

# ETHICAL NEWS

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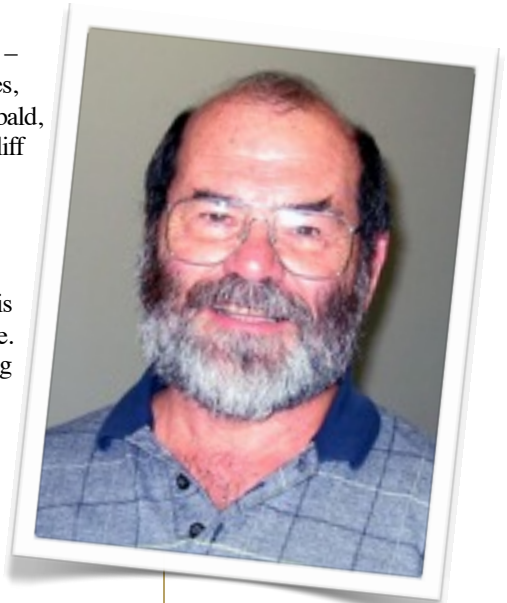
## A tribute to Jay Black


*Former students pay homage to retiring mentor*

**W**ith his retirement, Jay Black leaves a field of inquiry that he had a major hand in creating. Largely because of Jay's teaching and writing gifts, media ethics is arguably one of the most vibrant, active and relevant areas of communication scholarship today. In honor of Jay's role as co-founding editor of the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* and the lasting impact of his scholarship, JMME editor Lee Wilkins organized a dinner in his honor during AEJMC's Chicago convention last August. It was attended by several dozen "Jay fans" – former students, current protégés, longtime collaborators,

academic admirers – and featured tributes, both solemn and ribald, from the likes of Cliff Christians, Lou Hodges and Kevin Stoker. It was, however, anything but a farewell: Jay is not going anywhere. With several writing and publication projects in the works, people can be forgiven if, in the coming months and years, they never realize Jay actually has "retired."

The following are words of tribute from several of Jay's former students. ✍



 Jay Black has had a profound impact on my life as a scholar. It was in one of his classes at the University of South Florida that I learned about something called the AEJMC Southeast Colloquium, where I would present my first conference paper. It was for one of his classes that I wrote the paper that earned my first conference paper award. It was with his help in paring back acres of verbiage that I got my first publication.

As those milestones suggest, Jay is extraordinarily generous with his time. I still recall him handing me a paper covered with suggestions for improvement and telling me the circumstances of its grading. Leslie, his wife, had encouraged him to get away from work and join her at the beach. He went – and had taken my paper along. A few months

later, when I was applying to Ph.D. programs, Jay and Leslie invited me to their home on a Saturday night so that Jay could read over my applications.


Much more valuable than any of that mentoring, however, was the chance to watch Jay teach. He has an uncanny way of engaging people and pushing them to reason well. Those abilities made his courses wildly stimulating intellectual adventures. It has been nearly 10 years since I last sat in one of Jay's classes, but I still recall the buzz I felt at the end of the period, leaving the class hungry to think and talk more about ethics and media performance.

Several years ago, I found myself seated next to one of the leaders of AEJMC while Jay was giving a talk as part of a convention panel – a presentation he later told me he had

thrown together on the fly. "Wow," my neighbor whispered, leaning over, "studying with him must have really been something."

It was.

— Susan Keith, assistant professor, Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.

 Having Jay as your advisor was exactly like having Lou Grant as your editor. He was tough as hell on us, and sometimes gruff in his style, but he loved all of us and the teddy bear in him was never that buried that you couldn't see it in the glint in his eye. Jay was so proud of his graduate students. We would all hang

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out at the Tavern Bar on campus and he would often praise people very highly. It took awhile to realize that (again, in a Lou Grant kind of way) he never seemed to praise the people in the room; he was always tough on you to your face, but singing your praises to your peers or his colleagues.

Jay would go far beyond any limits to help his "Poynter Sisters" out. He was much more than an advisor, I literally cannot count the number of times he and his (lovely and amazing!) wife Leslie fed us and let us crash on the couch when they were on vacations.

I have so much gratitude for all the ways Jay has helped me and continues to be an inspiration to me and a model for a true scholar. Thank you Jay!

—*Judy Buller, associate professor and director of the Communication Program, Notre Dame de Namur University*



As the first Poynter Fellow at the University of South Florida-St. Petersburg, I was a late substitute as the student representative on the search committee that brought Jay Black there as the Poynter-Jamison Chair in 1993. Choosing him was a no-brainer, and the university pulled out all the stops to lure him and his wife, Leslie, the National Teacher of the Year, away from their good life in Alabama.

Naturally, I registered for Jay's media ethics course right away, and he shook the foundations of my thinking about journalism. He tossed me a proof copy of *Good News* by Cliff Christians, John Ferré, and Mark Fackler that first semester and urged me to read and critique it. The book has since informed my thinking and writing about ethics and served as the ethical framework for my doctoral dissertation. Jay himself helped steer my master's thesis about ombudsmen.

He urged me to cast my net wide in search of a great university position. I chose instead to wander from one intellectual desert to another to stay near my daughter. Yet, he has always praised me for being a good father — something he knows a thing or hundred about. Jay exemplified for me the balance between scholar and parent and gave me hope that some day I might find the right balance for myself. Jay and Leslie Black provided me shelter — and often, food — in St. Petersburg during every academic break for the innumerable years I pursued the doctorate at Georgia.

Along the way, Jay accepted a few of my contributions to a couple of his ethics books.

My work even made it into JMME a couple of times, though I failed as often as I succeeded. Jay showed no fear or favoritism when it came to academic business. He was my toughest critic in person, but he genuinely extolled my potential when introducing me, which he did over the years, to Cliff or Lou Hodges or Ralph Barney or any of the other wise, old heads in the media ethics field.

When it came to the personal, Jay's generosity was unmatched, except by Leslie's. The end of summer for most of the 1990s meant a brief reunion with the Blacks upon their return from Utah and a delicious dinner with good Australian wine before I headed for another academic outpost. This past spring, Jay's last at USF, I finally got the chance to treat the Blacks to dinner for a change, and they picked a cheap barbecue joint they loved. But I'll never be able to repay Jay for sharing his time and his mind, or for the many years he kept a roof over my head, wine in my glass, and hope in my heart.

—*Rick Kenney, assistant professor of journalism, Nicholson School of Communication, University of Central Florida*



When I first arrived at University of South Florida-St. Petersburg, as a Poynter fellow, Jay was an important mentor. He helped guide me through the rigorous master's program and encouraged me to pursue my doctorate at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Thanks to Jay's guidance and help with my master's thesis and his support of my efforts at continued education, I was able to earn a Ph.D. in journalism from Mizzou. His knowledge of journalism ethics helped prepare me to develop my own news media ethics course, the first ever offered at my school, Florida Atlantic University. Jay is a great teacher, an important figure in journalism education and a friend. Congratulations on your retirement Jay!

—*Susan Willey, assistant professor of journalism and multimedia studies, Florida Atlantic University*



Jay Black scared me to death when I first met him when I was a master's student/Poynter fellow at the University of South Florida-St. Petersburg. For some reason, I had no idea that I was supposed to be attending a media ethics colloquium during my first semester, so I didn't. When I went to see him for advising that semester, he asked me what the heck I was doing! Once that quagmire was straightened out, I began learning about media ethics from him via class and via my master's project about the ethics of freelance writing. He opened my eyes to Plato's "Allegory of the Cave."

He was supportive, interested and helpful at all times. He helped me with my dissertation topic, a topic we discussed at a pub in St. Petersburg; the idea was written on a beer coaster, of course. He has always encouraged me and respected me, and for that I am very thankful. He is one of my favorite people.

—*Lee Anne Peck, assistant professor of journalism and mass communications, School of Communication, University of Northern Colorado*



# Review: The Handbook of Mass Media Ethics

Chris Roberts  
Professional Freedom and Responsibility  
Chair

**T**he book that continually helped me during my recently completed doctoral pursuit was *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research*, edited by Don W. Stacks and Michael B. Salwen, his late colleague at the University of Miami. Their 1996 book offers thoughtful introductions to dozens of topics that were written by some of the top names in our business. It's still used in classrooms worldwide, and its second edition is coming before the end of 2008.

That book now has its first-cousin on my office shelf: *The Handbook of Mass Media Ethics*, edited by Lee Wilkins and Clifford G. Christians. Both offer deep and wide surveys into important topics for mass communication scholars. Both offer history and hints about the future of their fields. And both will remain useful for years to come.

The just-published *Handbook of Mass Media Ethics* has well-known editors and contributors. The University of Missouri's Wilkins edits *The Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, and the University of Illinois' Christians remains a missionary in the study of media ethics. Inside they have 28 chapters written by some of the key names in media ethical scholarship, from old hands including Lou Hodges and Jay Black to scholars that Black described during his retirement dinner during the AEJMC conference in Chicago as

“the new generation” of thinkers who are further advancing our scholarly calling.

The goal of the book, as Wilkins said in a phone call, was “to pull all of our scholarship together and to try to tie all the strings together in one book.” The result is nearly 400 pages divided into categories of:

- Foundations, which provides heavy thought into the philosophical basis for media ethics as well as the history of media ethics education and theory.
- Professional practices, which includes looks at journalism and photojournalism, at advocacy and propaganda, at the blurring of lines between news and advocacy, as well as at entertainment and at the blurring of lines between news and entertainment.
- Concrete issues, with chapters that include the topics of journalistic transparency and peace journalism. Little has been published on those topics, and Wilkins noted that she and Christians “wanted to make sure we were looking at topics that are on the horizon.” Other topics have received more attention – privacy, conflict of interest, and digital ethics – and will receive still more as technology continues to raise new questions.
- Institutional considerations, including chapters discussing corporate ownership and pure evil, and the ethics of Buddhists, feminists, and communitarians.

Part of the fun of the book – and the fun of living in the body of knowledge that is media ethics – is

sorting through differences in mass media, in ethical approaches, and being made aware of the world's disparate societies. The authors wisely start the book with University of Michigan-Dearborn's Wayne Woodward's wide-angle look at the fundamentals on the nature of human communication, and they end with Georgia State's Mark D. Alleyne's look at the difficulties of creating a global standard for media ethics. In between you'll need a nimble mind to work through the complexity (and sometimes, the sheer contradiction) of arguments, etiologies, and ethical approaches.

The chapters are generally well written and edited, but this is not a book you'd adopt for anything less than a high-level graduate course. “We weren't aiming this at students at all,” Wilkins said. “We were aiming at scholars and some graduate students, but not as a textbook. We wanted to find ways to assist scholars as they were thinking about topics, to give them a place to start.”

That they have done. Congratulations on a long-needed and useful collection of histories, guideposts, and trailheads.

*Chris Roberts, Ph.D., recently joined the journalism department at the University of Alabama's College of Communication and Information Sciences.*

Wilkins, L., & Christians, C.G. (Eds.). (2009) *The Handbook of Mass Media Ethics*. New York: Routledge. (Hardback \$150; Paperback \$60.)

## Teaching media ethics at the graduate level

Kati Berg  
Teaching Chair

**I** am pleased to serve as the Teaching Chair for the next year and look forward to sharing my thoughts and ideas on teaching media ethics. My goal is to carry on the strong tradition of my predecessors while introducing relevant and timely topics

related to teaching media ethics. In this first piece, I address the challenges of teaching a graduate ethics course.

Last spring, I had the opportunity to teach a graduate level ethics course: Research and Professional Communication Ethics. Because of departmental demands, I had not yet taught an ethics class at the Department of Advertising and Public

Relations at Marquette University. Yes, my first time teaching ethics was to be done at the graduate level...

My sense of being overwhelmed subsided when I learned I would be co-teaching combined sections with Dr. John Pauly, our Dean at the time. Not only would I have a co-instructor, but my teaching  
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partner would also be someone I admire and respect as a teacher and a scholar. Needless to say, I was thrilled. It is a rare opportunity for a junior faculty member to prepare and teach a graduate seminar with a well-respected, experienced professor.

I soon found out that it was too good to be true; there were not enough students to fill two sections. I was on my own. Even though I had taught a graduate course in advertising and public relations management twice, I was a bit leery. Not only was this my first time teaching ethics, but this course is a requirement for all master's students, not just those interested in advertising and public relations. I was definitely feeling a little outside of my comfort zone. But I forged ahead and in the end it turned out to be a good learning experience for both me and my students.

In preparation for the seminar, I reviewed the syllabi of past instructors and called upon my experiences as a teaching assistant for Dr. Tom Bivins at the University of Oregon. I wanted to provide a strong theoretical foundation while also implementing case studies to make the course challenging and thought provoking. I also needed to be mindful of the broad interests of my students. Taking all of these issues into consideration when deciding on

a text, I decided to use Johannesen, Valde, and Whedbee's *Ethics in Human Communication*, Patterson and Wilkins' *Media Ethics: Issues and Cases* as well as multiple journal articles. The theoretical material covered was used to evaluate the ethicality of practical "real-world" persuasive influence attempts in interpersonal, organizational, corporate and public settings.

The class was highly dependent on active student participation; my role was to set the context, facilitate productive discussions, raise some questions and keep us on track. We began each class with a brief discussion about a specific ethical issue in the news. Since the news article was applicable to that particular week's readings, it was a great segue to the ethical theories and/or perspectives. As each student was required to submit a one-page response paper on the readings, I could gauge their comprehension and understanding of the material. During the second half of each class, student teams facilitated a discussion that integrated the theoretical and practical implications of one of the media ethics chapters.

The assignments allowed students to explore their interests in greater depth. For example, I asked students to write a book

review on a communication ethics book of their choice. One student chose Sissela Bok's *Lying*, another reviewed *Dirty Politics* by Kathleen Hall Jamieson while one brave soul took on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The students were also given the opportunity to examine an ethical issue of their choice for the final research paper. Topics for the term paper ranged from photojournalism to cause marketing.

Coming in to this seminar, managing the expectations of both full-time and part-time graduate students was my number one concern. This is why I implemented a mix of theory and practice. This way, full-time graduate students benefited from the professional perspective because it provided a different mindset for critiquing ethical case studies. The students' class evaluations indicated that this approach was successful. The mix of students no doubt made class material selection and discussion topics difficult, but in the end I was able to use the class diversity to my advantage, which resulted in rich class discussions reflecting many areas of interest and expertise. ☞

## Considering the importance of objectivity

Shannon A. Bowen  
Research Chair

Is objectivity necessary for ethical journalism? Is mass communication predicated on the idea that analyses supported by journalists are free of bias, personal interest, or subjective opinion? Or is such an opinion an inextricable part of analysis, therefore expected by readers? I ask you to ponder these questions not only as a media ethics scholar, but also as you begin to form ideas for your research paper submission for next summer's AEJMC convention in Boston. As critics on the ethics of media, we are forced to ask: What is the role of objectivity in creating ethical mass communication?

Moral philosophy can be of assistance in answering this question. A deontological (Kant 1785/1993) approach to ethical decision making requires an objective and unbiased assessment of information in order

to make an ethical decision. Self-interest, as well as any other subjective interest, is considered by



Kant to be a bias that makes an ethical decision impossible. Kant tells us that without objectivity, ethical outcomes are impossible. If the moral autonomy necessary to make an ethical decision is not present, Kant advised that we do not then have the freedom required to make a morally worthy decision based on rationally weighing all pertinent and available perspectives.

The watch dog function of the news media relies on objectivity and an unbiased and independent reporting of facts. These concepts separate journalism from propaganda, editorial opinion and commentary, or advocacy-oriented public relations. But who decides what constitutes a relevant fact and what that fact means? We have to rely on the objective detachment of the media member to make that judgment. That judgment, however, appears to be lacking or failing in many cases.

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Advocacy journalism promotes an agenda or an interpretation of an issue by the journalist rather than seeking fair and balanced coverage of an issue. No doubt that there exists an important role for social justice and advocacy journalism, but when that type of communication is labeled as news, a serious ethical problem ensues: The audience is robbed of moral autonomy. Without the decisional autonomy to weigh considerations equally, it is not possible to arrive at an ethical decision.

Without objectivity, the press is little more than a group of publicists of a cause, advocating their own biased or self-interested interpretations of issues. This type of advocacy is what public relations practitioners have been doing for decades. In fact, the argument could be made that the more advocacy we have, the more objective reporting is needed to counter it and to provide a fertile ground for informed, rigorous debate.

Today, one wonders where to find objective reporting. As these ponderings are penned, a furor swirls on the Internet over Hardball host Chris Matthews' statement

that he sees his job as a journalist as doing everything he can to make the Obama presidency a success. How is his role then different from the one of a press secretary? Many journalists are abandoning their watch dog role and entering public relations by what scholars in the field (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) term a "journalist in residence." The journalist in residence is someone who gave up objectivity to advocate a certain viewpoint.

There are many challenges that lie ahead for mass communication and for media ethics in particular. The conceptions of public relations, advocacy, and the journalist in residence provide much research fodder on the organizational and reporting sides of the objectivity issue. Have you considered studying the role of objective communication in relation to your area of the interest? As a public relations scholar, my research argues that ethics is the ultimate duty of our profession.

Ethical philosophy prevents me from supporting the unbridled advocacy that is a part of much of the public relations literature. Instead, a call for objective and

unbiased counsel of organizational decision makers by their senior public relations professionals can help to support more ethically responsible organizational behavior. Incorporating multiple perspectives outside those of management is a necessary step in achieving this goal. The social role of public relations as a creator and provider of objective, fair, and balanced information is a departure from the advocacy model prevalent in the past. Can the concepts of moral autonomy and objectivity be applied in your own research area? ☞

## References:

- Kant, I. (1785/1993). *Metaphysical Foundations of Morals. The philosophy of Kant: Immanuel Kant's Moral and Political Writings*. Trans: C. J. Friedrich. New York, The Modern Library: 154-229.
- Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing Public Relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

## Call for papers

The inaugural Conference on Intellectual Property (CIP) will be held on June 12-13<sup>th</sup> 2009 at Iona College in New Rochelle, NY, and will include keynote addresses by Laura M. Quilter, M.L.S., J.D. and painter Joy Garnett.

Whether it be the submission of student papers to plagiarism-detecting websites, the marketing of a movie that chronicles the challenges of a windshield wiper inventor, or the latest debates over the application of non-obvious intention, issues involving intellectual property in the academic, economic, legal, and technological fields challenge the very notion of ownership: what we own, how we own, and who may claim ownership. The purpose of this conference is to explore intellectual property, in a cross-disciplinary context, as both a concept and a reality relating to the professional fields whose concerns intersect in understanding its essence and implications.

We invite papers and panels dealing with any and all aspects of intellectual property, from the origins of eighteenth-century literary property debates to the viability and ethics of plagiarism and plagiarism detection, from the economic impact of patents to the technological advances that may make intellectual property obsolete. We especially encourage papers/panels that embrace a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary approach.

CIP papers and/or abstracts will be included in a conference proceedings, and selected essays may be published in a proposed collection for a peer-reviewed press.

Papers/Panel abstracts should be submitted by February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 to Dr. Amy Stackhouse at [astackhouse@iona.edu](mailto:astackhouse@iona.edu) or Dr. Dean Defino at [ddefino@iona.edu](mailto:ddefino@iona.edu). We look forward to a fruitful and collegial experience. For more information, please see the conference website at [www.iona.edu/cip](http://www.iona.edu/cip).