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What's the next step?

Members should ponder ways to make MED a more public player

David S. Allen
division head

A letter I recently received highlights some of the challenges that face the Media Ethics Division in the future.

The 11-page letter, from a California man, was filled with charts and figures detailing how the U.S. news media have been misleading citizens about the safety of sport utility vehicles. Of particular concern was the use of what he claimed to be erroneous facts and assumptions in editorials that trumpeted the safety of SUVs. The man had written letters to the news media in an attempt to convince them of the error of their ways, and, when that failed, he turned to the Society of Professional Journalists. The chair of SPJ's ethics committee explained to the writer that its code of ethics was voluntary and carried no provision for enforcement, and went on to explain that "most journalists support looser standards for

Should, or can, MED play an external role in helping facilitate relationships between the media and citizens?

accuracy when it occurs within the confines of commentary or editorial pages." The writer found such explanations mystifying and sent me the information, as he explained, "in the vain hope that the integrity of future journalists might be better than that of you and your colleagues."

I have little idea what to do with this letter and therein, perhaps, is the problem for MED. How do we, as a division, respond to such letters? Are our professional obligations merely internal to the organization or are there external obligations to the public as well?

In its short existence, MED has

enjoyed a great deal of success. But the question we now face is what we do next and where we take this division. AEJMC President Ted Glasser has asked the membership to embark on an ambitious rethinking of the structure and function of the association, and it seems only fair that we should begin taking a closer look at our divisional home.

It seems to me that MED has done a wonderful job promoting the teaching of ethics. Through the work of people such as Ed Lambeth and Bill Babcock, the pre-convention teaching ethics workshop, as well as conference panels, has changed the teaching of media ethics. While there is much more work to be done in promoting research on media ethics, I do believe we are in the early stages of something very important. Through the hard work of Jay Black, the division's first winter meeting was an important chance for researchers to share ideas and, perhaps more

See Next Step, page 2

Journalism scholars and practitioners need MED input now more than ever

Maggie Jones Patterson
Duquesne University

The ancient Greek notion of *entelechy* tells us that everything organic reaches toward the natural end that it has within itself. So a tiny acorn, for example, has the potential to grow to a mighty oak, although it needs the right soil and moisture conditions to reach its goal.

The entelechy of the Media Ethics Division can be found in our common purpose: What brings us together is a shared belief in the need to bring ethics to bear on real-world mass media practices. We have applied that belief in almost all of MED's practices, and our ample success gives evidence of what conditions nurture our growth.

One practice I am proud to be associated with is the media ethics teaching workshop, whose history

with Ed Lambeth stretches back 20 years to when it was a six-day conference in the horsey hills of Lexington, Ky.

That workshop – now a one-day, pre-convention session at AEJMC – has spawned a generation of instructors. In turn, they have educated a diaspora of students who, we hope, have become good moral agents in the nation's newsrooms.

See Input, page 5

Crossing disciplines

It's worth the effort

Sandra Borden
vice chair/program head

The value of interdisciplinary work has become almost a truism. Yet, with few exceptions, we do very little of it. Why aren't we doing more? Is it too much work? Do we just not know how? Do we not, in fact, appreciate the value of interdisciplinary scholarship?

Let's face it. Doing interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching is hard work. We have to leave our comfort zones. We have to master one or more additional areas of the literature (and just to do media ethics, we have to know the mass communications literature and the philosophy literature as it is). We might need to seek out collaborators from other fields, and making those connections is harder than simply networking with our own. Not to mention the difficulties involved in adding more conferences to our schedules in tight budget times.

In some ways, crossing disciplinary boundaries is like learning a foreign language. We have to think differently. We have to work hard at it before we become any good. We have to practice, practice, practice. But there are certain benefits we get from learning a foreign language that are difficult to get any other way. Learning a foreign language expands your intellectual horizons by helping you appreciate different ways of seeing the world.

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Ethical Briefing

Send items for this column to:
Kris Bunton, newsletter editor
kebunton@stthomas.edu

MED leaders sought

MED needs you to take a leadership role in the division. Nominate yourself or a colleague for any of the following positions: Secretary/Newsletter Editor; Research Chair; Teaching Chair; Professional Freedom & Responsibility Chair; or liaisons to other AEJMC divisions and professional organizations.



Contact Sandra Borden at sandra.borden@wmich.edu for information or to make a nomination.

Officers will be elected at the division's members meeting from 8:30 to 10 p.m. Thursday, July 31. An executive committee meeting of all officers will be held immediately following the members meeting. Training for incoming officers will be from 8:45 to 10:15 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 2.

Law and Ethics survey planned

Jack Breslin of Iona College and Genelle Belmas of Cal State Long Beach are conducting a survey of media ethics and law teachers about their experiences teaching in those areas. They are particularly interested in faculty experiences teaching combined law and ethics courses. They will be mailing out surveys to members of the law and media ethics divisions of AEJMC.

If you'd like to reach them to discuss the project or to obtain a survey, Jack can be reached by e-mail at jbreslin@iona.edu or by phone at (914) 637-7761, and Genelle can be reached by e-mail at gbelmas@csulb.edu or by phone at (562) 985-2104. Please take a few moments when the survey arrives to fill it out and return it.

MED on the Web

http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/aejmc_ethics/home.html



MED's next step: public discourse?

Next Step, from page 1

importantly, for beginning scholars to present their work. These issues relating to teaching and research, however, are largely internal issues. And while they are clearly important, they don't really help find an answer to the California letter writer. Should, or can, MED play an external role in helping facilitate relationships between the media and citizens?

Some are unclear about whether such a program can be successful. For example, political theorist Mark Warren argues that professional associations that are forced to take a public stand on policy issues run the risk of losing standing with both the members and the public. Warren argues that when associations cannot externalize political conflict, they have an incentive not to insert themselves into public debates. That is not simply because it's difficult to find a consistent, effective public voice, but because a low public profile is necessary to maintain a balance of voices and forces within the association. Warren notes how groups often try to decouple issues, using the example of how Amnesty International ignores political

ideology and instead campaigns against torture and execution.

Perhaps MED needs to identify a similar strategy, putting aside and recognizing that people in this association have a wide range of political views. But recognizing and admitting that fact does not mean that MED members cannot come to agreement on certain values and actions, as well as put into place some mechanisms to help us play an active role in debates about media performance that are external to the division.

I believe MED needs to begin to think about what role it wants to play in assessing media performance and accountability. For example, perhaps the division might serve as an organizer of something akin to news councils, bringing the media and citizens closer together. But I'm sure there are many other options available to us. If we want to have a more public role, to have a positive influence on changing the media's performance in democratic society, we need to find a way to begin that discussion.

¹Mark E. Warren, *Democracy and Association*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (2001): p. 165.

Crossing disciplines: It's worth the effort

Crossing, from page 1

By seeing how your own language is similar but also different from another, you appreciate its nuances more, its distinct accent – but also its similarities with other languages. In short, by becoming fluent in more than one language – more than one discipline – we can talk to others better, but we also understand ourselves more.

Other disciplines can provide perspective, new questions, alternative frameworks. They can make us question fundamental beliefs about the role of the press, the public's expectations of great journalism, and modes of press accountability. It's good to shake up your common sense. And interdisciplinary work can help you do that.

Yet few media ethics scholars venture into foreign territory, intellectually speaking, with the exception of philosophy. Even going into the speech communication literature – an interdisciplinary journey – seems downright exotic. We don't tend to publish in the same journals or attend the same conferences. I have co-directed the last three national communication ethics conferences co-sponsored by the National Communication Association, making a special effort to attract media ethics scholars, with disappointing results.

Several of us work on making connections with philosophy and professional ethics by attending the annual meetings of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics. That would seem to be a natural, yet we often behave like

tourists at that meeting. We tend to hang out with each other, rather than with scholars and professionals from other fields. And APPE has a tendency to lump together anything with a media focus regardless of whether there is anything else tying the papers together.

It would make more sense – and broaden the networks of everyone – if papers were grouped, when possible, according to ethical concerns that cut across professional and disciplinary boundaries. For example, all papers dealing with conflicts of interest might land in the same panel, even if they looked at the problem in a variety of fields. That's how you might see people learning from each other.

What are some possible strategies for crossing interdisciplinary boundaries?

◆ Continue to involve non-media-ethics folks in future colloquia.

◆ Formalize the roles of MED liaisons so that we can be more proactive in collaborating with non-media folks and attending their conferences (such as NCA and APPE).

◆ Encourage interdisciplinary links in our call for papers next year.

◆ Hold an interdisciplinary collaboration workshop or session in Toronto to guide MED folks in how to cross intellectual boundaries.

◆ Maybe the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* could devote a special theme issue to interdisciplinary work in media ethics.

◆ Continue to seek programming co-sponsorship by divisions tied to other disciplines, such as Law and History.

Ethical Briefing

Send items for this column to:
Kris Bunton, newsletter editor
kebunton@stthomas.edu

Ethics and Excellence in Journalism reception set

The Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation of Oklahoma City will host a reception at the 2003 AEJMC Convention from 8:30 to 10:15 p.m. July 31, 2003.

Founded in 1982 by Edith Kinney Gaylord, the foundation is a private, non-profit foundation that supports projects throughout the nation designed to improve the quality and ethical standards of journalism in various media. The foundation provides funding for creative projects and research that promote the pursuit of excellence and adherence to high ethical standards in journalism.

Ms. Gaylord, a newswoman from Oklahoma's pioneering Gaylord newspaper family, was a reporter and editor for the family's paper and radio station prior to joining the New York bureau of the Associated Press in 1942. In 1943, she went to work for the AP's Washington bureau. In 1943, she was the only woman on the general news staff of the Washington bureau, covering Eleanor Roosevelt and other prominent women and news concerning women. In 1944, she was president of the Women's National Press Club and secretary of Eleanor Roosevelt's Press Conference Association, an organization of news reporters. Ms. Gaylord later returned to Oklahoma City, where she spent many years as the corporate secretary and member of the board of directors of The Oklahoma Publishing Co.

Members of the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation Board of Directors and Advisory Committee will be at the reception to discuss with conference attendees projects and programs that the foundation may consider funding.

MED on the Web

http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/aejmc_ethics/home.html



What about the children?

When child abductions make the headlines, journalists should stop short of interviewing the young victims

**Jack Breslin
professional freedom &
responsibility chair**

There is at least one positive result from the war in Iraq. Elizabeth Smart quickly disappeared from the national media's radar screen.

So now everyone is where they belong. Elizabeth and her family are on the road to recovery. Her alleged abductors are being brought to justice. And the media are not camping out on the Smarts' street.

Instead, the news media are letting a 15-year-old girl recover from her ordeal outside of the spotlight, while her family maintains their privacy and dignity. Unfortunately, that's not the way it happens all the time with abducted youngsters and their families.

The media can be a two-edged sword for missing children and their parents. On one hand, the family needs the media in order to help bring their child home safely. They hold press conferences, stage candlelight vigils, and invite reporters and cameras into their homes. Unless there are significant leads within two weeks, the story – and the missing child's photograph – slips off the news pages and broadcasts. Yet the family is desperate for ongoing publicity.

Sometimes that publicity, as in the case of Elizabeth Smart, results in the safe recovery of a stranger-abducted child. But it does not happen often. Perhaps that's why her case drew such saturation coverage. Or was it the bizarre nature of her alleged abductors? Or was it the unresolved questions why her kidnapping case was not resolved sooner?

With that media attention comes unwanted scrutiny of the family's private lives. Having been burned by murdering parents, such as Susan Smith, who claimed her boys had been abducted when she had really drowned them in a South Carolina lake, the media probe into rumors of domestic squabbles, even alleged child abuse, not always relying on the most reliable sources.

That does not mean that there are not compassionate reporters who consider the sensitivities of these crime victims, who have become involuntary public figures. But even the most

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ethical ones can be compromised under the pressure of competition for breaking stories and exclusive interviews.

In Elizabeth Smart's case, the family had some advantages in handling the media feeding frenzy after her miraculous recovery. A family member was able to provide professional-quality photographs to feed the media beast's visual needs. The family hired a press spokesman to handle interview requests coming from all over the world. Volunteers, friends and local law enforcement zealously guarded the family's privacy.

Yet why would any reporter request an interview with a 15-year-old who had just endured such an unspeakable nine-month ordeal? Would the typical interviewer have the necessary training and skills to conduct a sensitive session that would not re-traumatize Elizabeth and her family? Why couldn't they just leave the little girl alone? She will endure enough later on if the case goes to public trial.

During my publicity career at Fox's "America's Most Wanted," I played a minor role in the safe recovery of a Florida teenager abducted a short distance from her home. The show managed to negotiate an exclusive interview for the host John Walsh with the girl. As the father of a murdered child, Walsh does have an exceptional empathy for victims, particularly recovered youngsters, which gives him an edge over other media reporters. But looking back on the interview, I now wonder if it was payback – we helped find your child, so now you owe us an interview. Why couldn't we have just interviewed her parents, and let the child alone?

Send items for the next issue of **Ethical News** to: kebunton@stthomas.edu

Media Ethics Teaching Workshop turns 20

The Media Ethics Division once again will sponsor a pre-convention media ethics workshop for attendees of the AEJMC annual meeting. This year's 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. program will take place Tuesday, July 29, 2003, in Kansas City at the convention hotel.

Geared for the first-time media ethics teachers and seasoned media ethicists alike, the 20th Annual Media Ethics Teaching Workshop recognizes the work of Ed Lambeth of the University of Missouri, who helped to create and who oversaw the workshop for 20 years. This year's workshop includes such topics as teaching methods, philosophies, research and ways to build media-academic links.

Admittance is on a first-come basis, and is limited to 30 attendees. The workshop fee is \$50, which includes lunch. Previous work-



shops have filled up early, and you are advised to register very soon.

In addition, there will be a banquet that evening honoring Dr. Lambeth at the convention hotel, with open bar at 6:30 p.m. and din-

ner at 7 p.m. The banquet fee is \$35 (subject to change).

To reserve a spot, please send your name, title, organizational affiliation, address, phone number, e-mail, and \$50 and/or \$35 check (made out to AEJMC Media Ethics Division) to:

Bill Babcock, Professor and Chair
Department of Journalism
California State University
1250 Bellflower Blvd.
SS/PA 008
Long Beach, CA 90840-4601

Should you have additional questions, please phone Babcock at (562) 985-1730 or e-mail wbabcock@csulb.edu.

Media Ethics Teaching Workshop schedule: Tuesday, July 29

8 a.m.

"Welcome and Overview,"

Bill Babcock, California State University, Long Beach, Workshop Co-Chair.

8:15 a.m.

"The Human Condition in Teaching Media Ethics,"

Louis Hodges, Washington & Lee University.

9:15 a.m.

"Using Philosophies in Media Ethics Education,"

Cliff Christians, University of Illinois.

10 a.m.

Break.

10:15 a.m.

"Building Links between Practitioners & Professors of Ethics in Journalism,"

Bob Steele, Poynter Institute, and Joann Byrd, Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

11:15 a.m.

"Social Philosophy in the Teaching of Professional Ethics,"

David Allen, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, John Merrill, University of Missouri, and Jim Ettema, Northwestern University.

12:15 p.m.

Lunch.

1:30 p.m.

"Media Ethics Research: Where do we go from here?"

Ralph Barney, Brigham Young University, Jay Black, University of South Florida, and Lee Wilkins, University of Missouri.

2:30 p.m.

"Media Ethics Education: Ethics in the Classroom,"

Maggie Patterson, Duquesne University, Cindy Frisby, University of Missouri, and Ginny Whitehouse, Whitworth College.

3:30 p.m.

Break.

3:45 p.m.

"A Media Ethics Agenda for the 21st Century; A National Survey Report,"

Ed Lambeth, University of Missouri, Workshop Co-Chair.

4:30 p.m.

Round-robin dialogue, Ed Lambeth and Bill Babcock.

5 p.m.

Program ends

Journalism scholars and practitioners need MED input now more than ever

Input, from page 1

The workshop's approach has relied on bringing the real world of journalism into relationship with ethical theory and the expert ethics professors. In its brief seven years, MED has used a similar approach with a result of steady progress and success. Yet our work has never been more crucial than in this world of media conglomerates that cut and compromise news staffs, the talk-radio attack mode that is creeping into cable television, and threats to First Amendment rights in the name of anti-terrorism. Media ethics are needed more than ever.

To answer that call, MED will have to both increase its scholarly productivity and stay relevant to real-world practices. That is not easy, and the "how-to" advice that follows takes the form of questions and suggestions rather than prescriptions.

Scholarship

MED needs to encourage more and better scholarship. Most of us are familiar with the documented growth in media ethics courses over the past 20 or so years. Our scholarly submissions to MED should reflect a similar growth in ethics scholarship. They do not – yet.

We need to mentor young scholars the way we have been mentoring young teachers in the media ethics teaching workshop. For a couple of years, MED did give up one of its panel sessions to bring top scholars into a room to advise young researchers. It was a good start, but the help was too little and perhaps too late.

Could we do something more long term and more nurturing? The blind review process must be kept in place for the sake of fair competition and equal treatment. However, anonymous comments are inevitably cold and after the fact. Are there other measures we can take that are based in the ethic of care?

Could we offer ourselves as writing coaches before and after paper submissions? Could we help with revisions? Could we help young scholars to groom their conference papers for

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publication? Could we identify ourselves by research interests and make ourselves available as resources? Could we provide ongoing help to develop promising papers that we turn down for presentation?

Although such mentoring may be the job of the academic department, we know from experience that it is often neglected, especially for junior faculty.

We have initiated an award for the MED conference paper with research most relevant to practicing journalists. We also incorporated the Carol Burnett award for student scholarship into MED. But do these go far enough? Could we also help these authors to rework their papers and submit them to practitioners' journals – such as

Columbia Journalism Review, American Journalism Review, and Quill?

Journalism practitioners

Journalism professors are like Janus with two faces. One face answers the scholarly demands of the academy; the other tries to speak with relevance and credibility to journalists. Unlike Janus, however, our faces need not point in opposite directions.

The MED award for professionally relevant research is an attempt to underscore that point. Interaction with journalism practice stimulates new understandings of theory. And sometimes it proves the old saying that a ship of theory sinks when launched upon a sea of facts. Both insights are important.

MED needs to work smart and recognize its natural segues. It needs to join an already loud and lively conversation. For example, a search on Google under "media ethics" yields more than 1.4 million hits. "Journalism ethics" brings up over 200,000.

MED offers a reservoir of wisdom for this conversation. Its membership includes the field's top experts. Could the same list of experts that I suggested for use by academic researchers also be opened to journalists and the public? Are those experts a useful resource to organizations with which we have a natural affinity: e.g., the Committee of Concerned Journalists, the ombudsmen's organization, the Poynter Institute? Could MED spread its name by co-sponsoring more projects like the Global Journalism Ethics website that Stephen Ward launched with the World Press Institute last year?

MED is a means of bringing together our heartfelt concern for journalism's ethical practice. As an organization, MED can achieve what none of us – from the field's brightest stars to its smallest twinkles – can accomplish on our own. We just need to find the right soil and moisture conditions.

Maggie Jones Patterson is a past chair of the Media Ethics Division of AEJMC.

**Send items for the summer newsletter to Kris Bunton
(kebunton@stthomas.edu)**

Length of essays should not exceed 700 words.

DEADLINE IS JUNE 1

Participants sought for ethics colloquium

You are invited to apply for a fellowship to the media ethics colloquium on "The media, ethics and politics." The colloquium, the fifth in a decade-long series, will be held April 7-9, 2004, at the University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri. The goal of the decade-long colloquium series is to enhance scholarship in media ethics.

Selected scholars will receive an honorarium and all expenses. Papers will be published in the Journal of Mass Media Ethics in 2005.

Proposals should address the intersection of the media, ethics and politics. Desired topics include democratic theory, the media's role in governance and policy formation, the ethical and theoretical implications of political advertising, corruption and conflict resolution. Applicants may suggest other topics as well.

Fellows will be asked to work in two-person teams, and a total of six teams will be selected.

Application info:

Deadline: August 15, 2003.

Send to: Professor Lee Wilkins

Media, ethics and politics colloquium

School of Journalism

University of Missouri

Columbia, Missouri 65205

Phone inquiries: 573-882-9499.

E-mail: WilkinsL@missouri.edu

Applicants may apply as individuals (in which case colloquium organizers will pair them with another applicant) or as part of already formed teams. In the selection process, preference will be given to teams that either combine disciplines or include a junior scholar working with a more

senior scholar. These guidelines are general and should not be construed as exhaustive or exclusive.

Applications for fellowships should include the following:

- A brief (500 word) abstract of a paper proposal
- A curriculum vitae;
- If appropriate, a notation of the desired team member.

The colloquium, one of the Colloquia 2000 series in Applied Media Ethics, is sponsored by the University of Missouri, Brigham Young University, the Journal of Mass Media Ethics, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., and others.

Previous colloquia in the series have dealt with the ethics of persuasion, the search of a global information ethic, the ethics of virtual reality, and the state of ethics across the professions.

Send items for the next issue of **Ethical News** to: Kris Bunton, newsletter editor: kebunton@stthomas.edu

Deadline for Summer issue is June 1.

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