around the age when many students are entering masters programs. Research indicates that a base level of moral discernment is present in the pre-conventional level of reasoning (as can be seen in the fair-play disputes of children) and the conventional level (leading one not to break laws). Serious ethical reflection is necessary to proceed to the post-conventional level of analytical reasoning called for in ethical analyses. Some proponents of canceling ethics classes argue that ethics can be incorporated across many other courses. Does that lead to simplistic discussions of ethics, a pedantic use of codes of ethics, and little time to learn the various frameworks of moral reasoning? One concern is that moral development could stop at the conventional level if it is not pursued and learned.

For advertising students, a lack of ethics training could lead to a remarkable amount of hyperbole and even deceptive advertising. For public relations students, standards of what one will and will not do for a client could easily become blurred. For example, the practice of “cherry picking” data is ethically objectionable, but widely practiced. For journalism students, whether digital, print, or in other forms, the discernment of ethical principles in reporting is of utmost concern: gathering, assembling, and disseminating accurate information is a sacrosanct duty that allows democracy to function. *(continued next page)*

What will happen if those students, who likely will be in editorial positions soon, no longer learn to gauge standards of truth and accuracy?

What is the future of ethical decision making if more graduate programs take a wide versus deep approach? The responsibilities faced by communication managers require ethical analyses. Will tomorrow's managers be ready?

## Move over, Photoshop: Someone just Auto-Tuned my news

Philip A. Stauffer Todd  
Feature Writer

**P**olitical and social satire set to music has enjoyed generations of success in this country - from the thinly-veiled swipes at dignitaries full of double entendres

that the U.S. inherited from England; through the minstrel show heyday, the earliest ragtime revues, musical theatre, folk and protest songs; until the present, with its annual White House Correspondents' Association Dinner roast, late night comedy skits, Saturday Night Live, and The Daily Show all featuring witty takes on life set to catchy popular music.

On the other hand, some musicians have sought to create more subtle artistic impressions of the modern world through manipulating audio content drawn from real life. From the earliest tape recorders, the post-WWII musique concrete avant-garde, Steve Reich's 1965 *It's Gonna Rain* and the intriguing conversational snippets Alan Parsons captured in the hallways at Abbey Road studio and sprinkled throughout Pink Floyd's 1973 LP *The Dark Side of the Moon*, the use of audio found objects has become a modern music staple.

With even the lowest-cost personal computer now providing sophisticated digital audio and video production tools, and the post-modern generation's penchant for creating mashup collages (a favorite of mine is the anonymous remix of The Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper's" vocal tracks over Guns 'n' Roses' "Welcome To The Jungle"), and our long-honored tradition of fair comment and criticism, it was only a matter of time before someone had to invent Auto-Tune The News.

Electronic musician Michael Gregory first created some video mashups of a 2008 presidential debate, with original music added, but then used Auto-Tune software to alter the vocal pitch of clips of the candidates during the 2008 vice-presidential debate. He posted the satire result on YouTube. Gregory now works with his brothers Andrew and Evan, and Evan's wife, Sarah, under the band name "The Gregory Brothers," and has attracted significant national exposure with sendups of politicians, journalists (especially CBS anchor Katie

Couric), and average Jane and Joe Americans who find themselves first on local TV news, then transformed into virtual Broadway stars belting out Gregory's pop-meets-hip-hop concoctions.

The viral success of the "Bed Intruder Song" last summer introduced this new twist on news satire to many Americans. The original news clip reportedly garnered 1 million hits within a day of its posting; the Auto-Tune version had more than 7 million views within a month, and a remix offered through iTunes debuted at No. 4 on the Billboard "Heatseekers Songs" chart. These clips are brilliant at times (my favorite: "Dude, You Have No Quran"), and the Gregorys link to the original news content, driving traffic to the hit-happy local channel. And, as one Gregory told a reporter, it is the reality of these reality bites driving their success.

However, broadcast media scholars have already long lamented the shrinking sound bite, and the temptation of impact over depth. How long before we have to add "singability," "mashability," or "Auto-Tunability" to our list of caveats for ethical content editing? Before unscrupulous promoters plant tunable astroturf? Before profit-minded publishers insist "If it swings, it leads?"

The SPJ Code of Ethics reminds us to "[m]ake certain that ... audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context;" further, "Never distort the content of news photos or video."

At least one editor decried the "Intruder" song's "separation from the underlying situation."

Move over, Photoshop: A generation raised on manipulated imagery has a new sonic twist on reality, and the next melodic-sounding man-on-the-street bite is going to be awfully hard to resist, no matter what it does to the story itself.



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## Calling All Scholars

Bastiaan Vanacker  
Research Chair

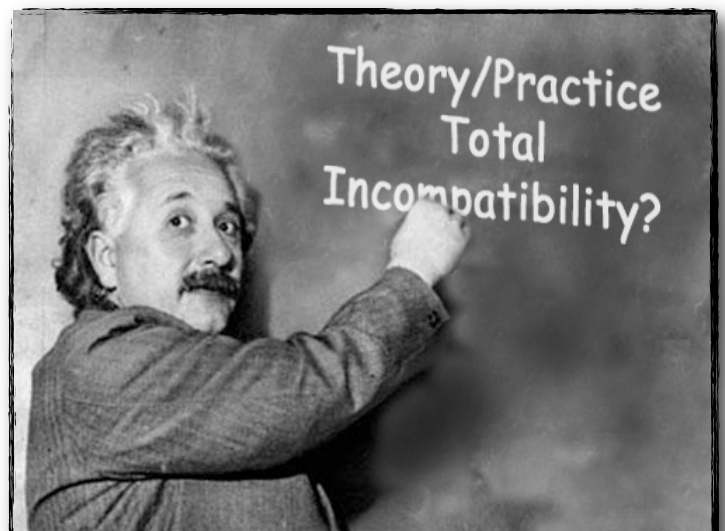
**F**or the first time in four years, our division is issuing a special call. By doing this, we are following a suggestion made by AEJMC's council of Divisions in its 2008 assessment of MED (Ethical News, Fall 2008). Apart from placating the powers that be, special calls also tend to attract new blood to the division. In 2007, for example, 13 of the 18 special call submissions came from non-members (Ethical News, Summer 2007). As paper submissions have been stagnating over the last years, a similar boost from this year's special call would be welcome.

But concerns of assessment committees and membership numbers aside, a special call's main *raison d'être* is to advance scholarship in the field by inviting researchers to focus their collective attention on a specific topic. The 2007 special call, for example, asked researchers to think and write about "developing ethical theory across the curriculum." The winner of that year's special call was David Allen with his paper entitled "The Trouble with Transparency: The Challenge of Doing Journalism Ethics in a Surveillance Society." The article, which would later be published in *Journalism Studies*, brilliantly achieved the goal of the special call. It took a traditional journalistic concept (transparency), analyzed it through a theoretical lens (provided by Foucault and Habermas) to come to some novel understanding of the concept that had some very practical implications. It is a must-read for every media ethicist. People who attended the special-call research session during those steamy hot days in Washington D.C. in 2007 will certainly agree that Allen's paper was hardly the only one who broke the theoretical mold in a thought-provoking way.

We can only hope for our 2011 special call to be as successful. That's why we modeled this year's call after the one from 2007, and picked up where it left off. Whereas the 2007 call invited scholars to think about expanding the theories used to study media ethics, this call is geared towards developing methodological approaches to test and further explore these theories.

"Theory," of course, is a bit of a loaded term in our field, as it sometimes -but not always- has a slightly different meaning than in other areas of communication studies. Whereas many of our colleagues at other AEJMC divisions test the value of a theory, agenda setting for example, by analyzing a set of data, media ethics theories' validity is not as easily exposed by a survey or content analysis. Our division's notion of theory is steeped more in its Greek origin where it means "contemplation," rather than in the meaning the term has come to take on since the development of the scientific method. Much of our research is devoted to illustrate the applicability and appropriateness of normative ethical theories and concepts to the communication context, more so than testing, explaining or predicting communication processes, behaviors, effects and influences.

Theory becomes associated with abstract thinking as opposed to a more practical or pragmatic orientation. We see this dichotomy mirrored in media ethics research, where the theoretical papers are often distinguished from the practical ones. During the member meeting in 2007, for example, there was discussion to separate theoretical and practical papers in different sessions (Ethical News, Fall 2007). Perhaps this stark differentiation is based on the fact that much of our research that is not theoretical, or less theoretical, tends to gravitate to the descriptive or prescriptive (developing practical guidelines).



As a result, the methods employed in our field tend to be somewhat limited.

This is not a criticism of the many theoretical and descriptive research studies produced by many of our peers (and myself). It is merely an observation, and a terrible over-generalizing one at that. I am well aware that many of my media ethics colleagues have successfully jumped back and forth between the philosophical and social science interpretation of theory and have employed a diversity of methods. However, we do believe that our field could benefit from a thorough reflection on the methods available to media ethicists. As our field continues to evolve theoretically and topically (e.g. the emerging interest in global media ethics), it behooves us to reflect which methods can assist us best in keeping track of these evolutions.

Apart from the traditional method of crafting well-written and well-supported arguments that provide a deeper insight into the morality of communicating or the case study analysis, what other methods can contribute to a deeper understanding of wrong and right in communication between human beings by means of the mass media? Which methods can be used to

compare media ethics cross-culturally? What methodological issues are presented to those of us who want to study media ethics from a neuroscientific perspective? Which methods that are unfamiliar to our field could contribute to its development? These are only a couple of the questions we hope to see addressed by our special call.

We invite and encourage everybody to think about these (and other) method-related questions, submit a paper in the special call, volunteer to be a paper reviewer, or to spread the word about this call to your colleagues who do not traditionally submit papers to our division. (More details about this call can be found elsewhere in the issue and in the official AEJMC call for papers.) We are confident that with your help, this special call can become as thought-provoking and intellectually invigorating as its 2007 predecessor.

## Feedback Needed on New Scholarship Proposal

Jan Leach  
Teaching Standards Chair

The Media Ethics Division plans to offer a new scholarship this year for graduate students to help defray the travel costs to the AEJMC convention in St. Louis. Division representatives need feedback from MED members before they can move forward with the scholarship.

MED's Tom Cooper, Emerson College, has gathered donation commitments from a few members to set up a "Conference Travel Scholarship" fund. If MED members approve, graduate students who submit papers to our division could be considered for the travel award. Winners of the Carol Burnett Award would not be eligible for the travel scholarship.

The Conference Travel Scholarship could be housed at AEJMC and administered by AEJMC Business Manager Rich Burke. A committee of MED members would select the winners. According to Burke, such an award cannot pay for membership but can be used to pay for travel and conference registration.

Cooper explained that the scholarship is an attempt to grow our graduate student members, help

our student paper competition and support those struggling on a student budget. The intention is for the travel scholarship to be given annually.

In order to proceed with this initiative, we need feedback from MED members. What do you think of the idea of a Conference Travel Scholarship? Should we attach certain requirements to the scholarship application such as GPA minimums? Should the award go only to those who submit papers to our division?

Other things to consider include publicizing the award in time for students to apply and make plans to attend the August convention, increasing the donations/funds so that more than one student could be given travel assistance, guidelines for the selection committee, notifying the winner(s), requiring winner(s) to attend the MED business meeting, contingency requirements if the winner(s) does not attend the convention. Donations to the Conference Travel Scholarship are tax deductible and once the fund is established at AEJMC, checks may be mailed there.

Please give this some thought and send ideas, suggestions and advice as soon as possible to MED Teaching Standards Chair Jan Leach at [jleach1@kent.edu](mailto:jleach1@kent.edu). We will need to move quickly in order to establish the fund, collect contributions, seek applicants and notify the winner(s).

# Programming Preview for St. Louis

Kati Berg  
Programming Chair/Vice Head

**E**ven though it is cold and snowy, now is the time to be thinking ahead to the heat and humidity of St. Louis where we will gather for the 2011 AEJMC Conference (Tues., Aug. 9 – Sat., Aug. 13). In December, Shannon Bowen and I attended the mid-winter meeting in Albuquerque to organize an exciting program for St. Louis. This year each division was allocated 6 chips, which allowed us to program a variety of competitive research sessions and co-sponsored panels.

This is a great year to submit a competitive paper to MED. For the second year in a row, we nabbed one of the coveted high density research sessions (Wed., Aug. 10, 3:15-4:45) in which eight to 10 papers will be presented in an informal, conversational style. We are also co-sponsoring a research paper session with ADV (Wed., Aug. 10, 5:00-6:30) to highlight the intersection of ethics and advertising. Additionally, MED will have three more traditional research sessions, a scholar-2-scholar (poster session), and a teaching ethics preconference. Because of the number of papers we will be able to accept, it is a fantastic year to submit a competitive research paper to MED. We also ask that you encourage your graduate students to submit a paper as well. As usual, we are looking for paper reviewers. If interested, please contact our Research Chair, Bastiann Vanacker at [bvanacker@luc.edu](mailto:bvanacker@luc.edu).

We also programmed seven co-sponsored panel sessions that cross a variety of interests resulting in an exciting panel program:

- New Territory: Developing Social Media Law and Ethics Instructional Approaches (co-sponsored with LAW)
- Hot Topics Panel (co-sponsored with SPIG)
- Going Green: Evaluating the Effectiveness, Ethics, and Enforcement of Green Messages and Campaigns (co-sponsored with ESIG)
- The Search for Ethics and Journalistic Survival in Non-Profit News (co-sponsored with RTVJ)
- Military Ethics and Media Ethics: Conflicts for Practitioners (co-sponsored with PR)
- The Case for Morality & Media: Overviewing, Reviewing, and Previewing Our Understanding of Morality in Media Uses and Effects (co-sponsored with ESIG)
- Look Who's Talking: The Perils of Journalism (co-sponsored with RTVJ)

Our members (business) meeting is Thurs., Aug. 11, 8:30-10:00 followed by our Second Annual Offsite Social from 10:00-midnight. Hopefully, you will be able to squeeze in a nap in between sessions that day. More details on the social will follow, but please mark you calendar now!

All in all, we planned an exciting and engaging program for St. Louis. Check the AEJMC website for more details about the panels we are planning and the location of our Offsite Social.

## Stars and Neurons: Using Celebrities, Entertainment and Brain Science To Teach Ethics

The Media Ethics Division will offer its annual pre-conference workshop, this year in partnership with the Magazine Division. The program, Stars and Neurons:

Using Celebrities, Entertainment and Brain Science to Teach Ethics, will give participants the opportunity to identify ways that they can use celebrity and entertainment culture as well as new brain science research to teach media ethics better.

The 2011 workshop will provide new ethics instructors and seasoned veterans with practical approaches for their classrooms. In addition, the Media Ethics Division's Ethics Teaching Resource Web Site will be introduced. This workshop will run from 12:30 to 6 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 9 at the Renaissance Grand and Suites Hotel. Registration is limited to 30; cost is \$50, \$40 for graduate students. Please sign up for this workshop when registering for the AEJMC conference. For additional information, contact Ginny Whitehouse, Whitworth University, [gwhitehouse@whitworth.edu](mailto:gwhitehouse@whitworth.edu).