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Ideas R Us

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

MASTHEAD

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Incivility in Politics and Media

by **Ryan J. Thomas**

Newsletter Editor

In my [last column](#), I discussed partisanship in politics, and how it is reflected and shaped in media content. I defended shows like CNN's *Crossfire* for possessing "the potential to serve as spaces where the public get a sense of the clashing ideological perspectives of the day, drawing citizens in to an ongoing national dialogue on issues of civic import." I would like to use this space to develop this argument further by discussing incivility in political discourse, and its relationship with media content.



Ryan J. Thomas

As a qualitative researcher, I believe that we each interpret the world through our own particular lens, and that our experiences structure our ways of knowing. Therefore, I have often come to think that it is because I come from a country with a different political system that I hold the beliefs I hold about politics and political discourse (I am British, by the way).

As a quick refresher, the UK has a majoritarian system of government with effectively no distinction between the legislature and the executive. The UK also lacks a written constitution. This means that if a party is fortunate enough to win a majority of seats in an election, and is able to ensure its own Members of Parliament (MPs) support its program consistently, a Prime Minister (the leader of that party) is able to pass whatever legislation he or she chooses. This is a bit of an over-simplification as the UK is subject also to EU and international law, but the broader point about majoritarianism remains.

So, what are these beliefs that have led me to the strange place of defending *Crossfire*, which many would point to as evidence of the decline of civility in political discourse (and corresponding rise in partisanship) and degradation of media standards? I see politics in terms of contest, contrast, ideology, and debate. The public ought to be given the choice between contrasting philosophies about the appropriate relationships between the state and citizens, and among citizens. In short, difference is good! We ought not to be afraid to disagree with one another, so long as those disagreements are grounded in reason and logic.

Which brings me to this lovely clip I found. It is a 1988 discussion (I use the term intentionally, rather than "debate") between Barry Goldwater, the 1964 Republican presidential candidate,

and George McGovern, the 1972 Democratic presidential candidate. It is probably fair to say that McGovern is the most left-wing presidential candidate, certainly since the Second World War, perhaps even of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, Goldwater is most likely the most right-wing presidential candidate of the modern era. It should also be noted that both candidates lost in landslide elections!



The video is revelatory for so many reasons. It is clear that Goldwater and McGovern have clear differences on an array of points. It is clear that they hold principled beliefs rooted in clearly thought out, coherent political philosophies. It is clear that they are not likely to agree about a great deal. But also note the *civility* of their discussion. Goldwater and McGovern are able to discuss their differences rationally, without resorting to name-calling or mean-spiritedness. The discussion is spirited, jovial, and substantive. Where are the contemporary Goldwaters and McGovern?

Credit should also be given to moderator Jim Lehrer, who asks artful, probing questions that illuminate points of political difference and in so doing provides the watching audience with a basis upon which political ideologies can be compared. His questions give both politicians latitude to articulate their philosophies. He emphasizes difference, but in a wholly non-adversarial manner, such that the viewer knows this is not [Celebrity Deathmatch](#) but rather a dialogue of beliefs. Where is the contemporary Lehrer?

Perhaps ultimately I am a fish out of water, unaccustomed to a Madisonian political framework that separates power horizontally and vertically and which, by consequence, necessitates a measure of compromise. Perhaps the very reason why McGovern and Goldwater lost their respective elections was because of their inability to find consensus. Perhaps much of this has to do with Goldwater and McGovern's personal qualities, and Lehrer's skills as an interviewer. Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps...

In any case, I wish there were more examples of this kind of discussion in contemporary media. I defend shows like *Crossfire* because of their possibilities, not necessarily because of their performance. More fundamentally, I am increasingly unconvinced that partisanship itself is the major obstacle to political and social progress. Rather, I am increasingly persuaded that it is *incivility* that is to blame for many of the problems we see as we survey contemporary media and politics. What has caused this incivility? That is a question for another column...

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Why Ethics?

by **Kevin Stoker**

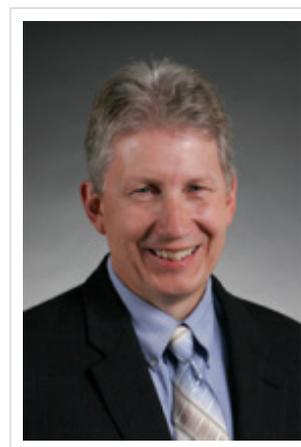
Division Head

As a [senior associate dean](#) at Texas Tech University, I sit through a lot of curriculum discussions regarding core requirements for majors in the college. As part of the faculty in the Department of Journalism and Electronic Media, I also sit in on debates regarding core requirements for particular majors and departments. Whenever we discuss a stand-alone ethics course, we encounter some of the following statements and questions:

1. We teach ethics in each of our courses. We always spend a class or two talking about ethics.
2. Why do we need a separate course on ethics? What are you going to talk about for a whole semester? Our professional standards of practice and codes of ethics are clear, and students just need to follow the rules.
3. Teaching an ethics class doesn't improve student behavior. If the student is going to be dishonest, no class is going to overcome years of poor examples and bad decisions.
4. We talk about media ethics in the media law class. There's no need for a separate class on media ethics.
5. There's no room in the curriculum for a media ethics class. What we need are more skills courses to teach students how to write.

Some of you may have encountered similar discussions. What struck me at a recent department meeting was that few of my colleagues have ever taken a media ethics course and even fewer understand the value of moral reasoning. I've had colleagues who would never publish an untruth but show little care and concern for students who lack the talent and refinement of the "good writers." We can help our own cause by looking for opportunities to educate our own colleagues about the importance of moral reasoning and philosophy.

We also need to do a better job of making ethics courses more practical and complimentary to our students' professional lives. I've often followed the counsel of professors in philosophy who resist making judgments for their students. They simply teach moral philosophy and let the students decide for themselves how to reason through problems. The goal is to help our



Kevin Stoker

students develop moral reasoning skills.

Then one year at a PRSSA conference, I listened to a fellow academic talk about the importance of being honest, avoiding harm, and doing the right thing, etc., but then add, “I can’t tell you what’s right or wrong, you have to figure that out yourself.” I thought, “Wait a minute. You just told these students to be truthful and transparent and avoid harm and do good, but then you’re going to say that you can’t tell them what is the right thing in professional practice.” Many of the students in the audience expressed dismay at this apparent contradiction.

I can’t judge too harshly because I’ve often found myself doing the same thing. I start every media ethics class by having the students share an ethical dilemma that they’ve faced. I’m always amazed at how many wallets my students have found. Here are two of my personal favorites:

“I drove up to an ATM machine, and the message was, ‘Do you want to make another transaction?’ So I pressed yes but I only took \$20.”

“My roommates and I went to Walmart to buy stuff for our apartment. We got a microwave and put it under the basket of the shopping cart. When we got up to the checker, we told her to be sure to get the microwave under the basket. When we got out in the parking lot, we looked at the receipt and saw that she had not charged us for the microwave. We looked at each other and somebody said, ‘We told her.’ Somebody else said, ‘Quick, go get the car.’”

For many years, I was careful not to provide a judgment or an evaluation regarding the “ethical dilemmas” the students faced, but lately I’ve been posing a question raised by [Patrick Plaisance](#) in his text, *Media Ethics*: Is this situation a case for ethics and moral reasoning or is it obvious what accepted standards of morality would require or prohibit?

As ethicists, we recognize that media ethics course teach moral philosophy, a critical foundation for reasoning through moral dilemmas. But in addition to the categorical imperative, veil of ignorance, Golden Mean, and Greatest Happiness Principles, we may need to do more to help students know how to practice these concepts in their professional lives. We also need to do a better job of educating our colleagues as to the practical value a media ethics course.

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Great Programming Lineup for AEJMC 2014

by **Jenn Burleson Mackay**
Programming Chair

The Media Ethics Division has lined up a great slate of programming for Montréal. I'm happy to say that we found many great co-sponsors and people seemed legitimately interested in working with our division. In that regard, I think we did very well.

That being said, we certainly didn't get everything that we wanted. Our major loss is that we will not be sponsoring a preconference teaching ethics program this year. It was difficult to let the preconference go, but I wasn't able to secure a co-sponsor for the program. There really was only one logical co-sponsor for the proposed topic and that group had another program in mind.



Jenn Burleson Mackay

In all honesty, our attendance at the preconference has dipped a bit for the past few years and since AEJMC is going to be in an exciting and pricy location next year, it seemed a bit risky to try to run a preconference without a co-sponsor. It seemed like an appropriate year to take a break from the teaching preconference. As an alternative, we're going a new route with the preconference this year by cosponsoring a preconference on how to write for academic publications. We'll be co-sponsoring this event with the Media Management and Economics Division as well as the Religion and Media Interest Group. Please encourage new scholars and graduate students to attend.

Mark your calendar for our business meeting. It is scheduled for **Thursday, Aug. 7, at 6:45 p.m.** Also, as you are making your travel plans, please keep in mind that there will be refereed research paper sessions on both the first and last day of the conference.

Here is a rundown of the other sessions that we are co-sponsoring during the conference:

Wednesday, Aug. 6

- CSR Research Panel (title to be determined), cosponsor-Public Relations Division, **3:15 p.m. to 4:45 p.m.**
- Beyond the Watergate Mythology: Revising the Historical Record about Woodward,

Bernstein and Deep Throat, cosponsor-History Division, **5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.**

Thursday, Aug, 7

- Press Councils: Keeping the press honest or undermining press freedom, cosponsor-Law and Policy, **8:15 a.m. to 9:45 a.m.**
- Ethics and Brand Content, cosponsor-Advertising Division, **11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.**
- Teaching Media Ethics with a Global Perspective, cosponsor-International Communication, **3:15 p.m. to 4:45 p.m.**
- Ethics of Media Business Models: What shouldn't be happening but is anyway, cosponsor – Media Management and Economics Division, **5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.**

Friday, Aug. 8

- Hot Topics (specific topic to be determined), cosponsor- AEJMC Council of Affiliates, **3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.**
- The Ethics of Sports Journalism, cosponsor- Sports Communication Interest Group, **5:15 p.m. to 6:45 p.m.**

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Polish Up Your Papers!

by **Jan Leach**
Research Chair

Polish up those papers and talk to your colleagues about submitting their work to the Media Ethics Division's research competition! We have three categories for entries and we're hoping to increase the number of papers we consider.

As most of you know, the number of submissions we have received the last few years has been stagnant. Yet we notice many papers submitted to other divisions that would "fit" the Media Ethics Division. We'd like a vibrant and viable competition every year, so consider your personal and collaborative research for entry in MED. Also, ask your friends and colleagues to consider entering their work in the MED categories.

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In addition to ethics research papers, we have a special call this year for papers exploring sports media ethics.

And don't forget your grad students. The general competition is open to faculty and graduate students and the Carol Burnett Award competition is restricted to graduate students. There are plenty of opportunities for grad students to submit their work.



Here is the official “paper call,” which also can be found in the AEJMC newsletter and on the AEJMC website. If you’ve seen it already, skip to the bottom for information on formatting, submission through the All-Academic website and other details.

MED PAPER CALL

From ethical issues facing journalists to questions in sports, entertainment, public relations and advertising, the Media Ethics Division seeks a diverse range of faculty and graduate student paper submissions related to ethics. The Division encourages submissions of all media-ethics research, regardless of methodological approach. We encourage submissions that use surveys, experiments, interviews, or other data-collection methods as well as submissions that use a rhetorical or theory-building essay style. Submissions may use a variety of theoretical approaches, relying on normative or descriptive theory, using communication, philosophy, sociological, psychological or other theoretical approaches. The Division is sponsoring a special call for papers on sports media ethics in addition to our regular call and our graduate student award.

All papers must be no more than 25 pages (excluding bibliography and appendices) and must conform to the rules outlined in the [AEJMC Uniform Call for Papers](#). Submitting a paper to the MED implies that the author (or one of the authors) intends to present the paper in person or will make arrangements for the paper to be presented by a colleague.

MED offers recognition in several areas. Except for the Burnett Award, all competitions are open to both faculty and students. All submissions will be evaluated in the general paper competition. Authors wishing to be considered for the special competitions should submit their papers only once.

In addition to supporting the Carol Burnett Award winners, the Media Ethics Division will offer small travel stipends for the top student submissions.

Special Call for Sports Media Ethics: In addition to our regular call, the Media Ethics Division is sponsoring a special call for papers related to sports media ethics. Papers may consider sports media ethics related to amateur (including college) or professional sports of any kind and in any medium such as broadcast, print, digital/online, etc. International sports media topics also are welcome. Papers may use a variety of methodological approaches such as quantitative, qualitative, rhetorical, etc. Special call papers must be marked “Special Call” on the title page (and ONLY on the title page).

Carol Burnett Award for Graduate Students: All graduate students who submit papers to the Media Ethics Division are encouraged to enter the Carol Burnett Award competition. The Media Ethics Division teams with the University of Hawaii and the Carol Burnett Fund for Responsible Journalism to sponsor this special paper competition for graduate students. Students are invited to submit papers on any topic related to media ethics: public relations, entertainment, journalism, advertising, etc. The winning paper will receive the Carol Burnett/University of Hawaii/AEJMC Prize, which includes a \$350 cash award. The runner-up will receive a \$150 cash award. Authors for the top two submissions will receive a small travel

assistance stipend and will be invited to present their papers at the 2014 conference in Montreal, Canada. The winner will be invited to accept his or her prize at the KTA Awards Luncheon at the conference. Burnett competition papers must be marked "Burnett Competition" on the title page (and ONLY the title page).

Professional Relevance Award: Special recognition will be given to the paper that is judged to be the most relevant to working professionals. The recipient will be selected from the general paper competition.

Top Faculty Paper: Special recognition will be given to the faculty paper judged to be the best paper submitted among faculty authors. The recipient will be selected from the general paper competition.

All questions should be directed to MED research chair Jan Leach, Kent State University, email: jleach1@kent.edu, phone 330-672-4289.

Details, details...

There is **no limit to the number of papers that one author or group of authors can submit to the Media Ethics Division**. If you have different papers on ethics topics, you may enter as many as you like. However, the *same* paper cannot be entered into the different MED competitions. That means you cannot submit the same paper to the MED general call *and* to the MED special call on sports media ethics. Nor can you submit the same paper to MED that you submit to another division.



Papers can be entered *now* at the [All Academic](#) website, which is the same system we have used in recent years for submissions and reviewing. To submit a paper, go to All Academic and create an account. *Please note that even if you created an account last year or in previous years, you must create a new account this year.*

Here is paper submission information from AEJMC:

- Submit the paper via All Academic to MED. Format must be Word, WordPerfect, or a PDF. PDF is strongly encouraged.
- International papers and authors are welcome but papers must be submitted in English only.
- The paper must be uploaded later than 11:59 p.m. (Central Daylight Time) Tuesday, April 1.
- The paper must include a paper abstract of no more than 75 words.
- Fill out the online submission form with author(s) name, affiliation, mailing address,

telephone number and email address. The title should be printed on the first page of the text and on running heads on each page of text, as well as on the title page. Do NOT include author's name on running heads or title page.

- Papers uploaded with author identifying information **will not be considered for review and will automatically be disqualified**. Follow these [instructions](#) on how to submit a clean paper for blind reviewing.
- Papers are accepted for peer review with the understanding that they are not already under review for other conferences and that they have been submitted to only ONE AEJMC group for evaluation. Papers accepted for the AEJMC Conference should not have been presented to other conferences or published in scholarly or trade journals prior to presentation at the conference.
- Student papers compete on an equal footing in open paper competitions unless otherwise specified by the individual division or interest group. Individual group specifications are appended to this uniform call. For MED, that means only graduate students may submit papers for the Carol Burnett Award competition.
- Papers submitted with both faculty and student authors will be considered faculty papers and are not eligible for student competitions.
- At least one author of an accepted faculty paper must attend the conference in Montreal to present the paper. If student authors cannot be present, they must make arrangements for the paper to be presented.
- If a paper is accepted, and the faculty author does not present the paper at the conference, and if a student author does not make arrangements for his/her paper to be presented by another, then that paper's acceptance status is revoked. It may not be included on a vita.
- Authors will be advised whether their paper has been accepted by May 20 and may access a copy of reviewers' comments from All Academic. For MED, contact research chair Jan Leach at jleach1@kent.edu or 330-672-4289. Authors of accepted papers retain copyright of their papers and are free to submit them for publication after presentation at the conference.

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MED Wants You!

by **Jan Leach**
Research Chair

If you're not entering a paper in the Media Ethics Division general or special or paper calls, please consider being a paper reviewer.

This year, MED has its general ethics, special call dealing with sports media ethics and the graduate student (Carol Burnett Award) competitions. We're hoping for an increased number of paper submissions and will need paper reviewers to lend their expertise to the process.

Paper reviewing is a great way to support the Media Ethics Division. If we get enough reviewers, no one will have more than two or three papers to evaluate. Paper reviewing will begin immediately after the deadline for paper submissions in early April and the deadline to complete paper reviews is May 1 (yes, that's a busy time for academics but the effort is worth it!). Review assignments and papers will be available online at All Academic as in past years.

Contact MED research chair Jan Leach at jleach1@kent.edu or 330-672-4289 to volunteer. Your help is needed and greatly appreciated.

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The Ethics of *Anchorman 2*

by **Chad Painter**
PF&R Chair



The latest episode in the life of Ron Burgundy, *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues*, provides ample examples for journalism scholars to take into the classroom. It also provides a searing critique of broadcast news and the devolution from hard-hitting journalism to soft-news features.

The movie begins in the early-1980s with Burgundy (Will Ferrell) and his now-wife Veronica Corningstone (Christina Applegate) co-hosting a network news show. When anchor Mack Tannen (Harrison Ford) decides to retire, he names Corningstone as his replacement, sending Burgundy on a downhill spiral both personally and professionally. He rebounds – and regroups his news team – when he’s hired by the startup, 24-hour network GNN.

Desperate for ratings, and equally desperate to escape the 2-5 a.m. timeslot he initially anchors, Burgundy stumbles upon a novel idea: “Why do we have to tell people what they *need* to hear? Why can’t we just tell them what they *want* to hear?” Thus begins a newscast featuring pro-American slogans, lots of stories about cute animals (the first episode features eight different cute-animal pieces), as well as “investigative” work by reporter Brian Fantana (Paul Rudd) such as an exposé of female anatomy. Burgundy later airs the first televised car

chase, where he narrates, or wildly speculates, about the onscreen action. At the same time, Corningstone is interviewing Yassar Arafat, but her network loses so many viewers to Burgundy that it cuts to the car chase.

Anchorman 2 could serve as a good jumping-off point in the discussion of a hard news-soft news debate. As journalists, should we give people what they want or what they need? What is the proper balance between the want and the need? What is the balance between a need for ratings (and the advertisers that come with high ratings) and a need to provide the monitorial role of the press?

Later, Fantana works on an investigative story about airplane parts falling from the sky. That story, however, is killed by GNN owner Kench Allenby (Josh Lawson), who wants the story killed because he owns an airline with a history of parts falling from its airplanes.

This segment could start discussions about conflict of interest and journalistic autonomy. The conflict in *Anchorman* is fictional, but it isn't far fetched with major conglomerates such as Disney, News Corporation, Time Warner, Viacom, and Comcast/NBC Universal owning major news outlets. What is the relationship, or what sorts of walls exist, between the news division and other properties of a conglomerate? What sort of relationship should exist? How should a journalist respond when told by the owner of the network to kill a story that potentially could hurt another asset within the same conglomerate?

Finally, *Anchorman 2* could provide an interesting way to discuss women in the newsroom. Corningstone is wildly successful—she is the first female anchor on a major network—but has a difficult time balancing her work with her life. Indeed, she plays the shrew by putting her career before her marriage. GNN producer Meagan Good (Linda Jackson) begins dating Burgundy as soon as he becomes a successful anchor on the network. She exemplifies the tramp, another common portrayal of female journalists. These archetypes could begin a discussion of how female journalists are portrayed in other television shows or films. What effect might these fictional portrayals have on how actual female journalists are viewed by society? What effect might these portrayals have on young women thinking about entering the journalistic field?

These questions and topics are far from exhaustive. However, *Anchorman 2*, a goofy comedy about a fake news anchor, could be a good way to connect with students on their terms.

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Why Accessibility Matters

by **Melissa Suran**
Co-Graduate Student Representative



A candle burns in front of a memorial wall bearing the engraved names of tens of thousands of Hungarian Holocaust victims in the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Budapest

On January 24, 2014 The University of Texas at Austin closed its facilities for the day because of the weather. But despite cold conditions and icy roads, there was one place on campus that remained open – the Hillel. Not only did the Hillel attract its normal crowd, but by 8:30 p.m., it was also packed with more than 300 people. The reason: Max Glauben.

Glauben was the only member of his immediate family to survive the Holocaust. As he recalled his story of struggle and survival, the only audible sounds other than his voice were occasional sniffs and sobs from audience members.

Having grandparents who suffered similar experiences, I grew up hearing about the travesties and bloodshed that occurred less than a century ago in war-torn Europe. When I decided to

study journalism, my grandmother was thrilled – the world needed more journalists to speak out against social injustices and give voices to the voiceless.

After his speech, I asked Glauben if he thought that the Holocaust would have ended sooner – perhaps never even had happened – had journalists shed more light on Hitler’s actions.

“Absolutely,” Glauben told me.

When we discuss media ethics today, the conversation usually steers towards how reporters may embellish facts and create unnecessary fear; to what extent an editor can use Photoshop before an image is no longer factual; and how to stop journalists like Stephen Glass or Jayson Blair from lying to the public. We also talk about government censorship, accountability, and citizen journalism. We endlessly discuss Edward Snowden, the Boston Marathon bombings, and Occupy Wall Street. While these are all undoubtedly important issues, we tend to find these topics significant because they directly relate to *us*.

We get so wrapped up in issues concerning our own little bubble that we sometimes forget that the media can act as advocates in life or death situations. Such situations may not directly affect our lives, but they are affecting thousands – if not millions – of lives in other countries.

We see a report about the genocide in Darfur. A week later we forget about it. Just a month or so ago, there was a story that broke about a drone in Yemen that accidentally targeted and killed civilians in a wedding party. It is now literally yesterday’s news.

The motto of Holocaust survivors is “Never Forget.” Past atrocities should be remembered, and current ones must be given ample attention. But this doesn’t always happen. We know through theories such as agenda setting that the media directly influences public opinion – but the public isn’t always aware of this effect. Perhaps the media isn’t even always aware that yesterday’s news isn’t necessarily irrelevant today, and that sometimes, the public needs a gentle reminder of what already occurred.

Therefore, it is *our* duty as media ethics scholars to produce research that translates into clear and concise language that the public can comprehend and that the industry can use. We cannot deny that much research is deemed incomprehensible by those not in academia. But we can still strive to make it relevant and important to the world around us.

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My First MED Experience

by **Angela M. Lee**

Co-Graduate Student Representative

I really enjoyed the 2013 AEJMC conference in Washington D.C. It was my first time attending the media ethics division social and business meeting, and I was honored to meet all the esteemed scholars whose work I often read. I've gone to a number of meetings at different conferences over the years, but never have I felt more welcomed than in the MED. I am grateful to all the professors who asked about my research, gave me constructive feedback, and showed me a good time with great food and awesome conversation. They also shared with me their experience in academia and gave me advice on the job search process.

Therefore, to all the graduate students out there wondering whether they should attend the MED business meetings – I urge you to come and join us! AEJMC can be overwhelming sometimes, with its colossal scope and size, but the MED business meeting is a great place to get to know everyone who shares the same passion for ethics research. To me the biggest plus is the conversation, and it's one that I believe would interest you too.

See you in Montreal!

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